

## You and Your Partner's Self Esteem

The Rev. Jerry L. Harber, D.Min., LMFT

Self esteem or self worth can be thought of as the way in which we see and value ourselves. There are at least three dimensions:

- *Worth*: being affirmed as a person of value; being respected and cherished
- *Competence*: gaining a sense of achievement; being affirmed as an able person
- *Belonging*: having a sense of security and identity with others who love, accept and support you

Self esteem can be thought of as points along a continuum. You can experience:

- *High esteem*: a realistic appraisal of self; seeing yourself as equal to others
- *False pride*: an unrealistic appraisal of self; seeing yourself as superior to others
- *Low esteem*: an unrealistic appraisal of self; seeing yourself as inferior to others.

High esteem is not a noisy conceit. It is a quiet sense of self respect, a feeling of positive worth, a sense of being glad you are you. Healthy self esteem is ultimately your own responsibility, but developing and maintaining it can be impacted by others. However, it is important to understand that others do not **directly** impact your self esteem. *Your self esteem is impacted by what you think about what others think about you!*

Even so, we can make it easy for others to feel appropriate good feelings about themselves or we can make it hard. Let's say early in a couple's relationship, they focus only on the positives in each other. They say and do endearing things. They brush aside any real or imagined imperfections. Each will tend to feel very good about themselves, and by the way, their partner.

As time passes they become more willing to focus on real or imagined imperfections, expectations unmet, and mistakes made. If they address these things by being critical and judgmental, each may find it difficult to maintain their positive self image.

Here are a few simple ways in which anyone can enable a partner to feel good about himself or herself.

First: **Nurture** your positive feelings of admiration and fondness for your partner and share them with him or her regularly. Doing so helps keep contempt, a deadly emotion, in check.

Second: **Learn** to appreciate your partner as a person with a unique point of view in matters. Agreeing about everything is not important. Being respectful, attentive and willing to consider your partner's point of view is.

Third: **Soften** the way you begin complaints and requests. Instead of, "Are you ever going to fix the toilet?" try, "I'm really eager to get the toilet fixed. Any idea when you can get to it?"

Fourth: **Love** as you would be loved. Make sure your conduct and interactions are consistent with the way you'd like to be treated. Be generous with the signs and symbols of care, concern, support and encouragement.

Fifth: **Care** for yourself. If you are not well in any dimension of life, your partner will likely suffer for it. Be sure your driving forces are life enhancing and positive.

These ideas are not cure-alls, but they can certainly help. Try them—you'll see.