



Wellbeing
& Recovery
College

Midlands Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust



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Building Self-Esteem and Assertiveness

Body Language

Professor Amy Cuddy is a leading body language expert whose research has explored the influence of posture poses and how people view us and how we view ourselves. The interest in this topic resulted from an accident that left Cuddy feeling helpless lowering her confidence levels. The impact this had on her behaviour, particularly her body language became a key topic in her research as she searched for ways to regain her confidence.

Cuddy chose to research powerful leaders as these were people who embodied confidence. The research aimed to identify what made these people feel and appear confident. The results showed that men and women tended to have more testosterone (a male sex hormone that plays a part in risk taking and confidence) and less cortisol (the stress hormone). An interesting finding was that this hormone profile altered from person to person and from hour to hour. It was discovered that how people behave effects the levels of testosterone and cortisol and Cuddy promotes body language that helps others to feels more confident. This in turn raises self-esteem. Although her research is viewed as controversial by some, here are strategies that are widely accepted to impact self-esteem:

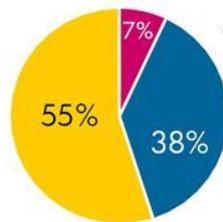
Slowing body movements and breathing

There is a mind-body connection that means how we behave influences how we feel or think e.g. fidgeting and shallow breathing is a nervous response which can lead to further cortisol being released. Slowing the body movements down has a calming influence and reduces the levels of cortisol.

The effects of standing or sitting straight

Anxiety and low self-esteem can lead to protective body language. Postures such as slouching, folding arms and shrinking into chairs or standing in the corner can keep self-esteem low. Taking up space, standing tall can increase testosterone levels leading to increased confidence.

Making eye contact. Looking away and avoiding eye contact can come from feelings of inferiority. Averting eyes reinforces internal beliefs that others are more important and can maintain low self-esteem. Although it's likely to feel uncomfortable at first, practicing eye contact sends a message to yourself that



Dr. Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55% Rule

Elements of Personal Communication

- 7% spoken words
- 38% voice, tone
- 55% body language

you are equally as important as others and deserve to be seen.

Nurturing Your Compassionate Self-Talk

Critical self-talk is usually negative, harsh, berating and judgmental about them and others, affecting a person's self-esteem. The critic may always be there to some degree but how a person responds to it can change the impact it has.

Developing nurturing self-talk is one way to reduce the negative effects of the internal critic. It can be difficult for some people to start developing nurturing self-talk and imagining you're a truly good friend to yourself can be helpful. It is the tone of voice often used when speaking to loved ones and is caring, compassionate, understanding, accepting, encouraging and patient. Compassionate self-talk remains the same whatever happens.

ACTIVITY

If you were to bring compassionate, nurturing self-talk into your mind,

1. What would it sound like?

2. What kind of qualities would it have?

3. What sort of things would it say?

Nurturing Voice

ACTIVITY

Critical	Nurturing
"Now look what you've gone and done!"	"I worked hard on this and I tried my best."
"People don't like me"	"I cannot possibly be liked by everyone. I don't like everyone I meet either. It is ok. I will be ok."
"I can't do anything right."	"I try my best to be a good person. I'm allowed to give myself space to grow."
"I look stupid."	"I am allowed to feel bad sometimes but it doesn't make it true."
"I won't bother trying again.	"I can't expect myself to do things perfectly."
"I won't say anything because nobody will listen to me"	"Everyone should be able to say how they feel. Even though I don't quite believe it, this includes me."
"I don't deserve to be in this job."	"I worked hard to get to where I am. Everyone has self-doubt. It doesn't make the thoughts true."
"I shouldn't feel upset. I'm so weak."	"It's okay to feel upset. It won't last. I have survived harder things than this."
"I should be better."	"I am enough. Even if I don't always believe it, I am enough."
"I wish I was someone else."	"Other people have made me feel like that. It doesn't make it a fact."

Affirmations

Affirmations are positive self-statements that can help change the way a person thinks and feels about themselves. They are the kind of words that the nurturing voice would say and using them repeatedly helps to develop and strengthen that voice.

Examples:

I am ok just the way I am

I believe in my abilities

I accept all parts of myself

I did my best

My body deserves to be nurtured

I am good enough

I have come a long way

I acknowledge my own needs

I am worthy of happiness

My contribution is valuable

I am worthy of love

I am capable of achieving this aim