

Improving Self-Esteem

Module 9

Healthy Self-Esteem

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Introduction

Congratulations on making it to the end of this information package! We're glad you stayed on with us. If you haven't read all the modules, it might be good to go back to the ones you missed. In this module, you will find a summary of all the important concepts and strategies introduced to you in the previous modules and a discussion on how to continue to improve on what you have learned and maintain your gains.

Putting It All Together

Just as we provided a model to help you understand how low self-esteem developed and what kept it going, we will leave you with a model of healthy self-esteem. This model brings all the important concepts and strategies you have learned together.

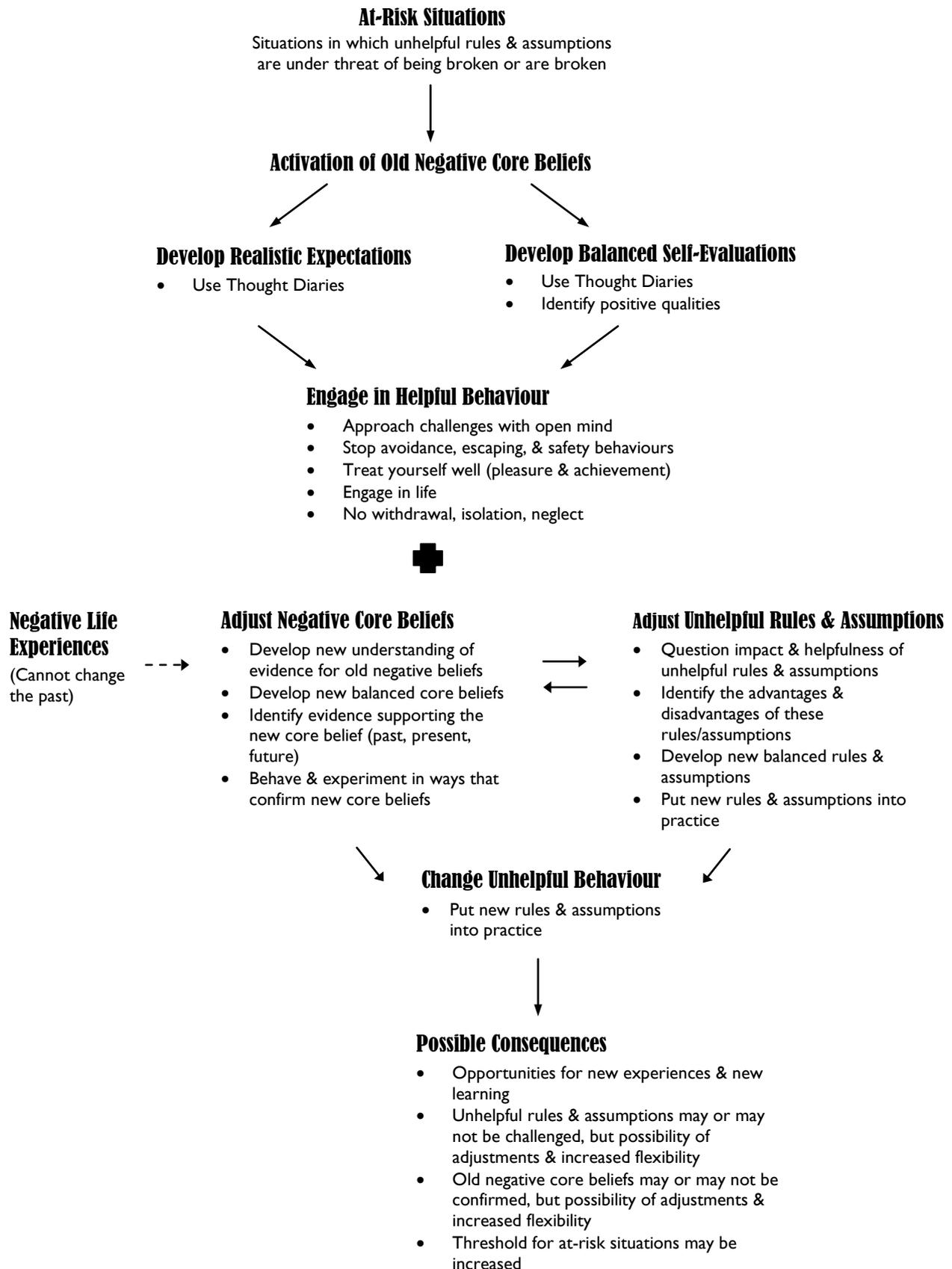
This model begins with an at-risk situation and the activation of old negative core beliefs. Having healthy self-esteem doesn't mean that you will never encounter an at-risk situation again. It also doesn't mean that you will never again think of yourself in a negative light. Everyone might think of themselves in a negative way or get down on themselves at times. The important thing to remember is not to do it too often. Healthy self-esteem is about thinking about ourselves and our worth in a **BALANCED** way. It is absolutely okay and appropriate that we recognise our weaknesses. What we need to do is accept that we all have weaknesses, and make a decision about whether or not we want to improve on them. We also need to recognise, acknowledge, and celebrate our strengths and successes. Also, don't forget any skills and abilities that might be neutral. Remember, it's all about being balanced!



The reason we might still encounter at-risk situations is that we cannot change our past experiences. We discussed that some of these experiences, especially if they are negative, can influence how we see ourselves and the rules and assumptions that we have developed. So, it is because we cannot go back and change those experiences that they might have a lingering effect on our self-esteem. The important thing to remember is that the effect of your past experiences on how you see yourself can be worn down the more you practise those strategies in the previous modules.

So, the model of healthy self-esteem begins with an at-risk situation and the activation of old negative core beliefs. However, by this time, you will be able to tackle any biased expectations or negative self-evaluations by using Thought Diaries to challenge them. You will also have learned to identify and celebrate your positive qualities and recognise new achievements. It is also important that you engage in helpful behaviours, which means that you are dropping any avoidance, escaping, use of safety measures, approaching new situations with an open mind, engaging in life and doing pleasant activities, treating yourself kindly, and not withdrawing. If you then add to these, the adjusting of your old negative core beliefs and unhelpful rules and assumptions, and put these new rules and assumptions into practice...the possible consequences of all these actions are numerous! You might encounter opportunities for new experiences and new learning. Unhelpful rules and assumptions, and old negative core beliefs may or may not be confirmed, but there are possibilities for adjustments being made and increased flexibility in the way you see things. Finally, your threshold for at-risk situations might be increased. This means that you are not as sensitive to possible negative situations and will be more open-minded and balanced in how you view new situations.

Model of Healthy Self-Esteem



Keep Practising

Now that you have come to the end of this information package, the most important thing for you now is to keep practising the strategies you have learned in all the modules. This means continuing to apply all the useful skills and insights about yourself you might have gained. If you continue practising the concepts and skills you have learned, they will become healthy habits that have been integrated into your lifestyle.

There are a few things to keep in mind now that you have learned some important skills in overcoming low self-esteem. One area to think about is how to *maintain the gains* that you have made. Another area to think about is how to *minimise setbacks* that might occur.

Maintaining Gains

It is important to recognise the progress that you've made, and as your self-esteem improves, it is helpful and appropriate to pat yourself on the back and celebrate your achievements. This will encourage you to keep going – to keep practising and applying the new skills you have learned. Maintaining the gains you have made relies on you continuing to practise these skills. Remember, developing new skills to challenge what may be years' worth of old habits takes time and persistence.

So, there are some important things you will need to do in order to make the most of what you have learned to stay well or gain that extra improvement. The easiest way to summarise this is by looking at the “Healthy Self-Esteem” worksheet on the next page. It shows the main strategies you have learned to tackle low self-esteem and develop a more balanced view of yourself. Continuing to work on these strategies will help you continue maintaining your gains.

You will notice that on the “Healthy Self-Esteem” worksheet, there are some key things that you have learned over this series of modules to manage low self-esteem:

- You have learned how to adjust your core beliefs and rules, so that they are more reasonable, flexible, balanced and realistic
- You have learned to question and test out negative thoughts (ie, biased expectations and negative self-evaluations) and address unhelpful behaviours in day-to-day situations
- You have learned to promote and support balanced self-evaluations by paying attention to your positive qualities and treating yourself well from day to day.

The key message is to keep practising the strategies summarised in the “Healthy Self-Esteem” worksheet. When you do this, you will be well on the road to overcoming low self-esteem and developing more healthy self-esteem.

Realistic Expectations

Positive Qualities

Balanced Self-Evaluations

Helpful Behaviour



Helpful Behaviour

Balanced Rules & Assumptions

**Positive Experiences to
Look Out For**

Balanced Core Beliefs

Minimising Setbacks



Setbacks or slip-ups in progress can happen at any time and are to be expected. Try not to fall into the trap of believing that you are ‘back to square one’ as this will only make you feel worse. Change is not a steady process, it's more like the old saying: “Two steps forward, one step back” from time to time.

Think about how you learned to ride a bike. It probably took a few unsteady attempts and a few falls before you gained your balance. Even when you get your balance, you might still be unsteady when travelling over new ground, or on different surfaces. In the same way, different situations or times in your life may be more challenging, and may require extra effort and persistence (i.e., more challenging of biased expectations or negative self-evaluations, more pleasant activities, more paying attention to positive qualities, more experimenting with your behaviours, etc). Even after much practice, there may be times when you think you've slipped back and feel a little off balance. Developing new skills is never a smooth process, you're always being faced with new challenges and different situations to apply those skills.

There are several reasons for setbacks occurring. There may be an increase in physical or mental stress. Just like riding a bike over challenging terrain, physical and mental stress can be challenges to the new ways of thinking and behaving that you have developed, and you may go back to old habits. Also, when we are physically unwell, we are less likely to have the mental or physical energy required to challenge or experiment with our negative thoughts, rule or beliefs, to treat ourselves well, or think of our positive qualities.

It may help to remind yourself that most people have ‘down days’ or days where life’s hassles are harder to deal with – its part of being human! Use the Thought Diary skills you have learned to help when these situations occur. Also, you can use setbacks as a way of learning something new about yourself to help avoid similar problems in the future.

Preventing Major Setbacks

As you are progressing, try not to focus too much on small setbacks. If you are experiencing several small setbacks then there are some ways of preventing a major setback.

1. Identify Early Warning Signs

The first step is to look out for your own early warning signs. Some common examples are:

- Spending increased time expecting the worst or being self-critical
- Reverting back to unhelpful behaviours (e.g., avoidance, escape, safety behaviours, withdrawal, isolation, neglect, passivity, etc)
- An increase in anxiety or depression.

2. Revise Skills

Think about the skills you have learned and what has been helpful in addressing your low-self esteem (eg., challenging/experimenting with biased expectations and negative self evaluations, paying attention to positive qualities, engaging in fun and achievement activities, treating yourself kindly, challenging/experimenting with your rules, challenging/experimenting with your negative core beliefs). Have you stopped practising these skills consistently? You may wish to revise the modules and techniques you have learned and perhaps increase practising those skills.

3. Social Support

It is wise to find someone with whom you can sit down and have a good talk. This doesn't mean a therapy session where you pour out your heart but rather just a chance to talk through what's going on in your life, what your goals are, and generally just to ventilate with someone you trust. Often, problems seem bigger than they really are when a person tries to deal with them on their own. Hearing yourself talk through something can help to put it into perspective.

On the next page is a self-management plan for you to complete. Make a note of the early warning signs that might signal a setback then write down the strategies and tools you have learnt about that can help you to deal with a setback.

Self-Management Plan

What are the early warning signs that tell me that I might be heading for a setback and need to do something about it myself? eg. *I am more depressed or anxious OR I am more critical of myself OR I am expecting the worst more often OR I am avoiding or withdrawing from things.*

What are some of my biased expectations, negative self-evaluations, unhelpful behaviours, unhelpful rules or assumptions, and negative core beliefs I need to watch out for?

If I do experience a setback, what will I do about it?

What are my future support options? Eg, *friends, family, GP, other, etc.*

What strategies/techniques have I found most helpful and need to continue to practise?

How can I build on what I have learned in this information package?

Module Summary

- Healthy self-esteem is thinking about ourselves and our worth in a balanced way
- From the strategies you have practiced, you will now be able to approach 'At-Risk Situations' and
 - Develop realistic expectations
 - Develop balanced self-evaluations
 - Engage in helpful behaviour
- From the strategies you have practiced, over the long-term you will be able to work at adjusting your negative core beliefs and adjusting unhelpful rules and assumptions
- Using the strategies introduced in this information package will allow you to approach situations with an open mind and to have the opportunity for new experiences and learning
- It is important that you keep applying and practising the strategies you have learned to maintain and further your gains in overcoming low self-esteem
- Consistent and continuous practice will enable you to integrate the strategies into your lifestyle
- Setbacks are expected when we make changes to the way we think and act – challenge any unhelpful thoughts that might get in the way of your progress, and repeat the modules to remind you of the strategies you have learnt and get you back on track
- Find some friends with whom you can be with and talk to. A group of friends can be a source of social support during difficult times.



To finish up ...

We hope that you have found this information package to be of benefit to you and that you will maintain the gains you have made. Do continue to practise the strategies you have learned and review the modules from time to time. For now, it's goodbye from us at CCI. Take care!

About This Module

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Louella Lim (DPsych¹)
Centre for Clinical Interventions

Dr. Lisa Saulsman (MPsych², PhD³)
Centre for Clinical Interventions

Paula Nathan (MPsych²)
Director, Centre for Clinical Interventions
Adjunct Senior Lecturer, School of Psychiatry and Clinical
Neuroscience, The University of Western Australia

¹Doctor of Psychology (Clinical)

²Master of Psychology (Clinical Psychology)

³Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology)

BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in the modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT is a type of psychotherapy that is based on the theory that unhelpful negative emotions and behaviours are strongly influenced by problematic cognitions (thoughts). This can be found in the following:

Beck, A.T., Rush, A. J., Shaw, B.F., & Emery, G. (1979). *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*. New York: Guildford.

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These are some of the professional references used to create the modules in this information package.

Fennell, M. (1998). Low Self-Esteem. In N. TARRIER, A. Wells and G. Haddock (Eds), *Treating Complex Cases: The Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Approach*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

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