

BEAUTIFUL JUST THE WAY YOU ARE

A Webinar Summary for Dr. Sara Ali



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Defining and Understanding Self-Confidence

- Self-confidence is **the way we see and think about ourselves**, representing the value we assign to **ourselves**. Healthy self worth is a balanced and positive view of self without belittling or exaggeration and with respect and mercy.

Healthy self confidence helps us face challenges and learn from experiences without belittling or harshly judging oneself.

- It is fundamentally an **internal process** that involves how "me, my heart, and my mind" evaluate the self.
- It is **not** defined by superficial, external acts like having a strong presence, clear speech, or insisting on one's opinion; these are mere outcomes or tools.
- It is about **knowing myself, regardless of what the mainstream society tells me**.
- It is a **dynamic state, a result of daily interactions and daily decisions**, and not a fixed state that one achieves. Self perception is changing based on our thoughts and emotions.
- **Problems in self-evaluation happen when consistently being negative all or most of the time.**

Core Islamic Foundation (Existential Value: Why am I here?)

- The most crucial foundation is the **Existential Value: I am honored by God**.
- A person's **value is derived from being a human being created by Allah The Almighty and worshipping him**, not from roles, degrees, or jobs.
- This foundation helps ensure that one's self-perception is measured by the standard of **closeness or distance from Allah**, not by impressing others.
- **Self-confidence should fit my nature** and allow me to be **comfortable with myself, with my nature, with my color, with my shape, with everything that Allah granted me as long as it pleases Allah**

Factors that Hinder Self-Confidence

- **Comparisons** (internal or externally imposed) are factors that decrease self-confidence, especially through constant social media consumption.
- Societal culture pressures individuals, particularly women, to "fit molds" and be "perfect in a certain way".
- **External criticism, blame, and self-reproach** (the inner voice) take self-confidence down.
- Forming **deep, negative conclusions about the self** (e.g., "I am unlovable," "I am stupid," "I am ordinary") establishes damaging self-views.

Negative assumptions can lead to unhealthy behaviors like paying unnecessary attention to every detail, perfectionism, running away from challenges or new experiences, people pleasing attitude, suppressing emotions or focus on appearance and weights and try to control them tediously.

Sometimes some environments or interactions trigger in-confidence, be aware of reasons and get ready with your tools beforehand.

Strategies for the Individual (Self-Help Manuals)

Internal Analysis:

- **Write down negative thoughts** about the self, in categories if needed (e.g., as a mother, wife, human being).
- **Write down positive qualities/thoughts with evidence** to use when the mind is anxious.
- **Prepare five or six counter-thoughts** to neutralize repetitive negative thoughts as soon as they sprout.

Evaluate yourself through reflections on Stories of prophets, Mother's of the believers and the Quran.

Acceptance and Development:

- **Practice self-acceptance (Al-Rida)**, recognizing that **it's okay that I have problems** and that **I am good as I am**; with my gifts, character, challenges and the circumstances that shaped me until today. While understanding (**Acceptance doesn't mean stop developing!**)
- Seek improvement from a position of striving in my role, to reinforce positive identity, not from a feeling of being inadequate or having no value.
 - be mindful of thoughts, how they get you closer or away from Allah, and what feelings stem from these thoughts. A believer is balancing between fear of his shortcoming and hope for reward.
 - Be aware of (if) statements; "If I get a job .., if I lose weight, .. this or that will happen eg "my life will change" "I will be more loved." These absolute unrealistic statements should be avoided. We can't control outcomes.

Dealing with Criticism:

- **Dissect the criticism** to determine if it is a **fact or an opinion/judgment**. Does it reflect your emotion or the critic's emotions? that will prevent criticism to turn into self-believing facts about yourself.
- **Confront automatic thoughts** that criticisms provoke (e.g., "I am a failure") with positive one (e.g. I can learn and develop even if no one can see that!).
- **Set emotional boundaries** (internal—reminding myself it's an opinion; and external—choosing whether to respond or deflect). (e.g. this is their opinion and not my self-belief).

You can also set external boundaries like avoiding sensitive topics, ending the conversation calmly, or neutral statements like "I prefer not to talk about that now".

- Depending on the relationship level and target outcome, decide on appropriate response.
 - For strong relationships, **have a conversation** about how the criticism makes you feel, focusing on "I feel this way, when you say...". Understand that things can get awkward until adjustments settle.
 - Also you can be clear in response to unacceptable comments simply with a smile and calm tone "I appreciate your care, but I don't accept when someone talks negatively about my daughter".
 - Have simple positive and skill development activities to hone abilities and boost emotions.
- **Hormonal Changes:** When self-esteem decreases due to hormonal changes, **acceptance** that there are times in your month when your mood will be down and esteem can be down too. highly intense symptoms and mood fluctuations may require consultation with an OB/GYN.

Strategies for Boosting a Daughter's Self-Confidence

- **Model Healthy Self-Talk:** The mother must review **how she talks about herself (life, marriage.. sacrifices) in front of her daughter**, as the mother's self-esteem correlates highly with the daughter's.
- **Maintain Boundaries:** Avoid **Parentification**, where the daughter takes on the role of the mother's therapist or is burdened with the mother's problems and defeats. Expats, due to shortage of support systems, tend to treat daughters as friends. Although mothers should develop friendship with their daughters, they have been the supporting party not the other way around. The talks should focus on the daughter's needs.
- **Unconditional Acceptance: Accept your daughter completely as she is** (her weight, color, skills.. etc.), avoiding imposing the mother's personal insecurities or worries (like fear of her not getting married or bullied) to justify criticism. Accept her differences from you.
- Accepting one's children as they are does not mean that we will not guide them to be better human beings. It means that this guidance will start from a realistic place of kindness and rahma. It also helps us and them see their good qualities and maximize on that.
- **Support and Dialogue:**
 - **Support her decisions** and coach her through daily decisions and interactions. Create a supportive environment and skill development opportunities that can boost her confidence.
 - **Have ongoing conversations** about sensitive topics like beauty or weight, rather than treating them as taboo.

- **Rebalancing Values:** Instead of telling a daughter that beauty is "not important," **validate her feeling** that appearance matters, and then **elevate the value of other things** (e.g., skills, character, faith) to balance her perception.

Stress on her strengths and values. Remind her that beauty comes in diverse forms, nothing is really ideal and that she doesn't have to look like anyone. Most importantly, that you value her beauty and don't tie her value to appearance.

Teach her to reevaluate her negative thoughts (as thought and not facts). Introduce positive examples of successful role models like her. Don't belittle her pain but remind her Islam focuses on our deeds and inner hearts.

- **Address External Factors: Set controls on social media consumption**, which contributes to constant comparisons and misery among youth.
- **How to encourage father involvement in his daughter's:**
 - The mother must recognize this is in the realm of "not in your control" and focus on taking small steps to help father get more involved or if this is not possible, then mom focuses her energy on what is within her control rather than getting drained by what's not in her control.
 - Some fathers lack the skills to connect with their daughters, they might benefit from clear instructions or guidance. Encourage even little words of encouragement, real presence, simple questions about the school day or hobbies. Consistent simple positive actions bring internal change!
 - Seek professional help and therapist advice if needed.
 - All in all, start with a good intention and rely on **Allah The Almighty**. We are responsible to take on beneficial means even if we can't guarantee the results. Make Doaa your companion in every step. Our vision is limited but Allah sees the whole picture and can provide great outcomes despite the foreseen limitation in our situations.
 - An example of the difference in faith for both the son of Nuh (peace be upon him) who was raised in a prophet's house and Musa (peace be upon him) whose upbringing was in the pharaoh's palace. Allah is the only one in control of the outcomes!

Resources and Next Steps

- [Baseerahacademy.org](https://baseerahacademy.org) Infographic are helpful: on **Negative Thoughts** and Infographics on **Arguments & Feelings**.
- Self help manuals: in English <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/for-clinicians/self-esteem>
- This article is about self-esteem for men but can be useful for women <https://www.simonniblock.com/blog/men-and-self-esteem>
- Dr. Haifaa Younis videos online focus on women values and stories of Shabiat. This lecture is highly related "How to be a Distinguished Woman" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wU1B6xFpgNg>
- Finding Therapist:

- Ask PCP for resources or references.
- Call you insurance for in-Network therapy options.
- Muslim or Arabic speaking therapists can be found by searching and applying filters on websites like <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/>, <https://maristan.org/>, <https://khalilcenter.com/>, <https://www.bayareamuslimtherapists.org/>
- Suicide prevention: available 24/7 in the US call or text 988 to reach the <https://988lifeline.org/> or call 911 Or go to the nearest emergency department.
- Understand and address hormonal changes with acceptance and seek OGYN help in case of severe depression or suicidal thoughts before period.

Remember it's not possible to 'hack' self esteem. Reading articles won't create self-esteem, nor going to seminars. It's a lifelong practice, not a one time event!

