



The Truth about Self-Esteem: People often talk about self-esteem like it is a constant such as your height or your eye color. In reality, self-esteem is can vary greatly from situation to situation and from place to place. Consider a few examples

Gary – Gary is head mechanic at a busy auto repair shop. No one at the shop knows cars like Gary so when he is at work he is completely confident in his abilities and he often takes charge of situations. He is ready and willing to put himself out there to take risks and set goals because of his faith in his abilities as a mechanic. Everyone looks up to Gary at the auto shop including his coworkers as well as his customers and he feels self-reliant, self-assured and positive when he is on the job, even when things get tough. He knows he is good at what he does and it feels good

At home however, Gary feels like he never mastered the art of being a family man. Gary's wife can be very domineering and often she backs him into a corner with her ability to argue and to find fault with Gary as a husband and a father. Gary's kids love him but they too tend to walk over him at times, taking advantage of his lack of confidence as a father. Gary loves his family and he doesn't want to leave but he finds himself often feeling uncertain, frustrated, and anxious in his home environment. When he doubts his capabilities at home he feels lousy about himself. Clearly, Gary's self-esteem is quite different dependent upon his situation whether he is at work compared to when he is home.

Mason – Mason sells weed and up until his recent arrest he was darn good at it. Mason loved everything about selling marijuana from the joy he felt that he brought his customers, to the constant flow of money he had coming in. Mason loved the excitement and attention of his phone always lighting up with calls and texts from his loyal customers. Mason was never bored and he always felt like he was in demand which gave him a sense of confidence and power

One dark day for Mason was the day the police found a large amount of marijuana in his car after a routine traffic stop when he had been making a delivery. Mason's lawyer and family insisted he stop selling weed immediately and enter a treatment program because it would look good for court. Mason complied with this advice but soon found himself feeling depressed when his phone no longer was active with calls and texts and the money stopped coming in and he now felt like just an "average Joe" when he used to feel like a big shot when he was in demand as a dealer

Clearly Mason's sense of self-importance and self-worth, varied greatly as his situation changed. Even though most people would agree that it is probably not a good idea to let your self-esteem be dependent upon a criminal behavior, from Mason's perspective the drastic change in his feelings after his arrest was very real and difficult to deal with

We will now consider self-esteem in 4 life areas. Try to rate your self-esteem in each area on a scale from 1 to 10.

1 - Career – *Where are you right now with regard to your career today? (Check all that apply)*

- In school
- Working part time
- Working full time
- Unemployed
- Disabled
- Retired
- Homemaker
- Other? _____

Rate your sense of self-esteem with regard to how confident and secure you feel about your current career status on a scale of 1 to 10. Remember this rating is how you feel, not how you think others may view you. For example, if you are unemployed or disabled but you are secure with that status in your life right now you can still give yourself a high rating. If you are feeling uncomfortable, anxious or unsure about your current career status give yourself a lower rating.

➤ **My Career Self Esteem Rating (1-10) - _____**



2 - Relationship (Romantic) - What is your current relationship status? (Check all that apply)

- Married
- Dating
- Single
- Getting over a Breakup/Divorce
- With a Boyfriend/Girlfriend
- No relationship
- Other _____ -

Rate your sense of self-esteem with regard to how confident and secure you feel about your current relationship status on a scale of 1 to 10. Similar to career, regardless of your situation (single, married, etc.) think about your level of comfort, satisfaction, and contentment with that situation right now

➤ **My Relationship Self Esteem Rating (1-10) - _____**

3 - Family - What is your current family status? (Check all that apply, you can check more than one)

- Living with parents or other family
- Living alone or with platonic roommate
- Living with partner (no kids)
- Living with partner and children
- I have very few close family relationships
- I have some close family relationships
- I have many close family relationships
- My family situation is mostly detached or in conflict
- Other? _____

Rate your sense of self-esteem with regard to how confident and secure you feel about your current family situation on a scale of 1 to 10. Just as you did with the previous areas think about your level of comfort, satisfaction, and contentment with that situation right now.

➤ **My Family Self Esteem Rating (1-10) - _____**

4 - Social – What is your current social status (Check all that apply)

- For the most part I keep to myself
- I have some acquaintances I talk to but not so many close friends
- I have a few close and positive social relationships
- I have a lot of friends, some positive, some not so positive
- I have a lot of support from good people whom I can trust
- My social life is chaotic and filled with drama or conflict
- Other? _____

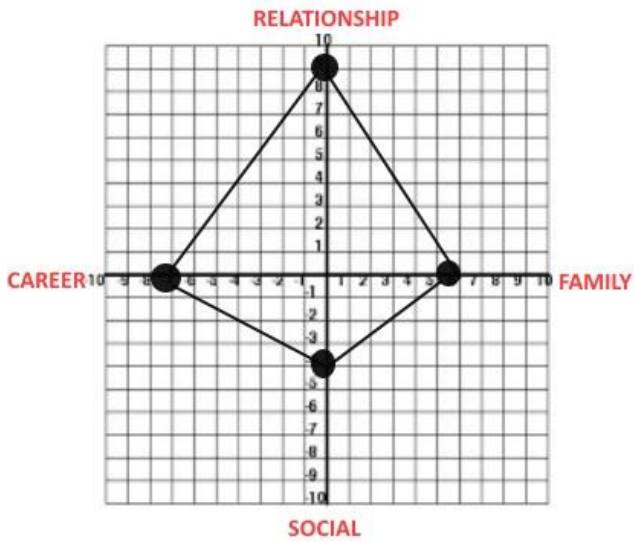
Rate your sense of self-esteem with regard to how confident and secure you feel about your current social situation on a scale of 1 to 10. Again, think about your level of comfort, satisfaction, and contentment with that situation right now

➤ **My Social Self Esteem Rating (1-10) - _____**

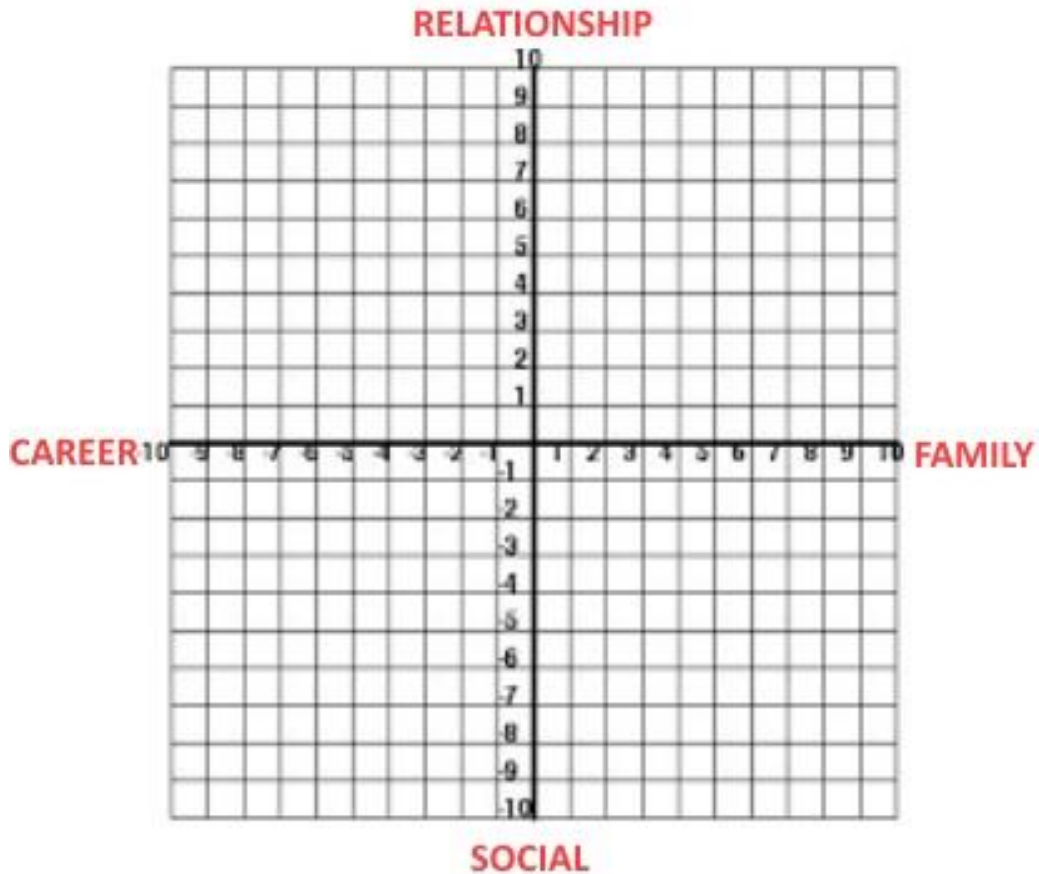


Make it Visual - Put your 4 scores on the graph below and connect the dots to get a visual image for discussion

Example:



Use this grid below to plot your 4 scores (1-10) and connect the dots like in the example above





Discuss your scores with the group regarding to your self-esteem with regard to your career, family situation, social life, and relationship status

- What are your strengths?
- Where do you need work?
- Which area is most important to you?
- What may be holding you back?
- Realistically speaking, specifically what can you do to build up/improve in the four areas:
 - ...In your career?
 - ...In your relationship?
 - ...As a family?
 - ...in your social life?

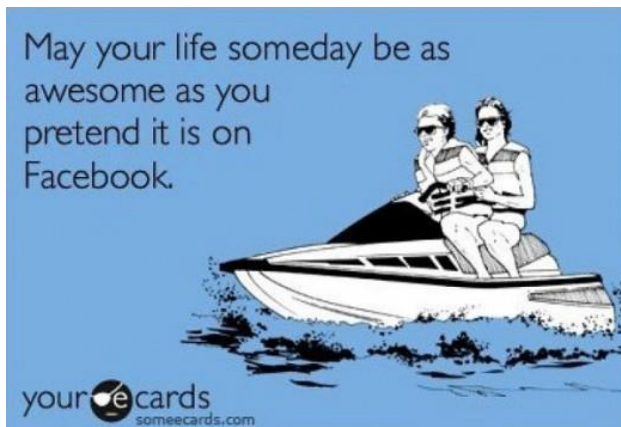
The Comparison Trap

Self-esteem should start with self but often it is human nature to make comparisons that are unfair, which can hurt our sense of self-esteem. Consider the following ways people may make harmful comparisons

Comparing Self with Others –

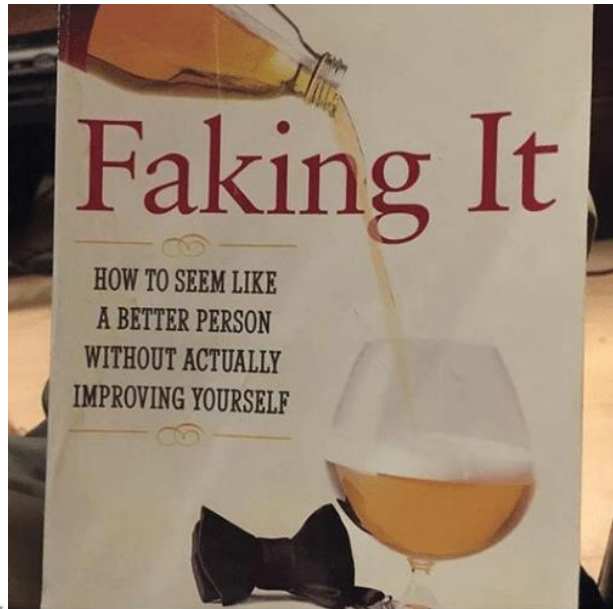
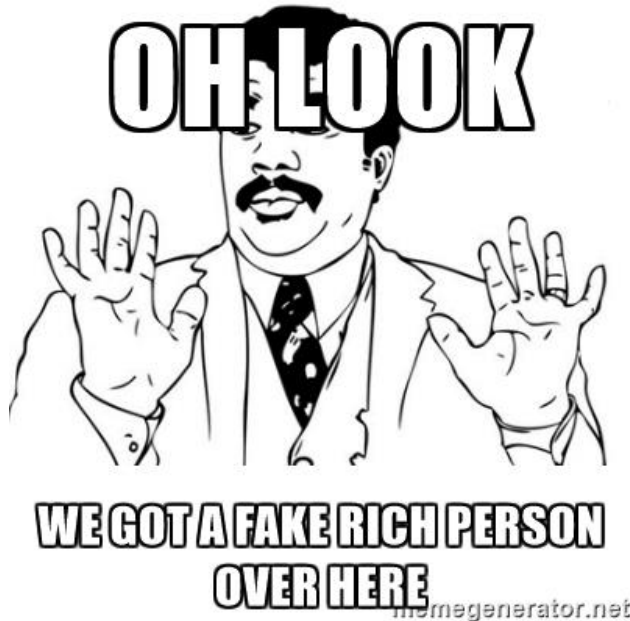
Have you ever been guilty of bringing yourself down by comparing yourself with other people? Consider some reasons why this is totally an unfair thing to do to yourself and to your self esteem

The Facebook Phenomenon– As you know some people go out of their way put their best foot forward on social media so often the life portrayed looks way better than it really is. People put their vacations, family fun time, accomplishments, etc. for the world to see but quite often you never get to see their failures, embarrassments, and other shortcomings. (Unless they are those types of people who post nothing but drama and problems, but that is an even more different and dysfunctional story for another day)

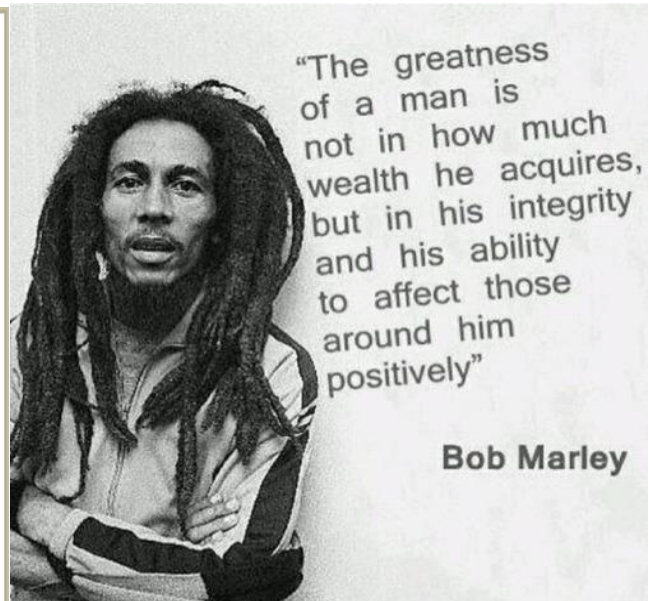




Face to Face in Your Face – People making their lives seem better than they really are isn't limited to social media. There are plenty of people out there who go out of their way to either blatantly brag or subtly drop hints about all the seemingly awesome things going on in their lives. Once again, all that seems amazing on the outside isn't always so great behind closed doors. For every nice thing a person brags about owning, there usually is a big bill to pay for it.



Of course some fortunate people are legitimately well-off and they are not faking it, but keep in mind **that does not mean that they are happier than you, more valuable than you, or more important than you.**





Comparison of Self with Self:

It can be damaging to your self-esteem to compare your life now to a time when things were better in the past or comparing yourself now with where you think you could have or should have been

“The Good Old Days” – One of the hardest things in life can be to go from a situation of prosperity and good fortune to a current situation of trouble and struggle. If that is your situation it can be very damaging to your self-esteem to constantly compare nowadays with the “good old days” Consider the following below if looking at the good old days is an issue affecting your self-esteem:



← This saying is often true

In a general sense, at times people may tend to remember the good and forget the bad over time. Even when things in the past seemed like they were so great, keep in mind that in reality it wasn't always easy and there probably were struggles even during the good old days that you might be overlooking. This is romanticizing or glorifying the past

“Woulda, Coulda, Shoulda” – Another way that comparison can hurt self-esteem is to compare your situation now with an imaginary life you feel that you could have or should have had if things were different. Consider some examples:

- “If I never had gotten fired from my job I would probably be a manager right about now and I would be on top of the world”
- “If I still was with ____ (Ex-girlfriend/boyfriend/or spouse) I would still have my family together and I would be so happy right now”
- “If I had not gotten arrested I would probably be living the best life right now”

All of these statements may be true, but the problem is that they are all useless because what is done, is done. Everyone loses and falls short in the “if” game when we start in with the “If only...” scenarios.



Acceptance is the only answer. Getting hung up on the past is a sure fire way to make yourself miserable today, no matter how unfair things may seem

Think, for example, of a person who lost their legs in an unfortunate car accident. That person can spend the rest of their life being depressed and frustrated with their disabilities and never move forward with life. Or, that person can accept what happened (as bad or unfair as it may seem) and then focus on being the best person he or she can be in spite of their disability.

Which path makes more sense?



For Discussion:

Being honest with yourself and with others, did anything that was just reviewed resonate with you personally?

How can any of these topics discussed so far relate specifically to substance abuse and the change process?

Self Esteem Building

There is a ton of advice out there about building your self-esteem, some good & some not so good. Below is a list of some simple strategies. You decide, based on what you know about yourself, which skills would be helpful for you to work on. Check off a few and discuss what you selected and then report to the group how you will use and practice that skill for self-esteem building and self-improvement:

- **Stop Comparing** – We just went over the comparison trap. Is this something that would be helpful for you to focus on? Specifically why/how in your case does this apply?
- **Baby Steps** – Struggling to get going in a positive direction in life? It can be hard to do what you know what you need to do, even when you are sure you need it. Goal setting is a great way to start building self-esteem and self-confidence. Taking *baby steps* is about starting small and building from there. Getting a career, for example, may just start with going on a couple interviews or researching a school program. What baby steps can you make toward a goal of yours?
- **Take Good Risks** – Taking stupid risks can be self-destructive but there are good risks to take. How can you challenge yourself a little? It can be such a self-esteem builder to go outside of your comfort zone which can empower you to keep on trying more and more
- **Stop the Negative Dialogue** – Do you even catch yourself either out loud or in your head telling yourself negative messages? (For example, “I’m an idiot” or “What is wrong with me”) – IF so – STOP, right now. Negative self-messages can easily become self-fulfilling prophecy. Break the negative self-talk like a bad habit
- **Meaningful Connection with Others:** It can be so up-building to make real connections with real people who really care. Yes people like that can be hard to find at times but it can be worth the search. Connect with some good people on an intellectual and emotional or spiritual level if you can. Giving of yourself to others can also be up-building. (This does not mean sleep with them which is not a way to build self-esteem in the long run)
- **Values and Integrity** – Knowing what is important to you (Values) and then honestly standing behind your morals and values leads to better choices. Better choices based on integrity and values leads to a better life and a better self-appreciation
- **Search for Purpose and Build Your Sense of Hope** – Can you extend your focus beyond the day to day concerns of life and look more at the big picture? A meaningful search for purpose as well as developing an increased sense of hope can do wonders for self-esteem, self-confidence and self-image

Discuss your selections with the group. Try to be specific about what you can do with your choices to better yourself and to better your future

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