

*Why do I think  
that I am  
not enough?*

**“The greatest danger  
for most of us  
is not that our aim is too high  
and we miss it,  
but that it’s too low  
and we reach it.”**  
Michelangelo (1475-1564)

## **The Golden Eagle**

By Anthony de Mello, author of *The song of the Bird*

A man found an eagle’s egg and put it in the nest of a backyard hen. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them.

All his life, the eagle did what the backyard chickens did, thinking he was a backyard chicken, he scratched the earth for worms and insects. He clucked and cackled. And he would thrash his wings and fly a few feet into the air like the chickens did. After all, that is how a chicken is supposed to fly, isn’t it?

Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. It floated in graceful majesty among the powerful wind currents with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings.

The old eagle looked up in awe. “Who’s that?” he asked his neighbor.

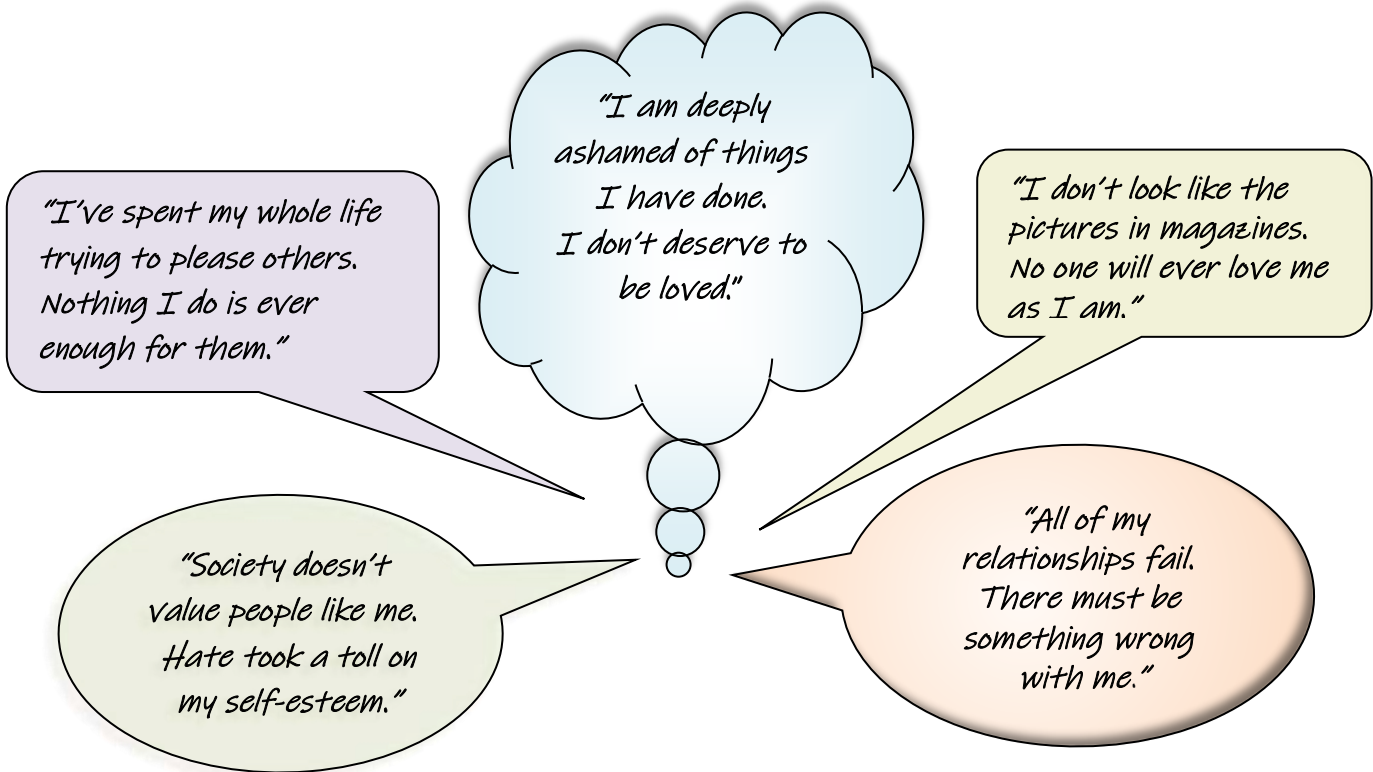
“That’s the eagle, the king of the birds,” said his neighbor. “But don’t give it another thought. You and I are different from him.”

So the eagle never gave it another thought.

He died thinking he was a backyard chicken.

“Until his sudden death on June 2, 1987, Fr. Tony de Mello was the director of the Sadhana Institute of Pastoral Counseling near Poona, India. Author of five best-selling books, renowned worldwide for his workshops, retreats and prayer courses, he aimed simply to teach people.” HOW TO PRAY, how to WAKE UP AND LIVE. [www.demello.org](http://www.demello.org)

Do you relate to a core belief in “lack” and “not enough?”  
Do you feel intimidated by attractive, affluent, educated, creative, or successful people?  
Does the social status, race, ethnicity, or gender of others trigger inferiority...  
...or does it trigger superiority?  
What is healthy self-esteem?



*If someone specifically or society in general wants you to believe that you are backyard chicken, do dare to believe you can soar with the eagles?*

The 12 tools in this self-esteem kit are intended to inspire you. Everyone has value as a human being. You deserve to value yourself, and to value others.

**Embrace it A.L.L. Acknowledge, Learn, Let Go**

Tool #1 Page 3	Acknowledge Yourself: Range of Human Self-Esteem
Tool #2 Page 4	Myths and Facts of Self Esteem
Tool #3 Page 6	Maternal and Paternal Love Necessary for Self-Esteem
Tool #4 Page 7	Self-Esteem, Self- Sabotage Inventory
Tool #5 Page 8	Body Image Inventory
Tool #6 Page 10	How Might Your Life Be Different?
Tool #7 Page 11	Character Building Inventory
Tool #8 Page 13	Climb the Self-Esteem Ladder Tool
Tool #9 Page 18	Stop “Shoulding” on Self-Esteem
Tool #10 Page 21	Vision Board
Tool #11 Page 21	Digging Deeper
Tool #12 Page 23	The Homework

## Tool #1 Acknowledge Yourself: Range of Human Self-Esteem

### How healthy is your self-esteem?

Humans rarely think or feel just one way ALL of the time. Responses will vary based on mood, relationships, experiences, age and culture. Responses are also impacted by stress, loss, depression, anxiety, OCD and trauma. If you believe your self-esteem concerns are related to a mental health or other medical condition, speak with a health care professional.

#### Check all items that represent your current state of mind.

Yes, you may check items in multiple columns.

### INFERIOR

*I'm not good enough.  
I am less than others*

- Lacks self- respect**  
*My opinion and promises I make to myself don't matter to me.*
- Self-blame**  
*Everything is my fault.*
- Excessive guilt & shame**  
*Feels guilty about everything.  
I'm no good, I'm a mistake.*
- Dependent**  
*People pleaser depends on other's validation or approval.*
- Lacks self-compassion**  
*Self-compassion is selfish*
- Learned helplessness**  
*Give in, shut down, give up*
- No win thinking**  
*Worry, fear, negativity, lose, fail*
- Conflict avoider**  
*Justifies inaction and passivity with "don't rock boat."*
- Victim**  
*Emotions: depression, anxiety, worry, fear, guilt & shame.*

[Emotional Mind](#)

### HEALTHY SELF- ESTEEM

*We all have equal value*

- Respects self & others.**  
*Lives by Golden Rule.*
- [Transforms blame into insight.](#)
- Healthy guilt**  
*"Guilt triggers corrective action."*
- Independent**  
*I am responsible for my life. I align my actions with my values.*
- Practices self-compassion,**  
*Self-acceptance and self-care*
- Responsible**  
*(Owns what's within my control.)*
- Acceptance, tolerance**  
*Understand what can't control  
Tolerance of others' beliefs.*
- Integrity**  
*Lives by values even when life gets hard and pushes back.*
- Resilient Survivor**  
*Embraces painful emotions using coping skills.*

[Wise Mind](#)

### SUPERIOR

*I'm better than others.  
I am above other people.*

- Lacks respect for others**  
*I wouldn't have to be so mean if you weren't so stupid!*
- Blames others**  
*Look what you made me do!*
- No guilt/shame**  
*No remorse, I justify anything.*
- Domineering**  
*I will tell you how to think, act and feel. Must control everyone.*
- No compassion for others.**  
*Righteous condemnation of others*
- Responsibility avoidant**  
*Blames, rationalizes, gaslights*
- Rigid, polarized thinking**  
*You are for me or against me, no middle ground, no tolerance.*
- Master of deception**  
*Possibly believes own lies.  
Whatever lies it takes to win.*
- Bully, perpetrator**  
*Emotions: impatience, contempt, anger, resentment, hate.*

[Emotional Mind](#)

## Tool #2


## Myths and Facts about Self-Esteem

### Humans are born with the ability to love themselves and to love others unconditionally.

Babies never worry if diapers make their butt look too big. Toddlers will transform into twirling dancers and mighty action heroes before your very eyes. Pre-schoolers spontaneously offer up a smile and a wave to strangers without the slightest hesitation.

Once upon a time, you KNEW you were wonderful. You were amazed with yourself, inside and out, all the way down to your little piggy toes. But, then.... something happened.



Sometime during early childhood  
you became aware of a gap  
between your real self and  your ideal self.

The gap grew slowly from criticism, comparison and competition. Love was withheld, words became weapons and life began to hurt. As humans grow, we develop conscious awareness of every fault, flaw and imperfection. Increased self-awareness is normal but also carries emotional burdens that may be difficult to navigate. ([For mor info check out Boo-Boo Theory](#))

Let's start our navigation by clarifying terms. What do we mean by self-esteem?

**Self-Esteem** = The value you place on yourself as a *human being*.

**Self-Confidence** = The value you place on your abilities: *human doing*.

**Character** = *Integrity or moral fiber*, your spirit or true nature.

**Body Image** = The value you place on your **outward physical appearance**, *your earth suit*.

**Public Image** = The value you place on your *status in comparison to others*: Influenced by societal status and cultural norms. This image is shaped by demographics: gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, health, religion, education, income, career and relationship status. Public Image is transformed by popularity and reputation. It is vulnerable to stereotypes, bias, discrimination and oppression.

Now let's challenge those false beliefs you may have about your self-esteem.

**Myth #1** You are a victim to your low self-esteem. You can't do anything about it. Like your height, your low self-esteem is something you just can't change.

**Fact** Self-esteem (the value *you* place on yourself) is your decision.

*"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."*  
Eleanor Roosevelt--

**As a child, you were not responsible for feelings of inferiority or inadequacy.** When adults and other authority figures said you were “stupid, fat, ugly, bad or unwanted,” you believed them. When society failed to acknowledge your value and worth, your young mind believed that failure was your fault. Young minds become wounded by poverty, oppression, racism, sexism, trauma, and injustices of all kinds. Children are fragile targets of hate.

**As you read this now, you are living proof that you survived your childhood. As an adult today, you now have choices you never had as a child.** You might often “feel” like a child, but feelings are not facts. The logic and reasoning portion of your brain knows that children are never responsible for a caregiver’s emotions, reactions or coping skills. Reasonable adults understand that abuse is never acceptable. As an adult, you may choose to work through and release the pain of the past by nurturing yourself and embracing your own value and worth. **Today you have the right to create a safe and loving environment. You may become the loving, nurturing caregiver to yourself.**

**Myth #2: Self-esteem is dependent on accomplishments and approval.** Self-esteem only improves with achievement, success, “things” and with others’ approval of you.

I am Not  
ENOUGH  
until...

“I’ll be good enough when I lose  
weight, make money, gain  
popularity, ALL THE THINGS!

Accomplishments & things **increase** self-esteem

● Lack of accomplishments and things **decrease** self-esteem

“ I Live in fear I will  
lose the things that  
make me “enough”

I lose self-esteem when I lose the  
**THINGS**  
(Approval, success and stuff)

**Fact** You may become more or less popular, wealthy, healthy, fit, successful, or attractive but your value as a *human being* is not dependent on those *things*.

- No “thing” increases or decreases the value of a human being. Human beings cannot increase or decrease in value. (Money impacts net worth, not human worth)
- Independent self-esteem does not *depend* on “things” or others to determine self-worth.
- Healthy self-esteem is a core belief deep inside of you. It is independent of money, accomplishments, success or the approval of others.

**Self-esteem is the value YOU place upon YOURSELF.  
It belongs to you. It is your decision.  
Because no one gives you your self-esteem, no one can take away your self-esteem.**

**Tool #3 Both Maternal and Paternal Love are Necessary for Healthy Self-Esteem**

Your decision to value yourself requires alignment of your thoughts and your actions with your values.

**This decision requires that you take responsibility for the value that you place upon yourself AND you take responsibility for living by your values.**

Harold Kushner defined the alignment of two elements of self-love in his book, *Living The Life That Matters*. Kushner believes that the key to fully loving yourself lies in your ability to embrace what he refers to as both the *maternal* and *paternal* elements of love.

**Maternal, Unconditional Love Requires Loving Thoughts (Human Being)**

Kushner defined maternal love as “no strings attached”. This unconditional love accepts you exactly as you are, simply for *being* you. Unconditional love is most easily bestowed upon children, family members, friends and pets. Our beloveds need not perform, achieve or compete to win our love. Unconditional love is guaranteed even after financial hardship, weight gain, hair loss, flatulence and incontinence. You may love others unconditionally, but do you attach strings to your love of yourself?

How do you demonstrate *unconditional love* for others? How do you demonstrate *unconditional love* for yourself?

---

---

---

---

---

**Paternal, Conditional Love Is Earned Through Actions (Human Doing)**

Kushner defined paternal love as earned by *doing*. This conditional love requires action. Conditional love strives for self-improvement. Conditional love fuels the motivation and drive to get in shape, find the partner, learn the skill, make the money and take out the trash.

How do others *earn* your love? How do you *earn* your own love, self-respect and dignity?

---

---

---

---

---



## Tool #4 Self-Esteem Self-Sabotage Inventory

*“Although it is embarrassing and painful, it is very healing to stop hiding from yourself. It is healing to know all the ways that you're sneaky, all the ways that you hide out, all the ways that you shut down, deny, close off, criticize people, all your weird little ways.” — Pema Chödrön*

**Claiming your right to value yourself may be difficult.** Below are the most common self-defeating thoughts and self-sabotaging actions that block progress toward your valuing, accepting and respecting yourself.

**Check each statement below that is true for you.**

- 1. Habitually compare yourself to others.
- 2. Never feel satisfied.
- 3. Fail to forgive yourself. Live in the past.
- 4. Deny your right to make choices in your own life.
- 5. Regularly “should” on yourself.
- 6. Practice self-defeating behaviors i.e., over-eating, over-spending, substance abuse, excessive gambling, unsafe sex.
- 7. Habitually think self-loathing thoughts.
- 8. Rarely challenge your abilities.
- 9. Refuse to adapt to new situations.
- 10. Live irresponsibly, recklessly.
- 11. Quit when difficulties arise.
- 12. Avoid responsibility or become overly dependent on others.
- 13. Have difficulty accepting your mistakes.
- 14. Habitually procrastinate.
- 15. Remain jealous of another’s success.
- 16. Live in a tiny and restrictive comfort zone.
- 17. Remain stuck in blame or guilt.
- 18. Dwell on flaws and imperfections.
- 19. Suspiciously brush off compliments.
- 20. Keep waiting for someone to step-in and fix-up your life.



\_\_\_\_\_ Total number of checked boxes

**Scoring:** Congrats on each unchecked box! Each item represents self-sabotage in thought or action. For each checked box, give yourself credit for honesty on taking your own inventory! You may transform your self-esteem sabotage into support and inspiration at any time. Use the additional tools on this site to continue your self-esteem transformation. Seek support networks or professional help when needed.

**Tool #5 The Body Image Test.**  
**Making peace with the variety of earth suits.**

*“The attempt to force human beings to despise themselves is what I call hell.”* — Andre Malraux

**The body image test** is a tool to help challenge your “not good enough” thoughts that revolve around body image, also known as your earth suit. If you struggle with loving and accepting yourself because of your appearance or something “different” about your body, this tool may help challenge and reframe your negative thoughts.

**Step 1. Take a moment to envision someone you love**—perhaps a child, family member or lifelong friend. Envision anyone you love—it does not matter who. What matters is the love you hold in your heart for this person. Do you have someone in mind? Now visualize this person standing beside you. Look deep into your beloved’s eyes. Look deeper, all the way into their inner spirit. Really see them.

**Step 2. Now imagine that your beloved has changed physically.** Perhaps they have gained weight, aged dramatically, or have been disfigured in some way. Notice this change in their outer appearance.

- Focus on your reaction to the changes in your beloved appearance. You may feel loss, grief and empathy. Perhaps some concern or worry.
- Did you stop loving this person?
- Does the love you feel for the most special people in your life vanish when their attractiveness fades or a crisis strikes?

Your ability to love regardless of changes in an earth suit may be applied to yourself as well. The choice is yours. Take the Body Image Test to learn more.

**Step 3.**

**Healthy Body Image Test**

Check each statement as **T** (True) or **F** (False).

- |   |                            |                            |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. My appearance or my weight limit my ability to love and value myself.      | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have difficulty valuing myself because I am not smart enough.            | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I do not accept growing older. As I lose my youth, I lose my self-esteem.  | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I do not value the color of my skin. I feel <i>inferior</i> because of it. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. My gender identity or sexual orientation damage my self-worth.             | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. My ethnic heritage is a source of self-loathing within me.                 | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |



**Scoring:** Give yourself a huge hug if you have marked all 6 False! Each true statement indicates a shared belief with an infamous leader in history.

- This historic leader devalued people based on appearance, intelligence, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and a host of cultural and ethnic factors.
- He believed so strongly in the supremacy of some people over others that he planned to create a superior nation by breeding only the blue eyed, fair-skinned people.
- His name was Adolf Hitler (1889-1945). His actions were considered crimes against humanity.

Comparing negative body image thoughts to “Hitler thinking” is an example of [cognitive reframing](#). Your negative thoughts must be challenged and reframed before they can be healed and transformed.

- Did reframing your negative body image thoughts as biased, discriminatory, racist, sexist or even hateful—help you decide that you do not want to hold those beliefs any longer?
- Does this reframe trigger a sense of responsibility and curiosity for how to engage in a healthier, more compassionate and loving view of all people, including yourself?

“You have been criticizing yourself for years and it hasn’t worked, try approving of yourself and see what happens.” [Louise Hay](#)

### Thoughts for consideration:

1. Your value as a human on this planet is not determined by your earth suit. Haters may insist that it is, but you choose what to believe is true for you.
2. You may improve your body image by releasing your need to denounce, degrade or devalue human bodies. No more comparing, competition or criticism of body parts.
3. You may make a choice to challenge, reframe and release any neagtive thought about your body.<sup>1</sup>
4. The next time you catch yourself making a negative judgment, ask yourself, “what is my intention?”
5. What will you think about when you no longer spend mental energy devaluing yourself?

1. Trouble letting go of negative body image? Learn more about [Body Dysmorphic Disorder](#). [Body Dysmorphic Disorder](#) affects **1.7% to 2.9%** of the general population — about 1 in 50 people. This means that more than 5 million people to nearly 10 million people in the United States alone have [BDD](#).

## **Tool #6 How Might Your Life Be Different?**

### **How Might Your Life Be Different.....**

**How might your life be different if,  
as a very small child, you heard a soft whisper every night,  
“You are lovable and smart. You are resilient and strong.”  
And when you felt sad the whisper said to you,  
“Tears are okay honey, let them all out.”**

**And how might your life be different if,  
as a teen, you heard that whisper each and every day:  
“You are learning and growing!”  
“I am always here for you.”  
And when you felt doubtful, the whisper said,  
“Mistakes are steppingstones,  
your answers are emerging.  
Believe in yourself.”**

**And how might your life be different if,  
as an adult, you continue to hear that loving, encouraging whisper.  
The whisper begins in your heart and sings love songs in your head.  
“You are loved.”  
“You are enough.  
There is nothing to fear.  
You are never alone.”  
And what if now that loving whisper  
is your own voice?  
How might your life be different?**

Adapted from ideas inspired by Judith Duerk, *Circle of Stones: Woman's Journey to Herself*,  
Innisfree Press: 1989

**Tool #6 is an extension of the [Miracle Question](#). Consider how your life would be different if you woke up tomorrow morning feeling positive about yourself.**

### **How might your life be different?**

**Complete each of these 10 sentences.**

1. If I woke up tomorrow morning feeling more positive about myself I would \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

2. If I had more self-respect I would stop...\_\_\_\_\_

---

---

3. If I truly loved my body, the the first thing I would do differently is\_\_\_\_\_

---

---

4. If I had more confidence in my abilities I \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

5. If I no longer feared rejection I\_\_\_\_\_

---

---

6. If I were the role model I wish to be I \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

7. If I accepted myself as I am I \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

8. If I accepted mistakes as opportunities\_\_\_\_\_

---

---

9. If I knew I was good enough I \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

10. At the end of my life, I want to be remembered as\_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

## Tool #7 Character Building Inventory

*“Character” refers to your spirit, your true nature, integrity or moral fiber.*

*“Your character defects are not where you're bad, but where you're wounded. But no matter who or what causes the wound, it's yours now and you're responsible for it.”*

Marianne Williamson

Rate each statement below based on how true the statement is for you.

**1= Never True    2= Rarely True    3= Sometimes True    4= Mostly True    5 = Always True**

- \_\_\_ 1. My lifestyle reflects *my* choices, *my* values and *my* beliefs.
- \_\_\_ 2. I accept my mistakes. I'm human. Mistakes are opportunities to learn and grow.
- \_\_\_ 3. I understand that I am a role model. Everyone is.
- \_\_\_ 4. Treating others as they wish to be treated is a priority in my life.
- \_\_\_ 5. I manage my financial matters with integrity. I pay taxes and vote.
- \_\_\_ 6. I tune into myself mindfully.
- \_\_\_ 7. I take responsibility for all of my emotions and all of my actions.
- \_\_\_ 8. I value a positive attitude toward life's challenges.
- \_\_\_ 9. I lead by example. I honor my word.
- \_\_\_ 10. I strive to be kind, empathetic and caring to myself and others.
- \_\_\_ 11. I am tolerant and accepting of those who are different.
- \_\_\_ 12. I care about the earth — I do not litter. I recycle. I conserve energy.
- \_\_\_ 13. Rather than just complaining, I seek positive solutions.
- \_\_\_ 14. I never intentionally cause harm to people, animals, or property.
- \_\_\_ 15. I am aware of current events and local community concerns.
- \_\_\_ 16. My words and actions reflect respect for the rights of others.
- \_\_\_ 17. I avoid gossip. I am loyal to those who are not present.
- \_\_\_ 18. I respect my own and other people's privacy and confidentiality.
- \_\_\_ 19. I maintain my dignity, even when angry or upset.
- \_\_\_ 20. I abide by public health and safety recommendations.

**Scoring:** Congrats if your answers reflect the person you choose to be!

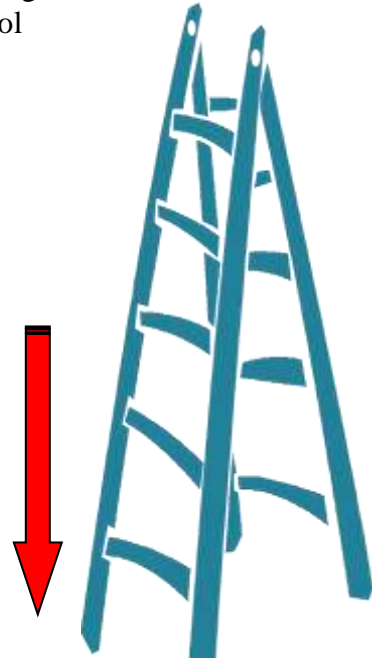
- If your answers caused you to notice some areas where your thoughts or actions do not align with your values, remember that every new day offers an opportunity to strengthen your character.
- Notice what small changes you could make to improve your score.
- Monitor progress by retaking this inventory as often as you like.

**Tool# 8: Climb the Ladder**  
**Self-Esteem Tool**  
A tool for transforming your thoughts

**Climb the thought ladder toward higher self-esteem**

Negative thoughts pull your mood down into a negative, self-loathing place. You can only heal what you take responsibility for. This tool begins with identifying which thoughts below are easy to relate to. Check all that apply.

- "I'm fat, ugly and stupid."*
- "I don't belong."*
- "I'm too old and too tired."*
- "I'm not attractive enough."*
- "I don't have the right stuff."*
- "I can't learn new things."*
- "If they knew me, they wouldn't like me."*
- "No matter what I do, it is never enough."*
- "I am always worried about what they think."*
- "I'm boring."*
- "I'm too sensitive."*
- "I'm divorced, my relationships failed."*
- "I don't have enough friends or followers."*
- "I am an imposter, a fake."*
- "I'm a loser."*
- "I am afraid I will be left out."*
- "I should have more to show for my life at this age."*
- "I snort too loudly, have a cackly laugh, I embarrass myself."*
- "I am awkward in social situations."*



[This ladder tool is also recommended in the Basic Tools section of this site.](#) Now we apply the tool specifically to your self-esteem. Let's start with a frequently asked question:

*"I understand that my negative thoughts cause me to feel bad, but I can't improve my self-esteem because my negative thoughts are true! How do I improve my self-esteem when my negative thoughts are TRUE?" James, age 42*

**Great Question!** Awareness of imperfections and flaws is an emotional intelligence skill that separates humans from other animals. This ladder reframing tool does not require perfection or denial. The goal is to value yourself WITH your imperfections and flaws. I will not talk you out of low self-esteem. Nope. I am not going to do that at all. You are going to talk yourself into valuing yourself warts and all.

*“The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely.” Carl Jung*

**Embrace it A.L.L**  
**Acknowledge Learn Let go**

**Embrace your flaws with the same grace, love and respect that you grant your weird friends, imperfect family and awkward loved ones.** When I facilitated my Life Solutions seminars, I acknowledged the fact that my workbook contains editing flaws. To keep the production cost as low as possible, we did not use professional editing. The workbook was a work-in-progress, improving over time with each new revision. Just like us. **Do you accept your own mistakes, flaws and imperfections as a human version of a work-in-progress?** Challenging your negative thoughts is not about getting better at bullsh\*t.

**This Ladder Tool transforms negative thoughts into more useful, helpful, and inspirational thoughts that YOU believe in.**

**1. Acknowledge:** Write an inventory of the thoughts, actions or events that contribute to your low self-esteem. Use the items you checked on the previous page or make up your own. If facts are upsetting you, list those too. (Examples of facts: divorce or break-up, weight changes, incarceration, poverty, debt, job loss, medical conditions—anything you use as a weapon against claiming your healthy self-esteem.)

**Write your own low self-esteem thoughts here:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

“Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone” Mr. Rogers



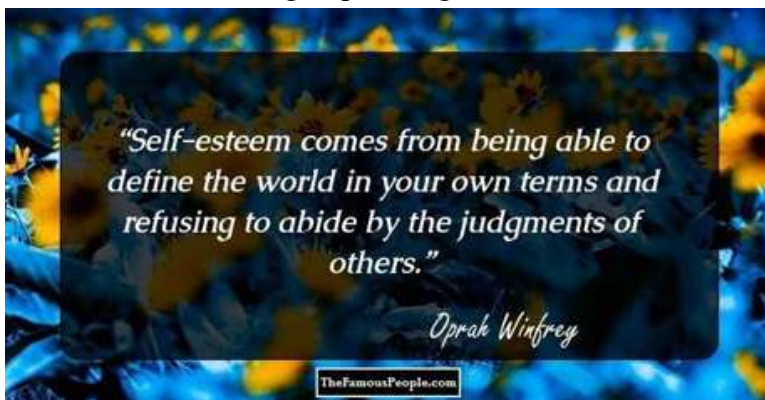


## 2. Learn: Once your negative thought list is complete, consider these questions:

1. **Reality check:** Is each item measurable, factual and true? What's the proof?
2. **Out:** Which of your flaws, mistakes and imperfections are *out* of your control.
3. **In:** Which of your flaws, mistakes and imperfections are *within* your control?
4. **Learning Curve:** What life lessons have you learned from your mistakes?
5. **Perspective:** In what ways do imperfections make you stronger, smarter, or more resilient?

**Caught you being human:** We humans can be so hard on ourselves! Notice that some items on your negative self-esteem list may not be true, but they *feel* true. Once scrutinized with a reality check, you may find some of your beliefs to be false.

- ✓ **If you think you are “not smart enough,”** then how do you explain your creativity, wit, common sense, resilience, or intuitive nature?
- ✓ **If you wrote that “they don’t care about me”** ...How would the people on your emergency contact list feel if you looked them in the eye and said to their face “you do not care about me”?! Are you discounting the affections or good intentions of important people in your life? Perhaps you are discounting the respect of your co-workers, the concern of your neighbors or the loyalty of a beloved pet or a houseplant?
- ✓ **If you think you are “not attractive enough,”** or “**not popular enough**”.... for whom? For what? Perhaps you have not noticed your kind eyes, witty humor, friendly smile, engaging laugh, warm heart or your generous spirit. And by the way—do YOU only love attractive, popular people? What’s up with that?
- ✓ **If you consider your abusive or traumatic past to be a reason to feel stuck with low self-esteem,** consider the story of an African American girl born in Mississippi in 1954. She grew up during a time and in a place where it was not safe to be a black female. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, she survived racism and discrimination as well as emotional, physical and sexual abuse. These events could have shamed her into a life of self-destruction. She did not allow her trauma or hardship to become a reason to live her life in the shadows. During her appearance at a 2006 women’s conference, she shared the fact that when she began pursuing her life’s dream, a Chicago TV station owner told her



that she did not have the right “look” to succeed in broadcast journalism. He said she “*was not pretty enough. Her skin was too dark, and her hair was too nappy.*” He tried to cancel her contract, but she refused to give up. Oprah Winfrey later became the first black female billionaire.

## 2. Learn: Reframing the negative into something you can live with.

I think you agree that negative thoughts take you down into a dark and painful thought space. **Reframing allows you to transform your negative thoughts into more helpful thoughts.** Cognitive reframing involves a change in the way you think about something. Reframing negative self-esteem requires you to **speak to yourself with that same wise and compassionate voice that you use when advising, counseling and coaching your loved ones.** Your reframed thoughts lead up the ladder, away from your low self-esteem. They help you maintain your dignity and become a positive role model. Use the ladder tool example below to practice becoming your own self-compassion, self-esteem coach.

- 1. Reality check—is this true?** Challenge the thought. Fact-check. Thought distortions?
- 2. What is your intention?** Does this thought have any positive function? If not, reframe!
- 3. Reframe:** Respond to your negative thought as you would when coaching a friend. The success of your reframing will be evident in your improved mood, attitude and outlook. **Successfully reframed thoughts allow you to live your best life as the role model you wish to be.**



Claim your positive reframe,  
Healthy Self Esteem

### Negative thought

- I am divorced. I failed at a relationship.
- I do not have many friends.
- I did not do well in school.
- I have not accomplished much with my life.
- I hate my body. Nobody likes fat people.

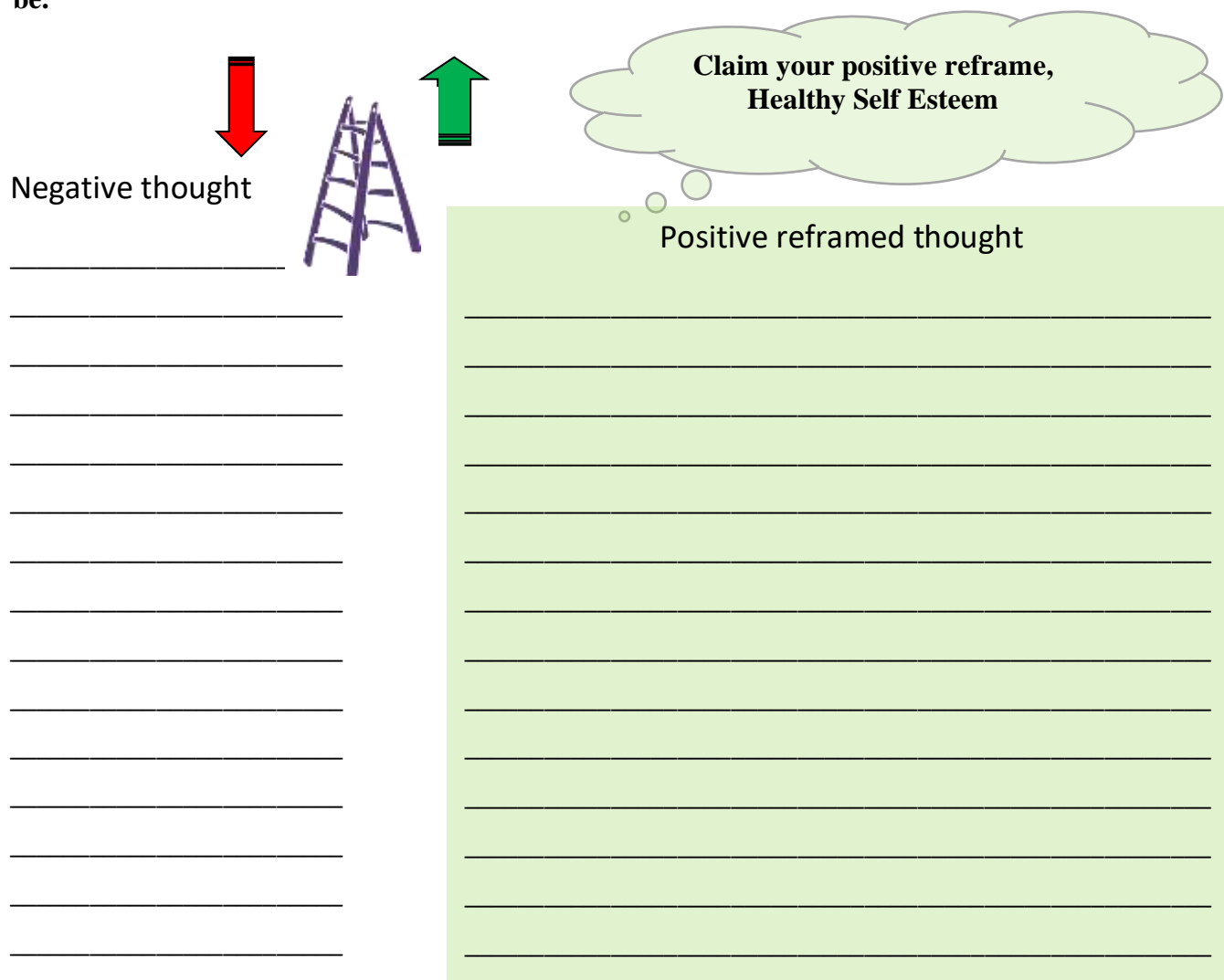
### Positive reframed thought

- *My relationship ended, that does not make **me** a failure. Good people choose divorce. I learned and moved forward. I can feel grief and loss without also attaching shame and blame.*
- *When I am a friend to myself, my world improves. I will be the friend I wish to have. Just a few solid relationships are plenty for me. Small and intimate connection is cozy.*
- *School was hard on my self-esteem. I was not a traditional learner, school failed me. I am so grateful to be able to use my creativity and talents now.*
- *The truth is I don't give myself credit. I will start noticing my small gains. I will stay off social media until I feel better about myself.*
- *Body shaming is real, but I don't have to participate. The people I love come in all shapes and sizes. Today I focus on valuing myself, understanding my emotions and learning to take care of myself with the same compassion and respect that I give to the important people in my life.*

## Tool #8 Continued Self-Esteem Ladder Tool Worksheet

Now it is your turn to use your ladder tool. Imagine your thoughts as rungs on a ladder. Once you have acknowledged your negative, stagnant and pessimistic self-esteem thoughts, you have an opportunity to challenge and reframe them into the best version of you.

- 1. Reality check—*is this true?*** Challenge the thought. Fact-check. [Thought distortions?](#)
- 2. What is your intention?** Does this thought have any positive function? If not, reframe it!
- 3. Reframe:** Respond to your negative thought as you would when coaching a friend. The success of your reframing will be evident in your improved mood, attitude and outlook. **Successfully reframed thoughts allow you to live your best life as the role model you wish to be.**



Negative thought

Claim your positive reframe,  
Healthy Self Esteem

Positive reframed thought

If you get stuck, share your negative thought with someone you trust. Ask your trusted one to help with a positive reframe. Openly sharing fears, failures and insecurities with trusted people builds confidence and connection.

## Tool #9 Stop Shoulding on Your Self-Esteem! Transform *Should* ⇒ into *Could*

This tool is also available in the stress tools section of this site. This version is slightly modified to address self-esteem. Let's transition out of the negative, perfectionistic, emotional, or self-sabotaging mindset into your supportive, self-compassionate and wise mind.

### 1. Begin by acknowledging your own “should” list for healthy self-esteem.

Make a list of things that you believe you “should” improve, change, start, stop, increase, or decrease in order to be the best version of yourself. This “should” list is not about perfection; it's about becoming the self-esteem role model that you respect. You may use the list below to get started, then create your own. **Examples:** Your “*shoulds*” may be physical, measurable, or tangible. psychological, abstract, or intangible. Examples:

- Eat healthier     Volunteer     Contact friends     Exercise     Stop people-pleasing
- Get organized     Open up     De-clutter     Delegate     Journal my gratitude
- Meditate     Worry less     Forgive     Self-care     Finish projects
- Be assertive     Trust myself     Set Boundaries     Participate     Value myself

**Create your own list here. What *SHOULD* you do for your self-esteem?** Finish the sentence. Here are three but write as many as you wish using more paper.

*I should* \_\_\_\_\_

*I should* \_\_\_\_\_

*I should* \_\_\_\_\_

### Now fine-tune your list:

⇒ **Reality Check. Cross off the unrealistic “*shoulds*” from your list.** For example, “*I should make my spouse stop drinking*” is unrealistic. You cannot control other people. Delete items that are not within your control. Replace with items that are within your control. “*I should seek help and support for myself to address alcoholism in my relationship.*”

⇒ **Cross off “*shoulds*” that have action plans and are already a work in progress.**

Example: “*I should eat healthier.*” If you are currently practicing good nutrition, reducing processed foods, following the advice of your physician or nutritionist, then cross healthier eating off your *should* list. You are already living it! This is not a perfection list. If you would respect a friend who did all that you do, then respect yourself too using self-compassion.

## Transforming **SHOULD** into **COULD** *Self-Esteem Tool #9 continued* *Also known as taking responsibility*

**2. Transformation.** Now insert the items from your *should list* into the blanks below.  
⇒ You may transform every “**should**” item into a “**could**” by inserting them into the sentences below:

If I really wanted to I **could** \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Insert your “*should*” item here)

If I really wanted to I **could** \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Insert your “*should*” item here)

If I really wanted to I **could** \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Insert your “*should*” item here)

⇒ When transforming your “**should**” into a “**COULD**,” notice how your body feels.  
“**Shoulds**” create judgment, worry, shame, doubt, obligation or resentment.  
“**Coulds**” inspire hope and possibility. Curiosity sets in. Your mind opens.

⇒ **Now finish the sentence.** Discover your resistance to change by acknowledging your reasons for *not* moving forward with each item on your list.

If I really wanted to I **could** —BUT I do not because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

If I really wanted to I **could** —BUT I do not because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

If I really wanted to I **could** —BUT I do not because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**3. Dealing with the “buts”.** Now that you’ve identified your “buts”, you decide what happens next. Address each “but” with **intention** and **curiosity**.

**I could—but I don’t because:**

- \*I do not know how
- I do not have time.
- It is too hard.
- I do not have the money.
- It is not a priority.
- I am too tired.
- I am afraid.
- I do not want to.

**Intention: How do I intend to face this “but”?**

\***Do I validate the obstacle** by removing this should/could item from my priorities and move on toward items I intend to address?

\***Do I empower change** by problem-solving?

**Curiosity: What are my choices?**

\*What are my values and priorities?

\*How have others overcome this obstacle?

\*What supports, resources, or mindset is required for resolving this but?

\* When you catch yourself thinking

*“I could but I don’t know how”.*

### Consider this:

You are not alone. Other people have successfully overcome whatever self-esteem obstacles you struggle with. Curiosity leads to research— Google it! Not only will you find a book dealing with this specific hurdle, you may also find a community support group, a YouTube video or even a *Lifetime* made for TV movie. If your “but” is so unique that nothing shows up in Google—then you are in luck! Contact an agent and write your own book!

If you choose to face your “but” head on--- (take a moment to pause, yes that was funny) then address your obstacle with the same wise counsel you would offer while helping others.

### I could, but I don’t because:

*“I could, but I don’t have time.”*

*“I could, but it’s too hard.”*

*“I could, but I don’t have the money.”*

*“I could, but I’m afraid.”*

*“I could but I don’t want to.”*

### Addressing your “but” head on Focus on your intention and on curiosity

- I’m the adult in charge of my life. I make my schedule. How do other adults make time? I can prioritize this to make time.

- Yes, it’s hard, but others have done it. If I break it down into small steps, if I ask for help, then I could do it. I can do hard things.

- Money is tight, this is true. I wonder how other people have accomplished self-esteem without money. Are there options within my budget?

- Fear does not mean failure. I could discuss my fears with mentors. I could build my confidence and my coping skills. Eventually, I will be ready to do it— afraid.

- If I do *not want* to—AND I *have to*, then I will change my attitude. I will make it enjoyable with rewards, supports and I will gamify it!

- If I do *not want* to— AND I *do not have to*, then I will take this item off my “should” list. I only spend energy on what I **choose** to change.

\*The term “*shoulding on yourself*” was first coined by cognitive behavioral psychologist Albert Ellis. The term gained popularity when used by author John Bradshaw in his bestselling book, *Healing the Shame That Binds You* (1988).



## Tool #10 Self-Esteem Vision Board

Celebrate your vision of healthy self-esteem by creating a self-esteem vision board.

What you think,  
you become.  
What you feel,  
you attract.  
What you imagine,  
you create.  
-BUDDHA

**1. Use** the guide for healthy self-esteem in Tool #1 and answers to your “How Might Your Life Be Different” questions from Tool #6 to help you with this vision board. Your board helps you visualize your own healthy self-esteem beginning now and in your future.

**2. Select** photos, words, quotes, poems and art from magazines, newspapers, and digital media. Choose items that describe your desired thoughts, emotions, values, needs, interests, talents, dreams and ambitions. Cut, and paste these words and pictures decoratively on a large sheet of paper, poster board, wood or canvas. Feel free to go digital by creating your collage on the computer, using Pinterest or other social media. However you decide to create your collage, let your self-esteem shine!

**3. Notice** how you feel as you select images that represent your values, priorities, dreams and future.

- \* **What are you learning** about yourself?
- \* **Are you taking the time** you need to create what you want?
- \* **How do you feel** about creating what you want for yourself?
- \* **Is your vision board a healthy role model**, aligned with your values?
- \* **Notice any resistance.** Address resistance with your reframing tools.
- \* **Once your collage is complete**, display it in a location that maximizes daily reflection.

**At a loss for what  
vision boards look  
like?**



## Tool #11 Digging Deeper in Self-Esteem Evaluating the Problem

Still stuck? Need more help with “Why do I think that I am not enough?”

*“I am never satisfied. I realize that my standards are unrealistic, but deep down I really believe that I could do better. Nothing I do is as good as I think it should be. I’m miserable. I truly do not love myself as I am. What now?”* *Meghan, age 24*

Good question! Let’s explore possible solutions. **Do you set unrealistically high standards of perfection for yourself but lower, more realistic standards for others?** Do you forgive others for mistakes that you will not forgive in yourself? *“I should do better. It’s fine for THEM, they*

*are human, but not ME, my standards are above that!*” These double standards reflect arrogance, not low self-esteem. Replace unrealistically high standards with human standards for all. It’s easier to release the double standard when you view it as “arrogant” rather than “right” or “perfect”.

**Unrealistic expectations may be a symptom of a mood disorder.** Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (O.C.D) causes intense frustration and anxiety when appearance, grooming or clothing is not perfect. O.C.D. may also manifest as repeated, unwanted disturbing thoughts such as excessive focus on danger, disaster, fearful events, perfection, and “what if” worry loops. For more information, consider a consultation with a health care professional or visit [www.ocfoundation.org](http://www.ocfoundation.org)

**Chronic dissatisfaction might be a mild form of [persistent depression called dysthymia](#).** Low self-esteem is one of the symptoms of Dysthymia. Anhedonia—the inability to experience pleasure or joy—is also a symptom of Dysthymia. Just as with suspected O.C.D., discuss diagnosis and treatment of mood disorders with a healthcare professional.



**Dissatisfaction with yourself could also be a habit or learned behavior.** Are you more comfortable with a complaint than with a compliment? Persistent thoughts of dissatisfaction may be a habit of judging, complaining and criticizing. The good news is that learned behavior may be unlearned. Individual therapy with a cognitive behavioral therapist can help resolve this habit.

### **Apply your cognitive reframing tools to heal the habit of self-criticism and self-loathing**

- 1. Listen.** For the next 30 days, be mindful of every negative comment you make.
- 2. Notice** how each comment affects you mentally, physically and emotionally.
- 3. Keep a record** of how your thoughts trigger your emotions. Notice the relationship between your thoughts, emotions and behaviors.

Example #1: *“I heard myself say I will never get all this work done and then I noticed that I had a headache and muscle tension in my neck. I felt stressed and afraid of failure.”*

Example # 2: *“I told myself that I look terrible and then I noticed I felt discouraged and depressed. I fought a very strong urge to go shopping or raid the refrigerator.”*

- 4. Choose your response.** Counter each negative or dissatisfied comment with compassion and a solution-focused response. Replace fear with acceptance and coping skills.

Example: *“Once I noticed I was thinking that I “would never get all of this work done”, I corrected my thought. I remembered that I may ask for help or delegate. I reassured myself; whatever I do not finish today will be here tomorrow. I am a good worker. No headache, no tension! ”*

- 5. Record your progress as your awareness triggers better responses.** Take pride in choosing self-respect and coping skills over habitual fear and self-destructive thinking.

## Tool # 12 The Homework

*“Why DO I think I am not enough?”*

**“Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate,  
but that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous,  
handsome, talented and fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.  
Your playing small does not serve the world.”**

Marianne Williamson,  
*A Return To Love*

- 1. Do one thing each day that inspires you.** This is not a big ask... think simple like catching a sunrise or sunset, journaling, deep breathing, creating, sharing, or loving. Just one small inspirational thing each day... even for only 5 minutes is a great start to a new habit.
- 2. Begin each morning with the belief that you are loved and valuable.** Demonstrate this belief in every choice you make. Check each item once accomplished:
  - Fuel** your own body with the food worthy of serving a beloved. (Do not stuff or starve your body...it needs to last a lifetime).
  - Care** for your own health as you would care for your beloved's health.
  - Pace** the events of your day with the same care you would schedule for a beloved.
  - Speak** to yourself as kindly and compassionately as you speak with your loved ones.
  - Honor** your own thoughts, interests and dreams with the same attention and respect that you offer your beloveds. If you are not sure what your interests are, let's find out! Consider rekindling your childhood interests and hobbies.
  - Give** time to addressing and solving your own problems. Show up for yourself like a friend.
- 3. Comfort and Cozy:** If you have not decluttered and organized your living space, make a plan to finish now, ask for help when needed. (Eagles deserve a comfortable nest).
- 4. Connection:** Find people who role model healthy lifestyles and positive attitudes. [It's ok to fake it until you believe it](#)