



Building My Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is built upon your experience in handling situations. If you lack self-confidence, you may feel that you rarely handle situations well. Everyone makes mistakes, but it is the negative messages that we give ourselves about our own competence that cause us to lack self-confidence. To build self-confidence, we need to identify our inner critic and silence it. We also need to identify and pay more attention to our positive inner voice that is proud when we do well.

In addition to making us unhappy with ourselves, our inner critic makes us unhappy with others. A good way to combat this is by paying attention to our positive inner voice. As we get better at listening to our positive inner voice and loving ourselves, we also get better at behaving in loving, caring ways toward others.

Here are some steps that will allow you to identify and silence your inner critic, while helping you to pay increased attention to your positive inner voice:

1. Think of a recent experience in which you felt embarrassed or down on yourself. Write down all of the negative messages you gave yourself when the event happened. Where do these negative messages come from?
2. Challenge your inner critic. Tell it to shut up. Recognize that your inner critic is hurting you. Find your positive inner voice, and write down a challenge by each of the criticisms you previously wrote down. Here are rebuttals for some possible negative statements:

Critic	Challenge
Everyone else is confident. I'm the only one who's not.	Many people have similar jitters. If you could read their thoughts, they would not be so different from your own.
Everyone can see that I don't know what I'm doing.	Most people are concerned about their own thoughts and worries and may not even notice yours.
I'm not good at anything.	There are probably a number of things that you do well. Try listing some of your past accomplishments and how they made you feel.
Why do I always feel this way?	Change the question to "What do I need to do in order to feel more confident in situations like these?"

I'll never be self-confident.	Don't expect to change overnight. You can learn to feel much more comfortable with yourself, but it takes time. Keep affirming that change will happen.
I must be a dunce because I don't know what to do.	It's not possible to be prepared for every situation. Acknowledging that you are not sure what to do may evoke advice or assistance from others.

3. When you are in the middle of a situation in which your inner critic kicks in, how can you shut it up and find your positive inner voice? You may need to excuse yourself from the situation to give yourself time to regroup. It might help to focus on something outside of yourself, such as your surroundings or other people around you.

Practicing the above steps to silence your inner critic and to find your positive inner voice will help you to build self-confidence. However, it takes practice. Here are steps for expanding your range of comfort and learning to cope with a variety of experiences:

1. Begin by identifying your comfort zone. Think about situations in which you feel reasonably comfortable and less self-conscious. If you are severely shy or self-conscious, your comfort zone may be very small and you may want to talk with a counselor.
2. List recent experiences in which you felt uncomfortable. For each situation, what was it about the experience that made you feel uncomfortable? Do you see any patterns?
3. Number your list of uncomfortable experiences. Give the lowest number to the situation in which you felt the least discomfort, and assign the highest number to the situation that provoked the most anxiety.
4. Try to tackle one of the situations with a low number first. Write a generic description of the situation. What aspects of the situation made you feel uncomfortable? Make your description of the situation broad enough so that it fits a variety of situations.
5. What did you say to yourself when you realized that you were beginning to feel uncomfortable? Did you feel anxiety when you realized that you didn't know exactly how to deal with the situation? What could you do in a similar situation to silence your inner critic, get in touch with your positive inner voice, and get through the situation with less discomfort?
6. Think of a way to place yourself in a similar situation in the near future. Afterwards, compare your feelings in this situation to those in the previous situation. Were you able to feel slightly more comfortable in the new situation? Give yourself credit if you were a bit less critical or panicky than in the past.

Continue to practice by allowing yourself to face experiences that challenge your comfort zone. Notice what you said to yourself, and what you need to say in order to feel more comfortable.

Other tools you can use to increase your self-confidence include “Achieving My Goals,” “Overcoming Pessimism,” and “Dealing with Setbacks.”