



## Self Esteem Part II – Self Esteem, Substance Abuse and Positive Change

The previous exercise, “The Truth about Self Esteem”, reviewed that idea that Self Esteem can vary based on one’s situation. For example, an individual’s confidence and security level may be higher in one place (like for instance school or work) and then not be as high in another (like in social situations, for example)

In the following exercises and discussion we will look at self-esteem, specifically as it relates to substance abuse and addiction. Let’s start with the following case example: (READ)

**Taylor** – (In his own words) – “When I was using I felt like I was in my element. As crazy as this sounds, I was good at being a drug addict. On the streets everyone knows my name and I know everyone else. There’s a social circle that I am involved with when I am in the life of getting high. Granted it’s a dysfunctional social circle but still I am accepted as a part of it when I am participating in it. I am actually very good at finding ways to make money to stay high and I am skilled at staying one step ahead of getting sick. I like not having to deal with the day to day rules and obligations that everyone else in the sober world has to deal with. Last but not least, I have to admit I get high not just from using the drugs but I get high from the lifestyle itself, which like I said before, I am actually really good at.”

“When I am clean it feels good for a while too but it doesn’t take long before that honeymoon stage wears off. Working a 9 to 5 job is a grind for me and I never feel like I am getting paid enough. Socially, dealing with the world of people who don’t get high can be awkward and really boring at times and most people end up either getting on my nerves or making me anxious. In fact, at times I just can’t relate to people who don’t get high. When I am not using I do like being back in my family’s good graces but eventually the nagging, questioning and lack of trust gets me down as it never feels like I am doing good enough for them to just be happy and just leave me alone. In some social situations I feel like if people knew about my past they will judge me or look down at me. I do like being sober but I have to admit, at times it just isn’t easy and sometimes I feel like a fish out of water.”

*When discussing, keep in mind this is one individual’s personal experience about adapting to a new lifestyle in his personal process of changing for the better. Everyone’s personal situation is unique*

### For Discussion:

- **Even though the substance using lifestyle is unhealthy in the long run, how can the process of learning to adapt away from that lifestyle affect someone’s sense of self?** (To be specific, think about what Taylor went through in his example and consider his sense of belonging and his sense of confidence when he was active in the drug using lifestyle when compared to his life while adapting to living without the substance – ***What challenges are often faced when trying to change?***)
- **After reviewing this example, can you personally identify with anything that Taylor is going through?**



## Looking at Self Esteem, Substance Abuse and Change – Exercise: Flipping the Script

**Objective** – This is the group’s opportunity to practice self-esteem building together, by turning a bunch of negative self-statements into positive self-esteem building affirmations. Be *realistic* and *honest* and allow the positivity to flow through the group.

**Directions:** Cut out each of the negative thoughts that can lower self-esteem for someone who is working on a substance use issue or addiction (On the next page) Put them in a pile.

As a group take turns picking & reading each one of these negative statements and discuss **1, 2, and 3** below:

- 1. SELF-AWARENESS:** Have you (the reader who picked the card) ever felt this way or had thoughts similar to what you just read?
  - 2. OPEN IT UP TO THE GROUP:** Can anyone in the group identify with what was just read? - Share
  - 3. “FLIP THE SCRIPT”** – Come up with a better and more positive and hopeful way to counteract that negative statement. (This process is also known as *Cognitive Reframing* which simply means changing negative thoughts into more positive ones)
- For example: The first card reads: **“I can’t let go of the guilt and shame I feel for some of the things I have done”** – An attempt to flip the script could sound something like “It may take time, effort and practice but eventually I will learn to let go of my past, forgive myself and move forward in a positive direction”

## REFRAMING





<b>I can't let go of the guilt and shame I feel for some of the things I have done</b>	<b>People will never stop judging me for my past</b>	<b>There is no way society is ever going to accept me for who I am</b>	<b>I just don't feel like I am making enough progress, no matter how hard I try</b>
<b>Managing my emotions without getting high is too much for me to handle</b>	<b>Sometimes, I forget to look at the good things about myself</b>	<b>There are too many who are waiting for me to fail, which will eventually wear me out</b>	<b>Serenity and inner peace sound nice but seem impossible in my life</b>
<b>I try to stay positive but too many negatives will always end up bringing me down</b>	<b>Making meaningful connections with sober people is almost impossible</b>	<b>Sooner or later I will do something to sabotage my own progress if I start doing too well.</b>	<b>I don't have what it takes to sustain this effort on a long term basis</b>
<b>Sometimes I feel like this whole process is not worth it so why keep trying</b>	<b>I have come to the conclusion that I am just no good at this whole "recovery" thing</b>	<b>I do okay for a while but I will always just end up making too many stupid mistakes</b>	<b>Other people have it so much easier than me so it is really not fair for anyone to expect anything good from me</b>
<b>I don't always have cravings but when I do, they can be too strong for me to endure</b>	<b>I feel like I am my own worst enemy</b>	<b>I am destined to eventually screw this up over and over again</b>	<b>Relapse is waiting right around the corner and it will eventually catch up with me</b>



**Conclusion: *Self Esteem building in relation to substance abuse can involve:***

- ❖ **Stop** overemphasizing and overstating your weaknesses (Everyone in the world has weaknesses but everyone has the capacity for self-improvement)

✚ **Give yourself a break – Are you ever too hard on yourself? If so, how?**

- ❖ **Stop** underestimating and overlooking your strengths (Don't sell yourself short. Think of all that you have survived just to get to this point. You are probably stronger than you realize)

✚ **Right now everyone in the room out loud list 2 or 3 of your strengths**

- ❖ **START** trusting that you can learn to adapt to and conquer uncomfortable situations. (No one ever said this is easy and there will be discomfort, struggle and mistakes along the way but the truth is that if you don't give up, eventually what once seemed impossible can become entirely possible with practice, patience and perseverance)

✚ **You have the ability to learn to make uncomfortable life situations into situations that you can handle with poise, confidence and skill. Everyone should complete at least one of these sentences:**

*If I keep on trying, I will soon learn to be able to effectively handle \_\_\_\_\_*

*I believe that eventually I will become good at \_\_\_\_\_*

*One day I will be able to \_\_\_\_\_ with complete self confidence*

*I know that I have what it takes to overcome \_\_\_\_\_*

*The day will come when \_\_\_\_\_ will no longer get the best of me*

*I have faith that my effort will one day all be worth it when \_\_\_\_\_*