

LIFEHACK

Expand your toolbox of life skills and strengthen your mental wellbeing



Main Module


Grow your confidence & self-esteem





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How to Use this Workbook

LifeHack is a self-help programme in which you learn various life skills for all sorts of situations you might encounter in life. This program is based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and consists of reading material and interactive exercises. Four domains are covered: your emotional well-being, your studies, your social life and your self-esteem.

Each domain consists of one main module and two related optional modules. The best way to do the programme is to complete one domain per week by doing the main module and any of the optional modules that seem relevant to you. Therefore, the whole programme will take approximately 4 to 6 weeks.

You can find a list of resources in the community [here](#) when you need support. Counselling and Psychological services are 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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Grow your confidence & self-esteem

Introduction

Do you like yourself? Do you have high self-esteem? Are you confident? Maybe you're not quite sure, these things tend to fluctuate and differ across different domains of life. And maybe you wouldn't mind feeling a bit more confident. Then it's great that you're here, as that is exactly what this module is for.

After today you will:

- Understand the concept of self-esteem and how it relates to confidence and self-worth
- Learn 3 hacks to increase your self-esteem



Comic by [Just Peachy Comic](#)

Before we get into it: describe your personal goal(s) with regards to confidence & self-esteem. What would you like to achieve after doing this module? (answer A)

Let's go!

Defining self-esteem

Confidence, self-esteem, self-worth, self-love, self-respect... There are tons of terms around this concept of how we feel about ourselves. Before we get into the official definitions, let's look at your own levels of self-esteem (which is what we will use as an umbrella term).



On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your self-esteem?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Extremely low					Extremely high				

Why did you give this rating? Based on what kinds of experiences, thoughts and feelings?

Defining self-esteem

Let's explore the idea of self-esteem a little bit further. The concept of self-esteem is quite complex.

In your own words, how would you define self-esteem?

What do you think creates healthy self-esteem?

Let's take a deeper look at self-esteem. Watch the below video now (Please refer to the video transcript on p. 19):



After watching the video and knowing why self-esteem matters, surely you want those benefits too! So let's look at 3 hacks to boost your self-esteem.



1. Know your strengths

The first hack to boost self-esteem is by knowing yourself, and by focusing on your strengths rather than your weaknesses. The way we define strength is very broad: it can be anything that is a positive, beneficial or helpful factor in your life.



They can be:

- characteristics or traits (such as being organised)
- support systems (close friends)
- skills (being good at writing)
- circumstances (having a lovely apartment)
- things that bring you joy (hobbies)
- ... and more!

Most of us are aware of some of our strengths, but a little bit of digging can yield so many more than we originally thought!

First write down all your strengths, as many as you can think of:

6 aspects of 'being you'

Odds are that after writing down a few strengths, you couldn't think of any more. That's because us humans tend to overlook our own strengths. To help you uncover a few more, let's look at the following domains.



1. Behavioural aspect

These are all the actions you take during your life, the way you respond to things, your routines, your tendencies and traits, your skills and undertakings, and achievements.

What are your strengths in the behavioural aspect? Write as many as you can and remember that a strength is quite broad: anything that is positive, beneficial or helpful!

Examples of behavioural strengths:

- I'm a go-getter
- Exercising consistently
- Picking up a new hobby last year and getting pretty good at it
- I don't get angry quickly
- I don't let fear stop me from going after my goals
- I'm a really considerate person; always looking out for other people



2. Social aspect

The people you interact with and that are important to you, as well as all the social and interpersonal experiences you have.

What are your strengths in the social aspect? Write as many as you can!

Examples of social strengths:

- Making new friends very easily
- I have really long-lasting friendships
- My friends/family are there for me if I need them
- There are people I can turn to if I'm having a hard time, such as my mentor or a study advisor
- I myself am a pretty good friend: considerate, loyal, always there for others



3. Emotional aspect

All the feelings and emotions you experience, and how well you can regulate and deal with them.

What are your strengths in the emotional aspect? Write as many as you can.

Examples of emotional strengths:

- I tend to laugh a lot and enjoy things
- My emotional growth in the past year
- Getting better at recognizing why I feel a certain way
- I'm pretty good at cheering myself up when I'm down
- Accepting that I will sometimes feel scared, but that doesn't mean I can't do it



4. Spiritual aspect

Any form of belief about something 'greater', which can be religious but doesn't have to be.

What are your strengths in the spiritual aspect? Write as many as you can.

Examples of spiritual strengths:

- Having a positive relationship with God
- Respecting all life
- Finding comfort in prayer
- Finding comfort in meditation/mindfulness
- Enjoying going to church and seeing the people there



5. Mental aspect

All the cognitive, intellectual processes that go on in your head, such as thoughts, ideas, memories, perceptions, expectations, decisions, and conclusions.

What are your strengths in the mental aspect? Write as many as you can.

Examples of mental strengths:

- Being generally optimistic
- Great memory
- Being a fast reader
- Liking to think deeply about topics
- I don't judge others quickly



6. Physical aspect

Your body, what you can do with it, your senses, and your relationship with your body (how you feel about your body and the way you treat it).

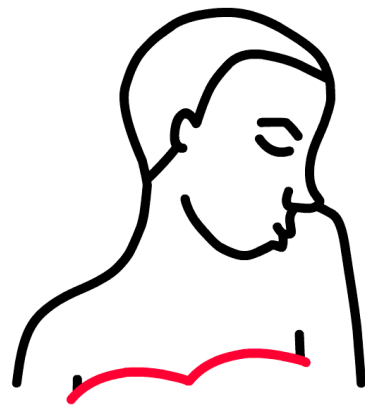
What are your strengths in the physical aspect? Write as many as you can.

Examples of physical strengths:

- Great immune system (rarely get ill)
- Being strong / having muscles
- Being fit
- Liking the way ... looks
- My body's ability to practice hobbies such as ... or ...
- I never get headaches

How do you feel about yourself after having listed so many strengths?

If you ever want to give yourself a little pick-me-up, try listing your strengths in different domains of your life to boost your self-esteem!



2. Be compassionate to yourself

The second way to boost self-esteem is by being kinder to yourself and accepting yourself; flaws and mistakes and all.

Accepting yourself and being compassionate is hardest when you're confronted with something you don't like about yourself: this can be having a 'bad' quality, or when making a mistake. In those moments, you might engage in negative self-talk: by blaming and judging yourself, calling yourself names, and viewing yourself in a negative light. Here are 3 steps to change your negative self-talk.

Step 1. Become aware of your 'inner critic'

First you need to start noticing when you're being self-critical. Pay attention to the way you 'talk' to yourself when you feel bad about something. This takes practice as some thoughts seem so 'normal' that you might not even notice it's your inner critic!

Let's give it a go!



Think about a recent situation in which you felt negatively about yourself. What kind of negative thoughts did you have about yourself?



Examples of negative thoughts:

- I am such an idiot
- I disappoint everyone
- I look horrible
- Everyone is doing better than me
- I'm not worthy of my partner, they're too good for me
- I'm so useless
- I'm never going to get better at ...
- I'm just a bother to people

Step 2. Acknowledge and understand your inner critic

What you might not realise, is that your inner critic has a purpose. It's trying to push you to do better, to BE better. That way, you have less chance of 'failing' and you can change something before other people notice, judge and reject you for it. So actually, your inner critic is looking out for you - it just does it in a bit of a 'mean' way.

So rather than trying to silence our negative self-talk altogether, it's better to try to identify what our inner critic is trying to accomplish.

Take another look at the thoughts you wrote above. What was your inner critic trying to accomplish? What did it want to motivate you for, or what did it want to protect you from?



Examples of what inner critic was trying to accomplish:

- I am such an idiot > To make me work harder next time so I don't make the same mistake
- I disappoint everyone > To make sure I don't lose my friends
- I look horrible > To make sure I look okay
- Everyone is doing better than me > To make me study harder and get better results
- I'm not worthy of my partner, they're too good for me > To make sure I don't get broken up with
- I'm so useless > To make me take action and not be 'useless'
- I'm never going to get better at ... > To ensure that I try harder to get better at it
- I'm just a bother to people > By not 'burdening' other people, they're more likely to keep me in their lives

NEXT LEVEL HACK

If you're up for it, you can even make an effort to be grateful to your inner critic. We know it sounds weird to be grateful for having negative thoughts, but trust us! By thanking your inner critic for its good intentions, you show that you accept it - which means you're already practicing a form of self-acceptance!

Step 3. Reframe the critical thoughts

Lastly, you reframe the negative thoughts in a friendly, positive way and be compassionate towards yourself. Your inner critic is almost never 100% right. By being kinder to yourself, you reinforce that you are a good and lovable person, which (over time) will grow your self-esteem and self-love.

A great way to reframe your thoughts, is to imagine what you would say or do if a close friend was having these thoughts. Then simply do the same for yourself!

How can you reframe the thoughts you wrote above in a more friendly, positive way? Think of what you would say to a close friend who had this thought.

Need a hand in reformulating the thoughts?

- I am such an idiot > I made a mistake, and now that I've had this experience I know how to do it differently next time.
- I disappoint everyone > The fact that I want to make sure that other people are happy, is a sign that I'm a very caring and considerate person. I like that about myself.
- I look horrible > No body is perfect, and there are also things I like about my body such as .. and ..
- Everyone is doing better than me > Sometimes other people are better at something than I am, and sometimes I'm better at something. It's impossible to always be the best, nor is it needed.
- I'm not worthy of my partner, they're too good for me > There are some things that make me an awesome partner (such as ...), and there are some things that I can work on (such as ...). The same goes for my partner, so neither of us is too good for the other.
- I'm so useless > This time it didn't work out the way I wanted it to. But if I make some concrete plans for next time, it'll go a lot better.
- I'm never going to get better at ... > This is taking more effort than I had anticipated, but if I keep at it I will definitely improve.
- I'm just a bother to people > The people who care about me want to be there for me, just like I want to be there for the people that I care about.

And that's it!

By consistently applying these 3 steps every time you have doubtful or negative thoughts about yourself, you can be more self-compassionate and therefore grow your self-esteem.



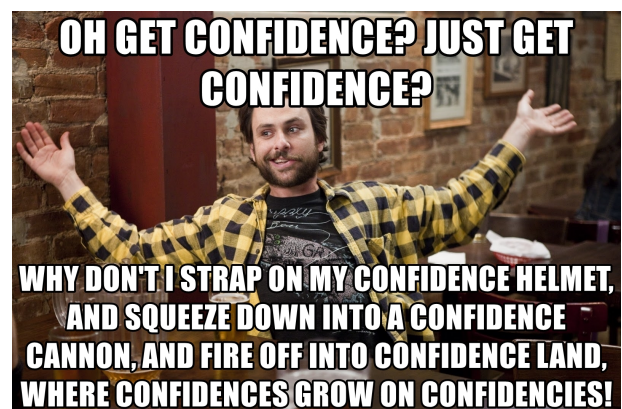
3. Feel the fear and do it anyway

The third and last hack in this module is to grow your **confidence**. As you might remember, confidence is a feeling of competence in more specific areas. When we're not confident about something, we might feel nervous, worried, scared or otherwise uncomfortable. And often, we tend to avoid things that make us feel like that.

Scenario:	Their 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.
Milan gets nervous around girls	Even though he'd like to date and find a girlfriend, he'll never go and talk to a girl at a bar or a party. Even talking to attractive girls from Uni is a challenge, so he prefers sticking to the guys.
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

What do you do when you're faced with something you're not confident about? Do you avoid it? Face it head on?

Many of us make the mistake of trying to build our confidence before doing something, but then we might as well wait forever as avoiding that thing only makes the fear grow. That's because we cannot get comfortable with something until we've experienced it several times.





Basically: confidence comes FROM doing something

The first time you try to drive a car, you're probably extremely aware of your surroundings and feel a bit nervous about causing a crash.

Over time, it becomes second nature. People who've been driving for years do so almost completely on autopilot.

The first time you cook a new dish, it feels difficult and you might worry about how it's gonna turn out.

After cooking it several times, it starts to feel easy. If you've cooked the same food a dozen times, you can prepare it without a second thought and feel confident that it's going to taste good.

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

First, let's make it practical: what would you like to be more confident about?

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:


New/Big challenges:	Smaller chunks:
Isa & public speaking	I will ask the tutor 1 question during a workgroup/tutorial (plenary).
Milan & dating	I'm going to install a dating app like Tinder and say something to the next girl I match with.
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.

How can you make the thing you want to grow your confidence in smaller?

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. Practice by yourself or with friends, write down what you want to say or do exactly, and set a date and time.

Things to do:	What to say or do exactly, 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.
Milan & dating	I'm hanging out with friends this weekend, I will ask them to help come up with the opening line and to encourage me to send it.
Ren & making friends	The project group is meeting on the weekend, 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.



How will you practice or prepare taking the action you wrote above?

When will you take that step exactly? (set a reminder for yourself in your calendar, too!)

3. Decide that you can handle it

No matter how much you prepare, the moment as you're about to do the thing will always be uncomfortable. And all worry and fear essentially boils 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.

NEXT LEVEL HACK

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.

Hack wrap-up



You made it all the way to the end, give yourself a round of applause!

Now let's take a look back at what you said at the beginning of this module.

This is what you wanted to achieve with regards to confidence and self-esteem:

Refer to answer A on p.2.

How will you move forward with this goal, using the tips from this module?

This module in bullets:

- Self-esteem is what we think and feel and believe about ourselves. Healthy self-esteem is linked to better mental wellbeing.
- The first hack to boost self-esteem is by knowing and focusing on your strengths. A strength can be any positive aspect of your life.
- The second hack is by accepting yourself completely - flaws and all.
- The last hack is to grow confidence by doing the thing you're not confident in: break it down, practice, and decide you can feel the fear and do it anyway.

Optional confidence & self-esteem modules unlocked!



We recommend continuing with the ones that are relevant for you straight away and keep the momentum going!

Overcome perfectionism & fear of failure - 6 hacks to deal with these kinds of unhelpful feelings

Impostor syndrome, begone! - so you can finally embrace how well you're doing

What did you think of this module? Please let us know your views [here](#).



Supplementary information



Video transcript of “Self-esteem”

Most people believe that self-esteem comes from our achievements. By performing well in uni for example, or having lots of friends. But more often than not, our achievements don't really impact our self-esteem that much. Rather feeling good about ourselves is all about understanding, accepting and loving ourselves.

So how do we get there? First, we need to look at what self-esteem is.

Self-esteem is what we think, feel and believe about ourselves, and the value that we place on ourselves. People with low self-esteem have a negative overall view of themselves, whereas people with high self-esteem truly like themselves. It is something of an umbrella term: it encompasses several psychological concepts. Two of those are the concepts of self-worth and confidence. These are often used interchangeably with self-esteem, but actually you can view them as different aspects of self-esteem.

Self-worth is a deep knowing that you are of value, that you are loveable, necessary to this life, and worthy. This is true even when you make a mistake or doubt yourself.

Confidence is a feeling of competence in more specific areas, such as certain skills. Any time we do something that's new for us, we might lack some confidence. Luckily, our confidence tends to grow as we do something more and naturally get better at it.

But why do these things matter? Low self-esteem can have a negative impact on our mental health, relationships and other aspects of life such as work or academics. However, too much self-esteem has been associated with entitlement, narcissism, arrogance and manipulative tendencies.

So then, what is the right amount of self-esteem? A healthy self-esteem allows us to be aware of our abilities, while still recognizing our flaws and trying to improve on those. When self-esteem is healthy and grounded in reality, it is hard to have too much of it. This is not about blowing your own horn, but about maintaining a realistic view of one's self and learning to respect yourself as a whole, including faults and all!