

Self-Esteem

Everybody has self-esteem. Sometimes we have high self-esteem, sometimes low, and sometimes in-between. But we all have it. But what exactly is self-esteem? We can't see it or touch it – it's an abstract idea.

Understanding self-esteem

Sometimes when we're trying to better understand abstract ideas, we use a metaphor. A metaphor might be a more solid thing that we already understand – something that's part of ordinary life. Maybe something we can touch or see, or at least imagine.

To help us better understand what self-esteem is, we will be using the metaphor of building a house.

Self-worth

First we start with the foundation of the house: the big strong boulder that we build our house on. This boulder symbolises self-worth. Everybody is 100 percent worthwhile, no matter who they are or what they do. We all have every right to be here.



Self-love

We build our house on top of this foundation. The inside of our house may be well cared for, or neglected. We can think of the way we care for our house as our emotional relationship with ourselves: our self-love. Do we give ourselves love? Do we care for ourselves? This is often hard for many women to do, because we are taught that we should care for other people first.



Self-respect

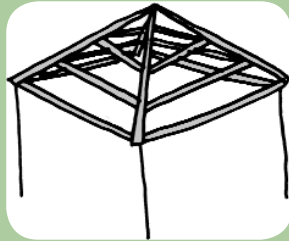
If there are problems with your house – a leaky tap, or peeling wallpaper – they need your attention. In the same way, if you are feeling sad or jealous or angry, they need your attention too.

This is about respecting your emotions and not judging yourself. This does not necessarily mean you act on those emotions, for example by lashing out at others. Instead you might see them as a way of understanding yourself better, or an area where you need to take care of yourself. This is called self-respect.



Self-judgement

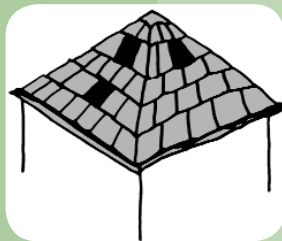
We can think of self-esteem as the roof on our house. Self-esteem is about how we judge ourselves.



We make judgements based on our personal values. We can think of these values as the roof's structure. What do we believe makes someone a good woman? What about a successful woman? If we have a strong sense of our own answers to these questions, our roof structure will be strong. If we simply take on the values or judgements of others (such as family, church or friends) our structure may not be as strong.

Self-esteem

We gain and lose self-esteem as we go through life. This is like gaining or losing tiles on the roof. We might have tiles that are about feeling that we are good at cooking, that we can be trusted, that we are good at supporting our friends, that we are good at sport.



We might lose tiles when we feel we have made a mistake, or when other people blame or criticise us. Tiles can come and go because of our judgements of ourselves, as well as because of praise or criticism from other people.

Our house

All of these aspects of our house are interrelated: its foundation, the walls, the interiors and the roof. We need to love and respect ourselves (creating a strong house) to have good self-esteem (a roof that keeps us warm and dry).



For more information

Ring the Power On Team at Women's Health West on 9689 9588 or online at www.whwest.org.au



women's health west
Power On!
peer education program for women
who have experienced a mental illness

Source *Feeling good – A model for understanding self-esteem*
by Philomena Horsley,
Family Planning Victoria.