

## How early bad experiences affect self esteem and relationships: and how to start resolving the problems.

- Early childhood trauma is understood to lead to many of the most common mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse.
- Two of the links between trauma and these problems are:
  - Self esteem
  - Esteem for others and Relationships with others

### Self Esteem

#### Prior experience

Positive	Negative
<p><b>Early life experiences</b> that were positive are likely to lead to a normal level of self-esteem.</p> <p>This self-esteem would likely be expressed as self respect, self confidence, self awareness, self compassion/care, and self acceptance.</p> <p><b>Self Respect</b> -how we think about &amp; treat ourselves, and how we let others treat us;  <b>Self Confidence / Efficacy</b> -our sense that we are effective in managing our lives;  <b>Self Awareness / Knowledge</b> -our insight into our unique skills, talents &amp; character strengths AND our flaws &amp; weaknesses;  <b>Self Compassion / Care</b> -the way we treat ourselves, especially when things are not going well;  <b>Self Acceptance</b> -accepting ourselves as we are - as a "whole package" - and is fundamental to being self compassionate.</p> <p>These beliefs and behaviours are major drivers of good mental health &amp; wellbeing</p>	<p><b>Early life experiences</b> that were a violation of your sense of self are likely to have led you to develop negative beliefs about your own self worth.</p> <p>Such violations would include absence of empathy or responsiveness from others; and being devalued, criticised or blamed.</p> <p><b>Beliefs</b> that come from this treatment include</p> <p>I'm bad, destructive or evil;          I'm responsible for bad, destructive or evil acts          I'm basically damaged or flawed;          I'm worthless;          I don't deserve to be happy or loved.</p> <p>These beliefs can lead to <b>symptoms</b> including Depression, Guilt, Shame and possibly self-destructive behaviour.</p>

#### How to resolve the problems: Change the beliefs and the behaviour - such as:

- Sometimes bad things happen to good people - it doesn't mean I'm the cause, or bad, or I deserve it
- Just because someone says something bad about me - it doesn't make it true
- Even if I have made mistakes in the past - it doesn't make me a bad person or not deserving of happiness or love
- I deserve some self compassion and some self care right now!

## Esteem for others

### Prior experience

Positive	Negative
<p><b>Early life experiences</b> with other people that were positive are likely to lead to a normal level of esteem for others.</p> <p>This early life experience usually leads to <b>beliefs</b> that include:</p> <p>People are basically good;</p> <p>People are trustworthy;</p> <p>People will be supportive if I need them to be;</p> <p>If I ask for help people will provide that help;</p> <p>If someone is not good to me it doesn't mean that this is how all people are;</p> <p>Sometimes people make mistakes but it doesn't mean they are bad people all of the time.</p> <p>These beliefs and behaviours are a major driver of good mental health and wellbeing because they result in satisfying and supportive relationships.</p>	<p><b>Early life experiences</b> with other people who betrayed you, harmed you or let you down, can lead to a negative set of beliefs about people that extends beyond those/that person to everyone..</p> <p><b>Beliefs</b> that come from this treatment include:</p> <p>I can't trust anybody;</p> <p>People basically only care about themselves;</p> <p>No one cares about me;</p> <p>No one is worthy of respect;</p> <p>People are bad, evil or malicious;</p> <p>The whole human race is bad, evil or malicious.</p> <p>These beliefs can lead to <b>symptoms</b> including Chronic anger, contempt, Bitterness, and Cynicism.</p> <p>They can also lead to behaviour that is dysfunctional such as:</p> <p>Isolating oneself from people,</p> <p>Not being able to trust another person who is showing compassion,</p> <p>Anti-social behaviour that is justified by believing that other people will only be out for themselves.</p> <p>These beliefs and behaviour can lead to Depression, Anxiety, Loneliness, unsatisfying relationships and possibly self-destructive behaviour.</p>

**How to resolve the problems: Change the beliefs and the behaviour – such as:**

- Give people the benefit of the doubt and see whether your assumption was right
- Ask for help when you need it from people who can and seem willing to help
- Make time and take a risk on a friendship

**This article does not constitute therapy or psychological advice.**

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