

## **POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM AND INTERNALIZED ABLEISM FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

During a recent conversation, Morrigan Hunter, a researcher and Sexuality Educator, mentioned the concept of internalized ableism impacting one's self-worth and/or self-esteem. If a person has low self-worth, they are less likely to protect themselves in relationships and have a healthy relationship. I took Morrigan Hunter's concept and the Green Mountain Self-Advocates' (GMSA) article on self-esteem to create this article and worksheet to help self-advocates think about this idea.

According to GMSA and the Self Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center (SARTAC), self-esteem is:

- How much you value yourself and how good you feel about yourself.
- How do you think about your abilities, qualities, and how you see yourself?

When you have high self-esteem, you feel good about yourself, are confident, and believe you can do things well.

But if you have low self-esteem, you might feel bad about yourself and think you're not good enough.

Whether a person with an intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) has positive self-esteem can be influenced by many things, such as how

our society views people with disabilities, personal experiences, and personal beliefs, including internalized ableism.

**Internalized ableism** is when a person believes the negative ideas others have about people with disabilities. A person who experiences internalized ableism may see themselves as society sees them, feel less intelligent and capable, less desirable and attractive, and not deserving of love and respect. These feelings of being less than others can impact one's willingness to work towards goals and dreams, increase our feelings of self-doubt and self-confidence, impact our mental health, and impact the decisions we make about our lives.

For example, a person with low self-esteem may see themselves as unattractive, undesirable, and/or not intelligent. All of these thoughts can lead to low self-confidence and self-worth. This person may not try to date others, they may give up on getting a job, and they may not take care of their bodies.

On the other hand, if a person has a positive or high self-esteem, it leads to high self-confidence, and self-worth and impacts how they lead their life.

For example, a person with positive or high self-esteem may ask someone out on a date, protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections, or decide to apply for a new job.

We can build our self-esteem by exploring internalized ableism, appreciating who we are, and learning ways to feel better about ourselves.

**Here are some ways to increase one's self-esteem.** Use the handout "[Me and My Self-Esteem](#)." This handout is for people with IDD to explore and build their self-esteem. If you are supporting someone, use the handout by asking the questions below.

### **Step One: Explore your self-esteem**

The first step is to think about how you see and feel about yourself and how your disability fits into how you see and feel about yourself. Explore the questions on the worksheet titled, How Do I Feel About Myself?

### **Step Two: Building your self-esteem**

Once you understand how you feel about yourself, there are many tools to help build your self-esteem. Choose a few of these tips from Green Mountain Self-Advocates and SARTAC.

### **Step Three: Create a plan of action**

Come up with a plan to build your self-esteem.

### **Step Four: Revisit this handout in three months**

Building self-esteem takes time and effort. Return to this handout in three months to see how you are doing.

For people with IDD, positive self-esteem is not just about feeling good about who you are—it is a powerful tool for empowerment and growth. Internalized ableism, however, can get in the way of feeling empowered and growing. As we work to remove ableism from our society, we need to

find ways to build our self-esteem. By reflecting on who we are, promoting inclusion, and challenging harmful stereotypes, we can help ourselves and others develop strong, positive self-esteem and live a full, meaningful life.

For more information about self-esteem, you can contact Morrigan Hunter (they/them, fae/faer) at [morriganehunter@gmail.com](mailto:morriganehunter@gmail.com).

For the slide deck on "What is Self-Esteem" from Green Mountain Self-Advocates, click the link below.

<https://gmsavt.org/resources/what-is-self-esteem>

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