



Letting go of what others think

Many people spend a lot of time worrying about what others think of them. This anxiety can hold them back from things they want in life, lead to them feeling unnecessarily upset by what others say and often results in lower self esteem as they elevate other people's opinions above their own.

Therefore it's important to build up your own self esteem and develop an internal frame of reference now, where you decide whether it's ok for you to do or say something.

Why do so many people pay so much attention to others?

Human beings are a very dependent species and we spend a lot of time with parents and teachers telling us whether we are 'good' or 'bad'. Of course we need to learn about certain rules and 'acceptable' behaviours so that we can live together; but there is a (very) short class missed out at the end of school which would simply teach you....

...how to decide whether it's ok to do something:

It's ok to do or say something if:

1. you think it is ok
2. your intention* is positive and not to harm anyone else

*It's important to focus on intention rather than whether anyone decides to feel hurt about what happens, as this is out with your control.

What can you do to change this?

Read on for some of the signs of worrying about external approval. Start by noticing times when you look for external approval, and then use the rules above to decide if it's ok with you to say it. If so, then say it!



Bragging and disliking your self

Loving your self is not about telling others how wonderful you are in an attempt to gain approval. This boasting or 'one-upmanship' is a sign of looking for external approval.

Instead decide to look at learning to love yourself, so that you don't need others to convince you.

Otherwise you live an anxious and unhappy life and become a weak person with no real self image.

Whatever you do in life will result in disapproval from some people! Allow people to disagree with you - in certain circumstances just say 'ok' rather than trying to persuade them differently. Many people just won't understand you and vice versa.

Edison and Einstein were ridiculed at first for being different.

Remember that you won't be better off if they agree with you - unless you let their opinion count.

If you always try to adapt what you say to gain approval and you send out these signals, then people won't feel they can trust you (think of a politician.)

Ironically, you gain more approval for having a positive self image and being yourself and having opinions!

Why would someone be so hard on themselves?

1. They pretend that it could be easier to accept negative things others say - if they're not good enough, there's no point in trying.
2. It's an excuse for not taking control of their life.
3. They can avoid risks in relationships, career etc and thus avoid risk of rejection or failure.
4. To gain pity and attention and in some cases even approval from others.



Things to practice to build up your self esteem and self-respect:

- Accept compliments rather than denying them or playing them down.
- Order what you want in a restaurant - you're worth it!
- Take time for yourself.
- Make up your own mind when buying clothes, rather than asking for someone else's opinion.
- Don't look for forgiveness before you decide to feel better.
- Look out for times when you apologise even though you haven't done anything wrong.
- Stop asking for approval - i.e. 'Good food, isn't it?', instead use a statement 'Good food'.
- Spend what you want on gifts etc; you don't have to match what the other person spends.
- Remember that rejection is not a criticism of you and that it doesn't determine your self worth. (For more on this see [my book "Letting go of anger"](#))
- Jealousy is a sign that you think someone else is better than you. Stop comparing yourself with others and recognize that you are loveable as you are.
- Stop basing your self worth on what you have achieved. You are worth something without your achievements.
- Don't put others up on a pedestal. Recognise that we all have different talents and that everyone is of equal worth as a human being regardless of external achievements.
- Make a list of good qualities you have and things you're proud of yourself for*. (*This is about the times when you have grown as a person, rather than what you have achieved compared to others.)
- Look at yourself in the mirror and notice things you LIKE about the way you look. Look away and imagine you are smiling and enjoying talking to a friend, then look back and notice how different your face looks, how much softer your expression is. Start to look at yourself this way.
- Remember that it's your opinion that counts, not other people's. First of all, you have to live with yourself. If you base all your behaviour on what others want, how happy will you be?