

EsteemUp

Work on improving
your self-esteem and confidence



Module 2

Confidence booster

CEDARS – Counselling and Person Enrichment Section (CoPE)

Contents

How to use this workbook	P1
Introduction	P2
Next-level positivity list	P4
Feel the fear and do it anyway	P8
Rethink your expectations	P13
It's a wrap!	P15
Cheat Sheet	P17



How to Use this Workbook

EsteemUp is a self-help programme with 4 modules based on the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). It takes around 45 minutes per week for 3-4 weeks.

It was developed in the Department of Clinical, Neuro-, and Developmental Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Students were involved in the creative process by giving feedback on the materials, which were then adapted to suit the needs and preferences of students.

A special thanks to Manja de Neef and her book 'Build your confidence with CBT' for the invaluable input she has provided!

An overview of the programme

Module 1

Kick-start your self-esteem

Start challenging all the negative thoughts you have about yourself and focus on the positives.



Module 2

Confidence booster

Learn the secret to growing confidence: feeling the fear and doing it anyway.



Module 3

Start to own it

Learn to really own your accomplishments and to stop comparing.



Module 4

Socially self-assured

Lastly, boost your self-esteem by improving your social circle and speaking your mind.



You can find a list of resources in the community [here](#) when you need support. Counselling service is available at HKU for current students. It is free-of-charge, professional and confidential. Don't hesitate to seek help if needed.

Enquiries and Feedback

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Module 2

Confidence booster

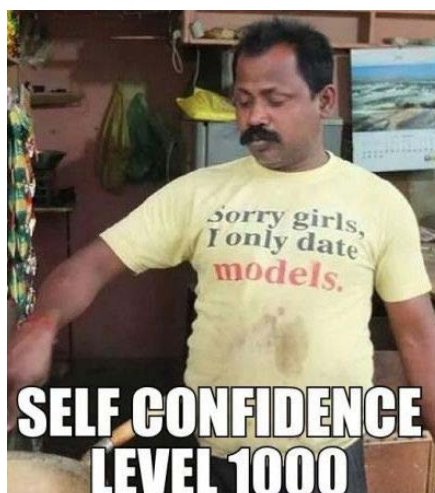
Introduction

Welcome back!

Today's topic is confidence. Most of us would like to feel more confident, but aren't quite sure how to get there.

In this module, you'll...

- ▶ Up the ante on your positivity list and start growing a more positive view of yourself
- ▶ Take another look at what confidence is, and learn two ways to grow it
- ▶ By feeling the fear and doing it anyway
- ▶ And by setting more realistic expectations of yourself and your actions



Quick check-in

In the previous module, you learned to be more aware of your critical thoughts and how to reframe them. How did this go?

Did you get better at recognizing your own negative thoughts?

Did you manage to reframe them like you practiced? If so: how did that affect you?

What if this were you:

I didn't manage to pay attention to or reframe my negative thoughts

That can happen and it's never too late to start! Changing your negative thoughts is a core aspect to improving self-esteem, so we highly recommend doing the following:

1. Go over the chapter 'Critical thoughts, begone!' from the first module again to get another go at practicing (and skip the rest of the module).
2. Also have a think of why you didn't manage, what might have been the reason(s)? No time, forgot about it, too difficult, something else? If you know, you can come up with solutions.

**Now on to today's topic:
confidence!**

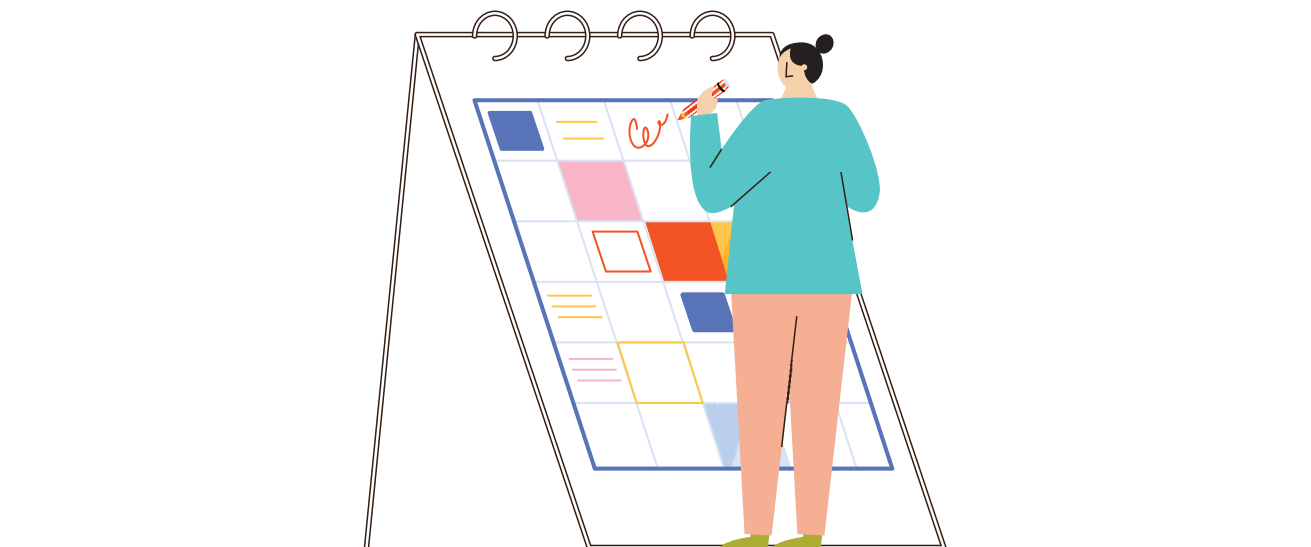


Next-level positivity list

Last time we gave the assignment to keep an eye out for positive things and to write them down. Focusing on the positive is a core aspect to improving your self-esteem and confidence, so today we're taking it to the next level!

How did it go with the positivity list? Did it get easier to notice the positives as you practiced more?

How did keeping track of all the positives affect you, your mood or your thoughts?



What if this were you:

I didn't manage to keep track of positive things

If that's the case: that's okay, don't beat yourself up over it! Today is a new day and you can start keeping track from now on.

At the same time, it's important to know what blocked you so you can overcome this barrier. Think about the possible reasons you didn't keep track and try to come up with a solution. Below are some examples for inspiration!

I forgot

- **Solution:** add a daily reminder to your phone at a convenient time. Pro tip: combine with an existing daily ritual, such as brushing your teeth or eating lunch. Ideally you'd keep track as soon as you notice something positive, but this is a good way to start getting into the habit.

It depressed me that I couldn't think of many things

- **Solution:** perhaps your standards for 'positive' things are too high. Try lowering them and allow yourself to add even the smallest thing. It can be as small as the nice smell of coffee, or anything that made you smile (how a doggy wagged its tail, a funny meme you saw etc).

I don't believe it works

- **Solution:** take the following words to heart: Focusing on the positive is a scientifically proven way to improve your self-esteem. It does take time and repetition (up to several months) to really see changes. The key is sticking to it, and not giving up within a few days if you don't notice any effects.



Positive traits

People with self-esteem tend to assign all these ‘bad’ traits to themselves. They might consider themselves lazy, impatient, stupid and much more... And the question “**What are your good traits?**” can be hard to answer. But having a healthy self-esteem requires that you CAN answer that question, which is why we’re going to change up the positivity list from now on.

The coming week, keep adding as many positives as you can to your positivity list. And here’s the twist: you’re going to start adding **character traits** to some positives you write down. Here’s how it works:

- Set a moment aside towards the end of the day to look over your positivity list (for example: right after dinner).
- Ask yourself: which of these positives contain a good character trait of mine? Pick one or two positives that do.
- For those one or two positives, write down the trait behind them.
- Don’t worry about finding the perfect word, you’re simply practicing taking off your black-tinted glasses ;) You can also write down a short sentence if you can’t easily come up with 1 word.

Let’s practice: what traits might these positives contain?

Hugged my boyfriend	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caring girlfriend• Affectionate• I appreciate physical contact• I’m very considerate to my boyfriend• I try to make others feel good
Went for a nice walk in the park	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindful of my health• Enjoying nature• Disciplined (I go for a short walk every single day)• Being fit or active• I’m environmentally conscious
Managed to study for the upcoming exam for 2 full hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsible• Taking my studies seriously• Sticking to my planning• Being organized• I was able to focus for that long

As you can see, a positive can be interpreted in many different ways and can contain several traits. It’s also not about finding the absolute perfect word: anything good about yourself will do. Your turn!

Grab your positivity list now and look it over. Choose 1 positive from your list that might contain a good trait of yours, and write down both the positive and trait:

Even more examples of positives and traits

Positives	Traits
Prepared a healthy dinner	Mindful of my health, good cook
Went to a fun party	Fun-loving, social, outgoing
A nice talk with a close friend	Caring, good conversationalist, kind
Didn't yell at my mom (even though I was annoyed at her)	Patient, considerate son/daughter
Enjoyed a comedy movie	Humorous, movie-lover
Saw a cute dog	Animal lover, kind to animals
Played guitar	Musical, or passionate

Starting today, you'll continue adding things to your positivity list AND add one or two traits every day. In the beginning, this can be quite tricky, so don't get discouraged if you struggle to come up with traits! This is completely normal and will quickly get easier if you keep practicing.

Over time, this exercise will allow you to get a more balanced view of yourself: you'll know your weaknesses AND your strengths!



The positivity list is an exercise from the book 'Build your confidence with CBT' by Manja de Neef.

Feel the fear and do it anyway

In the last module, you focused on changing your negative thoughts to improve your self-esteem. And you might remember that your actions can also have a big impact. So now we're going to focus on exactly that: growing your confidence and self-esteem through doing. Because here's a secret: confidence is a skill that you can learn through practice and repetition.

Reminder: how actions can influence self-esteem (Nell's example)

Meet Nell. Nell has low self-esteem and considers herself painfully shy. One day, Nell goes to a party, and this is where the timeline splits.

Timeline A:

Nell does what comes naturally: she sticks to herself, sits quietly in a corner and leaves the party within an hour. She has a terrible experience and feels pretty bad about herself afterwards. She thinks: "See, I'm impossibly shy and will never feel confident".



Timeline B:

Nell really pushes herself to get out of her comfort zone: she goes up to talk to some friendly looking people, gets on the dancefloor (which is extremely awkward at first but it soon gets better), and ends up staying at the party for several hours. She was quite anxious at first, but eventually actually had fun and feels very proud of herself. She thinks: "Maybe I'm not as impossibly shy as I thought!" Or: "Maybe I can change!"



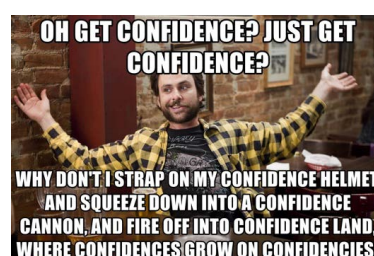
Usually, when we're not confident about something, we might feel nervous, worried, or otherwise uncomfortable. And many of us **avoid** things that make us feel like that, meaning we don't practice and therefore don't grow our confidence.

Scenario	Action
Isa doesn't like public speaking	Any time there's a group project with a presentation, she'll quickly volunteer for any task other than presenting.
Ren just moved to the Netherlands and wants to build up a social circle, but they're quite introverted	Because the prospect of having to interact causes them nervousness, they tend to avoid going to social events. And don't meet any people.
Milan isn't comfortable with his body.	He tries to hide it as much as possible by wearing baggy clothes and avoids showing his body. For example if his friends want to go swimming, he'll say he can't make it. And he never walks around without a shirt when his girlfriend is around.

Let's make it personal: what would you like to be more confident about? (Answer A)

How does not being confident in this thing affect your actions? Do you avoid certain situations, or behave differently than you'd like because of the insecurity?

Many of us make the mistake of trying to build our confidence **before** doing something. But then we might as well wait for forever, because avoiding that thing only makes the fear grow. We need to experience something many times over to grow comfortable with it.



Basically: confidence comes FROM doing something

The key to becoming more confident is to do something even if we feel uncomfortable; **to take action despite the fear**. And to repeat it many times over. So how do we do that? Well, there is no foolproof method, but there are a few steps you can take.

1 Make it smaller

If something is new, challenging or daunting, a great way to make it more manageable is by breaking it into smaller, less scary chunks. There is less of a barrier to performing these smaller chunks, and by successfully taking action you're boosting your confidence as you go, and build up to the big thing.

Examples of smaller chunks:

Isa & public speaking	I will ask the tutor 1 question during a workgroup/tutorial (plenary).
Ren & making friends	The people in my project group seemed nice, I'll try and strike up casual conversation with them and see where it goes.
Milan & appearance	I'm going to buy one piece of clothing (a shirt) that isn't super oversized and wear it sometimes.

This is the thing you want to be more confident in: refer to Answer A on p.9

First, do a mind dump of all sorts of actions you can take. You can even brainstorm with a friend! Make sure you keep it small and doable.

Now choose one of these actions to perform. It's important that you choose an action you will have time and energy for in the coming week. (Answer B)

2 Plan and practice

Once you know what you want to do, you can decide when/how you want to do it, as well as do some test runs. Write down what you want to say or do exactly, practice by yourself or with a friend, and set a date and time.

Isa & public speaking	The next workgroup is this Thursday, I will go over the preparatory assignments beforehand and formulate the question I want to ask. I will read it out loud a few times right before the workgroup. When we're discussing the assignment, I will ask my question.
Ren & making friends	The project group is meeting on Friday. Sometime during the meeting, I will ask what kind of fun things they've done or have planned. Maybe (depending on what they say) I can even see about joining.
Milan & appearance	I'll ask my sister if she wants to come shopping with me in the weekend to help pick something out. After I've bought the shirt, I'll wear it at home one day to get used to it. Then I'll wear it to Uni next week Thursday.

How will you practice or prepare for the step you wrote above?

When will you take this step (in the coming week)? Set a time/date, and add a reminder in your calendar, too! (Answer C)

3 Decide that you can handle it

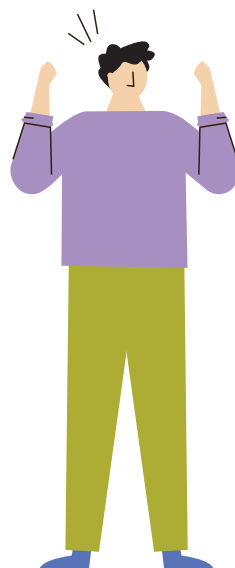
No matter how much you prepare, the moment you're about to do the thing will always be uncomfortable. And all worry and fear essentially boil down to the same thing: we fear that we won't be able to handle the situation and/or its outcomes. And that belief is 100% false. Humans are extremely resilient, and you are too. You've experienced a million difficult situations, and you've always persevered. This new thing that you're going to experience is no different.

When you feel the fear, decide that you will be able to handle whatever happens and do it anyway.



Make the sentence “**Feel the fear and do it anyway**” your mantra. When you're low on confidence, remind yourself that you can only grow your confidence by doing in spite of feeling uncomfortable, and repeat the mantra to yourself.

PS. When you finish this module, you will unlock another unlockable! A cheat sheet for growing your confidence :)



Rethink your expectations

Let's say you felt the fear and did it anyway - that's amazing and something to be proud of! Yet people with self-esteem can **still** be unhappy with themselves if it didn't go 100% perfectly, which prevents their confidence from growing.

So let's talk about letting go of this type of perfectionism.



Your definition of 'a success'

First it's important to know how you 'measure' something being a success (or on the flipside: a failure). Below are different expectations one can have of themselves, check the ones you recognise in yourself or agree with.

Doing something successfully means...

- making no mistakes
- getting the exact outcome I wanted
- doing it perfectly
- doing it without feeling nervous or scared
- doing it quickly and easily, without a lot of effort
- being able to do it without help
- Otherwise, namely: _____

This is the small step you're going to take in the coming week: refer to Answer B on p.10

What expectations do you have of yourself for doing this thing? When will you consider it a 'success' rather than a 'fail'? Feel free to use the examples above, but make it concrete for this specific action.

After seeing them on paper, you might realise that these expectations can be quite unattainable and unrealistic. To improve self-esteem and grow confidence, you need to redefine what makes something 'a success' to be more realistic. That makes it much easier to measure up and to feel like you did well!

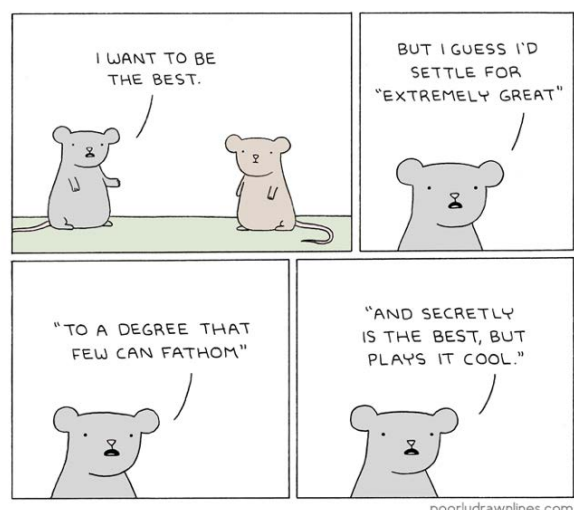
Examples of redefined expectations:

Scenario	Redefined Expectations
It's only a success if I do it perfectly without making any mistakes.	I'm new to it, so making mistakes is a natural part of learning. On top of that, in the past I always learned the most from my mistakes (so they're very useful in their own way). It's a success if I can learn from my mistakes.
It's only a success if I was able to easily do it without any help.	It's completely normal that new things take a bit of effort. If anything, the fact that it was difficult and I still did it is a big success, because I can be really proud of myself for persevering.
It's only a success if the outcome is exactly what I wanted it to be.	The outcome doesn't change the fact that I overcame my own barriers and was able to take action, which in itself is already a huge personal success.

Take another look at your definition of success for the task. How can you make your expectations of yourself more realistic? If it helps, you can imagine what you'd say to a close friend who had these expectations.

A little heads-up: writing down realistic expectations is one thing, actually being okay with things being imperfect is another. You will likely still feel disappointed or unhappy with yourself if it didn't go perfectly, even if you can rationalise your expectations like we just did. That's normal! Like many things, redefining 'success' is something that needs a bit of time and effort.

Keep being on the lookout for unrealistic expectations you have of yourself, redefining them in your mind, and eventually your feelings will follow suit!



Comic by Poorly Drawn Lines

It's a wrap!

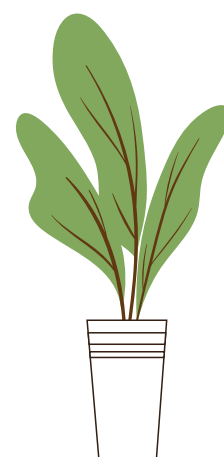


Nice - you made it to the end
of the second module!

In a nutshell:

- You started forming a more balanced view of yourself (weaknesses and strengths) by adding good traits of yours to your positivity list.
- You learned that the only way to grow your confidence is by doing the thing you're insecure about over and over.
- 3 steps to make this easier: make it smaller, plan and practice the action, and decide you can feel the fear and do it anyway.
- Lastly: if you have unrealistic expectations, you'll never be happy with the outcome. So work on making them more realistic!

On which day of the week and at what time do you want to do the next module? Add it to your calendar or set a reminder on your phone.



Take it home!

To continue boosting your confidence, do these assignments in the coming week.

1. Continue keeping track of your **positivity list**. Set aside a moment towards the end of the day (for example after dinner) to look over your positivity list and add a good trait to one or two things.

Don't worry about finding the perfect word: a short sentence is also fine!

2. To build **confidence**, you decided to start with one small step you can take.

You can also use the cheat sheet on p.17 you unlock upon finishing!

This is the step you wanted to take: refer to Answer B on p.10

And this is when: refer to Answer C on p.11

Make sure you actually do it to grow your confidence! We'll evaluate how it went in the next module. Remember: **you can feel the fear and do it anyway**. If you want to learn more about building confidence, here's a pretty good TED-Talk you can check out.

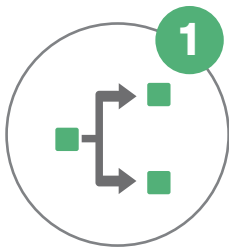
3. Don't let negative thoughts stand in your way of performing this action. Reframe any thought such as 'I can't do it' or 'It'll never work' with the technique you learned in the last module:

1. Become aware of your negative thoughts
2. Gather evidence & come up with arguments against the thoughts
3. Reframe the critical thoughts in a more realistic way

Good luck and see you next time!

What did you think of this module? Please let us know your views here.

Growing confidence



Make it smaller

If something is new, challenging or daunting, a great way to make it more manageable is by breaking it into smaller, less scary chunks.

What would you like to grow confidence in?

.....

What is a possible small first action?

.....



Plan and practice

Write down what you want to say or do exactly, practice by yourself or with a friend, and set a date and time.

Create a concise action plan:

.....

.....



Decide that you can handle it

No matter how much you prepare, the moment you're about to do the thing will always be uncomfortable. When you feel the fear, decide that you can handle it and do it anyway.