

# LifeSkills: How to increase your self-confidence

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Have you thought of this?

If you want to improve your self-confidence, you need to think realistically about who you are, and learn to count on your strengths. Developing self-confidence has nothing to do with simply repeating to yourself that you are great and life is wonderful.

When you're in a situation where you don't feel self-confident, simply making sweeping affirmations probably will not work. You won't be convinced, and nobody else will be either.

Being self-confident is closely related to how you perceive yourself. How you perceive yourself is related to what you think about yourself, and to how you talk to yourself. People who lack self confidence repeat all kinds of negative sentences to themselves. They focus on negative experiences and memories of weaknesses. By doing so, they feel good-for-nothing, and consequently miss great opportunities—chances for growth and enjoyment. Know yourself—and be realistic.

Think of a field you know nothing about (for example, how to make a bonzai). Would you feel confident explaining to someone how to do that, what is particularly interesting about a bonzai, and how important bonzai are to you? Probably not. Now think about a hobby or an activity you do know well. Isn't it easier to imagine yourself explaining how to do what you know well, and how interesting and important that is for you?

Being self-confident is about displaying behaviors that show you know yourself—that you know how important you are, and what you want. And at the source of these behaviors are your thoughts about yourself.

To help you have good thoughts about yourself, try this simple exercise.

*An Exercise: Prove to yourself that you have strengths.*

**1. Write down ten of your strengths.** You don't have to list all ten today, but make sure you write down at least one.

**2. Illustrate each strength with at least two specific examples from your past experience.** Examples are important because they represent immovable and realistic proof that even your most negative thoughts can't beat. Actually, the more examples you write, the more power you attribute to your strengths, and the more convinced you will become. People tend to focus on their weaknesses, and they have plenty of examples of these.

If you want to have a realistic perception of yourself, you need to accumulate examples of your strengths. Most people lack self-confidence in certain situations, or at particular moments in their lives. Sometimes people feel they've lost a confidence they'd like to regain; sometimes they feel they've reached a point where they simply want to develop new strategies.

For instance — Strength: Honesty

Proof #1: Last year, I found a wallet and returned it to its owner without taking any money from it.

Proof #2: Last week, the cashier in a coffee shop gave me too much change and I told her there was a mistake. Take responsibility for finding your own strengths. People have probably praised you at one time or another for some of your strengths. Do you believe in these strengths because someone else observed them? You want to become the one who knows your own strengths, so you need to work on finding them for yourself. Asking a significant other about your strengths is strictly forbidden for this exercise.

**3. Read your list of strengths and examples often (at least daily).** By doing so, you will keep those strengths in mind, ready for use when you need them. You may continue to add to the list. Some people post it on the fridge, on the bathroom mirror, or they carry it in their wallet to make sure they see it every day. Rehearse your list before difficult situations, and when you don't feel self-confident. By doing so, you will recall your strengths in situations that are critical. For example, if you have to talk to a coworker with whom you usually feel less than self-confident, you might want to take a few minutes first to remember your list and its examples. Even while you are with the person, you can recall parts of your list to boost your self-confidence. Take the responsibility for initiating your own changes. If you wait for others to make you feel self-confident, you remain dependent on external factors. That means a comment can make you feel either really good or really bad, and you don't have much control over your emotions. Self-confidence is learned and comes from practicing your strengths.

**4. Persevere.** Personalize these strategies and persevere in applying those you find relevant to your situation. However, if nothing seems to work, consider seeking professional help. Read a book.

Would you like to read more on this topic? We recommend the following book: Bower, Sharon Anthony and Bower, Gordon H. *Asserting yourself*. Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company 1987.p.