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Northern Virginia

December 1999

## Raise Your Self-Esteem

By Kay F. Walkinshaw, RHA

Self-esteem is essential for survival. One of the main factors differentiating humans from animals is the awareness of self and the ability to form an identity and attach a value to it. We judge ourselves too harshly. It is okay to have likes and dislikes but when we reject certain parts of ourselves we damage the structures which literally keep us alive. Judging and rejecting ourselves causes pain and we find ourselves avoiding anything that might cause us to feel this pain.

Our parents' style of child rearing during the first three or four years determines the amount of self-esteem we have initially. Our own thoughts, our internal critic, affects our self-esteem 100 percent of the time. To raise our self-esteem we must change the way we interpret our lives. We must learn to recognize, uncover and analyze the negative self-statements we constantly feed ourselves. We must learn to create new, objective, positive self-talk that will build our self-esteem.

Our internal critic can be vi-



Kay F. Walkinshaw, RHA

ciuous. It blames us for anything that goes wrong, compares us to others, sets impossible standards, and beats us up for the smallest mistake. It tells us we have to be the best and if we are not the best, then we are nothing. Our critic exaggerates our weaknesses and is busy undermining our self-worth. Yet it is so much a part of us that we usually do not even notice it breaking down the good feelings we may have about ourselves.

Our purpose is to disarm the critic. We must discover its hidden motives and understand we are reinforcing this voice in some way.

Depression usually indicates the critic is working on us. To disarm it, close your eyes and take some deep breaths, stretch and relax. Notice and let go of any tension in your body. Notice where you feel the depression in your

body. Focus on that place and really get to know that feeling. Listen to the thoughts that go with that feeling. Try to remember how the feeling began and what the critic was saying. Now just let it go.

Another way of dealing with our critic is by talking back. Learning to reject the old negative programming received as children. Some examples: This is ridiculous, stop it! No more put-downs, shut up! Stop this garbage! Mentally scream at the critic so you can drown him out with your anger and displeasure.

Make a list of ways our self-esteem has affected us in terms of our relationships, work, and level of well-being. Then combine the most important items into a summary statement and use it to fight back by telling the critic, "I can't afford this, you've cost me..."

We must affirm our worth and realize our value is consciousness, our ability to perceive and experience life. We are unique individuals trying to live just like everyone else. Whatever we do should come from the natural flow of being alive and not from the fight to justify ourselves.