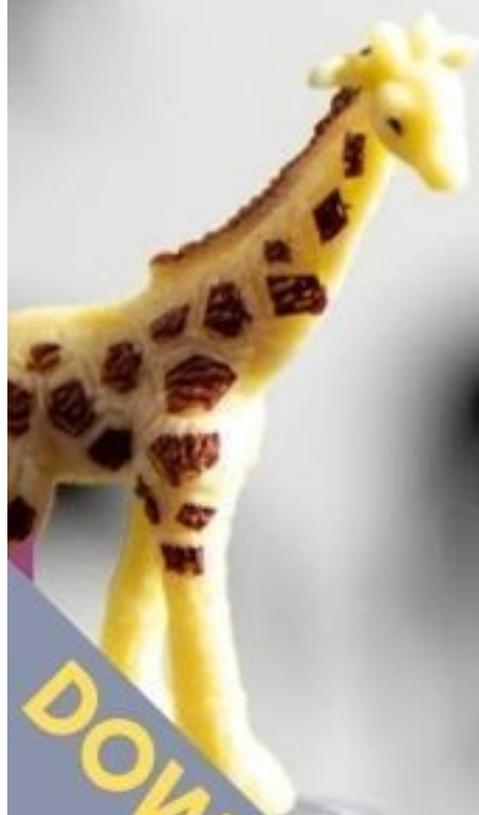


UNCONDITIONAL SELF ACCEPTANCE



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DENISE BOSQUE

UNCONDITIONAL SELF-ACCEPTANCE

There is much talk about self-esteem and how important it is, and it is. However, it is my belief that it is over-rated! When we esteem ourselves it's usually about something we've done or comparing ourselves to someone else. It's good to esteem ourselves positively but the trouble is it's usually based on very changeable things. For example, sometimes we do a job well and other times, even though we seem to do the same thing, it goes pear-shaped.

Our 'self' is constantly changing, it's always in a state of flux, it's a process. Who you were a year ago, is somewhat different to who you are today. Esteem comes from the verb to 'estimate' = to judge, rate, evaluate. So self-esteem is about rating or judging self. How can one possibly rate self or evaluate when self is something that is constantly changing day-to-day? That is based on very 'dodgy' ground. So low self-esteem is about constantly giving self a rating but on shifting ground so to speak. So improving self-esteem isn't the complete answer. So what is the answer then?

Dr Windy Dryden says that that self is every conceivable thing about you that can be rated: Behaviour, thoughts, personality characteristics, feelings and emotions, sensations, images, dreams, bodily parts. The self is extremely complex and the self is constantly changing.

So when we give ourselves a rating on any of the above, because those things are constantly changing, many people will end up depreciating themselves.

One thing we ALL have in common is that we are Human, Unique and Fallible. No one is exempt from this. When we depreciate ourselves we tend to generalize too much or compare ourselves in a negative way with others this can lead to globalisation 'I screwed up, therefore I'm a screw up'. This is unhealthy and illogical. If a person goes for an interview and believes they have screwed up, or come across as inarticulate or incompetent, that doesn't mean they are inarticulate and incompetent, it just means they are human and fallible and capable of doing good interviews and poor interviews, THAT'S ALL!

Self-depreciation also comes from making demands or ‘musts’ on ourselves. “I must do this interview well”, “I must be seen as witty and outgoing at that party”, etc. Where is this written that you must. These ‘musts’ make us inflexible and rigid. We need to accept that we are human, unique and fallible. Albert Ellis, an American psychologist noticed this way back in the ’50s, i.e. that the unmet demands such as, “I must do a great interview”, then not doing so, just increase our self-depreciation. These beliefs and demands have to be challenged if we are to move into unconditional self-acceptance.

For instance, a healthier thought might be “I would like to do well in this interview, but I don’t HAVE to”. This leads to acceptance of yourself as a human being, fallible and unique and capable of doing well and poorly, that’s it. In order to develop Unconditional Self-Acceptance, you must challenge your self-depreciation beliefs and your demands both on yourself and perhaps on others too. When you begin to have self-acceptance this is linked to ‘preferences’, which take the form of wishes, desires, etc but they also state that one doesn’t have to get what one wishes or desires. See if you’ve grasped this point.

Unhealthy Thoughts

These are self-deprecating beliefs:

- I am a bad person for hurting my friend’s feelings.
- I am defective if I reveal a weakness in public.
- If people don’t like me it proves that I am unlikeable.

Healthy Thoughts

These are full-preferences and self-accepting beliefs:

- I want people to like me, but they don’t have to. If people don’t like me it does not mean that I am unlikeable. It means that I am a fallible human being with some likeable and unlikeable aspects whom some will like and others won’t.
- I wish I hadn’t hurt my friend’s feelings, but there is no reason which suggests that I am immune from doing so. I am not a bad person for hurting my friend’s feelings, I am a normal person who acted badly.
- I don’t want to reveal a weakness in public, but there is no reason why I must not do this. If I do reveal a weakness in public it does not mean that I am defective, it means that I am an ordinary human being with strengths and weaknesses.