



Self-Esteem and Assertion: Foundations of Life!



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SELF-ESTEEM AND ASSERTION: FOUNDATIONS OF LIFE!

Self-esteem means loving ourselves and having self-respect. Before we can love others, we have to be able to love our self. If we do not love ourselves, we are unable to love others. And if we are unable to love others, this spells chaos, in our own life and in society.

To love oneself means:

1. Showing **empathy** for ourselves;
2. Instead of feeling **guilty**, feeling **responsible**;
3. Identifying, and seeing to, one's **needs**;
4. Identifying one's **limits**, respecting them and having them respected;
5. Cherishing one's **uniqueness**;
6. Acting not so much as to please others as to be **proud of oneself**;
7. Learning the art of **dialogue**.



themselves only. But no one must be in a position of unhealthy dependence on others for their basic internal well-being. Each and every person must be able to feel good on their own. Relationships are all that more rich and complete, but these are “pluses”, complementarities based on the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Let us become responsible toward ourselves and others: our relationships will be all the more rich, functional and rewarding, and we will truly be able to be **happy**.



INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESENCE

From the very beginning of life, what confers the greatest self-esteem is the good-willed and attentive presence and availability that our close ones grant us. How wonderful it would be if every parent would take cognizance of this booklet and seek to apply its contents!

If someone loves us enough to make being with us their number one priority, then we feel important, that we have value. In the intimacy, calm and security of the home, true intimate relationships can be developed and learned.

No amount of money or material goods will ever replace the presence of a person. Indeed, it is absolutely indispensable to be present physically for one's close relationships to take root and bloom.

To have this availability, this capacity for presence for our loved ones, there are no fifty ways about it. It takes a lifestyle that is as simple as possible. The more material possessions we have, the more they require our attention and divert it from our loved ones. The goods must be stored, maintained, ensured, upgraded, etc. And of course, all these possessions require not only our time and attention but also our money. So we must work even more for the up-keep of our possessions, and these hours of work keep us away all the more from our loved ones.

ABSENCE creates a vacuum, a lack in terms of security and in terms of feeling that one truly has relationships. This emptiness, each and every one seeks to fill it with what they can, to feel, if not **happiness**, at least **pleasure**. But pleasure is not happiness, and pleasure, when it is sought out only for itself, quickly leads to unhappiness. Pleasure sought out for itself is a tyrant that enslaves people. It always demands more. It is never satisfied and leads us by the nose. It dictates our life. It takes away our freedom.

We must therefore learn to be satisfied with the essentials in life. Surpluses can be shared with those in need, which lightens our life and helps us keep our freedom and greatest wealth, i.e. our capacity for presence and availability for those we love.

I. EMPATHY

Showing empathy for oneself means acknowledging that every human being has weaknesses, flaws, lacks, and imperfections. No one will ever be perfect. Everyone makes mistakes and fails. One must not loathe or punish oneself for that. If we do our best, that's all that matters. If our best does not meet expectations, there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. We must not feel inadequate, but rather proud for having done our best, and welcome the results, whatever they may be. Others do better? Good for them. In other fields, we might do better than them, and maybe not, and that is not what matters. The only thing that counts is doing one's best and to never compare ourselves to others.

With regards to so-called physical imperfections, it all depends. If we want to correct our being overweight so as to be healthier, then the goal is healthy and we can take on measures that are healthy and balanced to reach it. Or, we can have physical attributes that are truly bothersome and that we wish to correct to normalize them. As long as we reach that result through healthy means, that is a very acceptable motivation. But it takes a rather serious anomaly to justify a change of an artificial nature, e.g. plastic surgery, as what is non-natural involves its lot of problems and risks that can poison life as much. Also, what is artificial, what is not natural, will never have the freshness of what is natural, even of what is natural and imperfect. What is artificial looks and feels as such. A man once complained: "My wife has become a plastic doll, I cannot touch her anymore!"

and modulate somewhat our desires for the good of all. But inversely, the expectations of others must not become our beacon to stop us from doing what we want. Take the classic example of the parent who imposes their dreams and aspirations on their children. The child learns to do what the parent expects of them, to please them, and later in life, they learn to recognize and honour what they themselves desire in terms of occupation, vocation, etc.

7. LEARNING THE ART OF DIALOGUE

It is absolutely pointless to attempt to communicate in a context other than open, calm and serene dialogue. If each tries to be right and to prove the other one wrong, there never will be any dialogue. If the optimal conditions are not present: ambient temperature, calm, rested, focused and available parties, attempts to have a dialogue must be avoided. The goal of dialogue is to try to understand the point of view of the other, and then to explain ours. If we are negative towards the other, if we try to devalue them by calling them names or demeaning qualifiers, we do not respect the other and they will not want to respect others either. We must always keep in mind that we do not elevate ourselves by putting others down.

CONCLUSION

As we grow into adulthood, we must become our own parent. We can give ourselves the attention, the presence we need. It is an introspection, a recollection, during which we decide to let go of certain ideas, thoughts and feelings that are not constructive for us. Feeling guilty, unworthy, inadequate, shameful for being imperfect, for having made mistakes or having had failures, none of this serves us. We must absolutely do all that internal clean-up, or else we will always be depending on others to try to fix this.

Functional relationships are those that are based on healthy interdependence, and not on dependence or codependence. We need others and we must think of them. No-one lives for

A person who loves themselves will also seek to acknowledge and respects the limits of others. We can neither push, nor pull, on others. Everyone has their own pace. We cannot force them to change, e.g. using blackmail, trade-offs, scare tactics, harassment, obligations or ultimatums. People must be welcomed as they are. We can propose things to them, but the only person we actually have any power over is ourselves.

5. CHERISHING ONE'S UNIQUENESS

Cherishing one's uniqueness means never seeking to be "like" someone else. The only person who can be that other person is that other person. And the only person who can be us, is us. There never was a human being like us in the entire history of humanity, and there never will be again. We are beautiful when we are fully ourselves, fully assumed.

A person who loves themselves will also cherish the uniqueness of others. They will not expect others to enter into a prefabricated mold or the pigeon-holes of their expectations.

6. ACTING NOT SO MUCH TO PLEASE OTHERS AS TO BE PROUD OF ONESELF

Self-pride comes when we love ourselves and do acts that are good, honest, non-violent, generous and pure. When our actions are gross, dishonest or selfish, we are ashamed of ourselves and we seek to hide. Self-pride comes when we love and assert ourselves fully. It is a good thing to want to please others, but never at the expense of what we find acceptable or just. Our first motivation for everything we do must first come from our inside, our wishes, our will. If our aspirations displease others, so that must not stop us or make us sad. If we refrain from doing what we want by fear of displeasing others, we are not ourselves, we are not living our own life. We live for others. It is true that in society, we must always think of others, of the possible consequences of our actions for them. No human is an island onto themselves. If we want to live in society, we must think of others

2. NOT GUILTY BUT RESPONSIBLE

In life, the more we feel guilty, the more we are and stay that way. There is absolutely nothing constructive about guilt. What one must do instead is hold oneself responsible. Be able to respond about one's acts. Consider the consequences of our actions, for ourselves and for others, and avoid those actions that involve negative consequences. Once the actions are accomplished, fully assume ourselves the consequences that follow, for ourselves and for others. Lastly, responsibility involves the duty to do **reparation** towards people who have been hurt by our actions. Reparation can be financial, but it must absolutely entail: a) sincere regret; b) a clear understanding of the mistake or wrong-doing and of the ensuing consequences; c) a concrete plan to correct oneself so as to prevent similar mistakes or wrong-doings in the future. What was the weakness involved? What mistake did I do? What limit did I overstep? What trigger should I have avoided? This whole process of "responsibilization" contributes enormously to self-esteem, to self-pride and to one's feeling of dignity.

Inversely, a person who loves and asserts themselves invites others to assume their responsibility towards them, without caging them in guilt. Empathy must be granted to all, without exception, as it is empathy that allows people to correct themselves, to heal and become better people. If our requests for responsibility are not heeded, the response cannot be forced. We cannot either have recourse to revenge (wish, or actually deal out ourselves, negative things for that person, take on justice in our hands, "teach them a lesson", etc.) because we always reap what we sow. If we sow violence, we will reap the same. If we sow empathy, we will reap the same. It is only by wishing good things for the person that we will help them to better themselves.

On our side, we will need to "ventilate" our anger, sadness, deception and frustration some other way. The best ways include expressing our feelings to a person who is able to take them in without trying to change them. If we do not have such a pearl in

our surroundings, we must then express ourselves in other ways: by writing a letter or a journal, by going in the woods alone (not too far, please!) and crying all the tears we have and screaming our sadness and our hurt. These things make a whole lot of good. They lighten our load and help us to slowly reach serenity. We must then take this experience and channel it in something positive for society, something that will help people who have been hurt like us, will help in terms of prevention or healing, etc.

Becoming responsible also means not complaining or blaming others. So we avoid “victimitis” and we fully assume our own life. We take ownership our life. If we criticize, we must suggest a solution.

If punishment there is, for children, for example, the latter must consist in the taking away of a privilege, and the punishment must always be applied in a spirit of caring and non-violence.

3. IDENTIFYING AND SATISFYING ONE'S NEEDS

We must acknowledge our needs on all levels:

- Physical;
- Social;
- Intellectual;
- Emotional.

Physical level

- Do we eat well? (lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, water, and as little as possible of transformed goods, fast food, sweets and salty products) ?
- Do we do the basic amount of exercise required for good health (at least 20 minutes of walking at least three times a week)?

hierarchy, where we accept to follow rules, laws and regulations, for example at school, in the army, at work, in associations, etc. – What’s involved here is health discipline, which is very good for character-building). It not egotistical/selfish to simply respect oneself. In interpersonal relations, if people require that we go against ourselves to please them, we will end up hating ourselves and them as well.

Does your employer force you to do overtime above what is reasonable and balanced for health and well-being? You must refuse, even if threats of being fired, or of having a bad note in your employee file, are thrown your way, however unjust this consequence may be. For working over and beyond one’s capacity is neither honest nor responsible. It is dangerous for ourselves and others.

You are tired and people make unreasonable demands on you when you are in that state? You say no, you explain why, even if they are cross and/or mean consequently.

Many have recourse to artificial means to be able to go over their personal limits so as not to displease people, or to impress them. Artificial means can include coffee or energy drinks. Then, there are drugs, one often leading to the other, like cocaine, heroin or meta-amphetamines. Any means that allows us to overstep our limits involves a heavy price to pay. They may give us the impression that we are extending our limits, but in fact, we do exceed them, only the price to pay is delayed and also amplified (e.g. drugs and alcohol exacerbate predispositions for violence; drugs can lead to mental illness, etc.). One must as much as possible never go over one’s limits, only when an emergency requires it, or on an exceptional basis. Emergencies cannot become the norm, the systematic or prolonged way to do things.

Surpassing oneself is something else. It means seeking to better oneself, to correct flaws, increasing one’s capabilities, but always within the limits of healthy functionality.

- Do we try to develop our opinions on current events and different subjects?
- Are we always trying to learn something new?
- Do we have periods of rest, silence, introspection, recollection, leisure and holidays?

Emotional level

We need to identify and express our feelings through emotions: crying, laughing, screaming, writing, singing, dancing, drawing. We need to be listened to, for our emotion to be welcomed. =We do not want to be told that we should not feel the way we do or that we should feel some other way. We just want the other person to acknowledge how we feel and let us express it freely and take all the time we need to do it.

So we see that others are part of our needs, in an equation of healthy interdependence, but that we can, and must, assume ourselves many of our needs. We cannot wait upon others, and therefore depend on them, for everything. Balance is key here, as in anything else.

4. IDENTIFYING ONE'S LIMITS

We must continually identify our limits on all levels:

- Physical;
- Intellectual;
- Emotional;
- Social.

Just because magazines and movies say you should do this or that, if you do not feel like doing that, nobody should force you to do it against your will. When we love ourselves, we do not do what we do not want to do (except in situations of social

- Do we have enough air, heat, light, space?
- Do we have the right tools, the right set-up, to be able to work efficiently and comfortably?
- Do we wear weather-appropriate clothing?
- Are our clothes comfortable, distracting?
- Do we get enough sleep?
- Do we have a good contact with nature?
- Do we compromise our security on the road and in our other activities?
- Do we have healthy stability?
- Do we have good hygiene?
- Are our living spaces salubrious?
- Sexuality: A sexual relation should be:
 - A) consented to; see www.educaloi.qc.ca/en, type “Consent to sexual activities” followed by “Age of consent to sexual activities”, , as well as <http://educalool.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Alcohol-and-Sex.pdf>, and <https://encadrementcannabis.gouv.qc.ca/en/loi/>;
 - B) protected against sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs), keeping in mind that many STBBIs are transmitted through areas of the body that are not covered by the condom; even the best condom can tear or slip off; vaccines do not protect against everything; certain STBBIs are incurable; certain STBBIs are increasingly resistant to antibiotics (<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-8-2016-growing-antibiotic-resistance-forces->

updates-to-recommended-treatment-for-sexually-transmitted-infections); STBBIs can be contagious even if there are no symptoms (perceptible signs); a person can have one or more STBBIs and not know it (<https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/stbbis/>); certain STBBIs can go unscreened if they are asymptomatic (have no perceptible signs) (<http://www.quebec.ca/en/health/advice-and-prevention/screenng-and-carrier-testing-offer/screening-for-sexually-transmitted-and-blood-borne-infections-stbbis/>);

C) protected against unwanted pregnancy. It is important to know that the conditions for contraception to be effective require strict observance, some of which may elude user control and can be difficult to apply (www.contraceptionconditions.org). If unwanted pregnancy ensues, none of the possible outcomes are easy, be it open, semi-open or closed adoption, keeping the child, either one with recourse to social integration resources during and after pregnancy, or abortion (www.pregnancyoutcomeresources.org).

If we chose to limit our sexual activity to a degree or another, it is possible to obtain a certain form of compensation:

- through sports and exercise (painkiller hormones called endorphins);
- by becoming passionate for a project;
- by cultivating rich interpersonal relationships.

Also, a certain degree of moderation presents the advantage of procuring training for the skillset required for fidelity within the couple, if ever this is something that we think we may want to experience some day. **Natural family planning** is an interesting option for couples (www.rnn-nfp.org).

Social level

- Do we enjoy the presence of other people who truly love us and who are truly interested in our person (our well-being, feelings, opinions, projects, dreams, aspirations)?
- Are we truly interested in the persons we spend time with?
- Are we well rooted, through direct physical presence, in our local community?
- Do we feel **useful** for society? Being useful for society means making it better, more human, more civilized. Civilization has laws that are opposite those of the jungle. Civilization is based on the stronger taking care of the weaker. Humanity, for its part, is the capacity for compassion and empathy, non-violence, solidarity, listening, presence and warmth. In this way, even the person who must be helped in order to survive contributes to society because they give society the occasion to exercise their capacity for helping and sharing. Humanity means treating people like people and not like things that can be bought, sold, rented out, used, consumed and thrown away. Is this the way society in general is going? Can we improve the course of things? Any and every one can contribute;
- We also need visual contact with others as well as tactile contact (touch that is purely affectionate, respectful, warm, caring, like a hand shake, a pat on the back, a hug)

Intellectual level

- Do we have intellectually stimulating activities like reading, films, outings, conferences, debates, mini trips and excursions?