

“The Name of the Game”: How to Revive Your Ailing Self-Respect

Most of us are aware that we want to be treated with respect by other people. You probably find yourself becoming upset, angry or hurt when someone acts in a disrespectful way toward you, because it feels as if that person does not value you enough to treat you well.

SELF-RESPECT: WHAT EXACTLY IS IT?

Self-respect works in the same way as being respected by others. When you value yourself enough to treat yourself well, you are acting in a self-respecting way. If you take good care of yourself in healthy ways such as having clear and assertive boundaries, saying “No” when you need to, taking good care of your physical, emotional and spiritual needs, and putting your own important needs ahead of the needs of others when necessary, then you are exercising your self-respect.

And you will find that others take their cues from you, in terms of how to relate to you. For example, when people hear you talking about yourself in a derogatory way and putting yourself down, they will likely think less of you. However, if they see you valuing yourself and living your life in that manner, they will likely value you more as well.

As Dr. Phil so aptly reminds us, “We teach other people how to treat us.”

SELF-RESPECT HAS ITS ROOTS IN CHILDHOOD

The way you treat yourself often has its roots in messages that you were given about yourself in childhood. The ways in which you were treated by your parents, caregivers, siblings, teachers, and even your friends have led you to believe that you either were or were not worthy, valuable or cherished. And you have most likely brought these same beliefs about yourself into your adult relationships, colouring the way you treat yourself in present time.

But you do not have to continue believing something about yourself that is not true!

Of course you are valuable and unique and special – you always were, and that is true of all of us. When you make the decision to empower yourself by choosing to believe the truth about who you are rather than what someone else may think of you, then you are on the road to self-respect.

SELF-RESPECT AND ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOURS

Addictions can wreak havoc on our self-respect.

If you are grappling with an addictive behaviour of any kind (such as alcohol or drug misuse, eating disorders, codependency in relationships, smoking, gambling or compulsive overspending), you know what I mean. On some level, you are aware that every time you indulge in that specific behaviour, you feel badly about yourself. You know that you don't really want to be doing what you're doing, and that you would feel better about yourself inside if you could stop.

For many people with addictive behaviours, low self-respect has become a part of life – you may not even be aware of how different life could be for you if you could change how you act and thus how you feel about yourself. Life is so much better when we have our self-respect!

SELF-RESPECT IS EARNED

Here is an easy gauge to see how well you're faring in terms of your self-respect. Ask yourself this question, and be willing to look honestly at your answers:

“What do I need to do, or what do I need to NOT do, to be able to look at myself in the mirror and be okay with who I see?”

Each time you ask yourself that question, listen for your true answer and actually base your behaviour on what you have heard. If you do this regularly, you will build up your self-respect. That is the name of the game, and it becomes the basis for all of your interactions, whether you are aware of that or not.

This may be a difficult change for you to make, however. If you are used to pleasing others instead of yourself, for example, your challenge may lie in learning how to put yourself first without feeling guilty or “selfish.” But if you continue to put others first and feel badly about yourself for doing that, your self-respect will suffer.

So here is the choice-point – what is more important to you: having other people like you or liking yourself?

Every time you make the decision to like yourself despite any potentially negative consequences from others, you earn a little more of your self-respect.

ANOTHER'S PERSPECTIVE MIGHT BE HELPFUL

Learning how to treat yourself more respectfully will change your life. You will experience a profound shift in the ways you see your life, as well as your place in the world. Your relationships with other people will become healthier, as you begin to treat yourself in healthier ways. Although nobody's life is ever "perfect," living with non-negotiable self-respect is the most consistent way of living a rich and fulfilling life.

If you are having difficulty believing in yourself and treating yourself with self-respect, you may want to talk to some of your trusted friends or reach out to a skilled therapist for assistance. This might help you to explore what is holding you back from giving up your self-sabotaging patterns.

Remember, it all starts with YOU – what do you need to do, or what do you need to NOT do, to be able to look at yourself and feel happy with who you are?

That is the name of the game!