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live  
**Conquering fears is the key**



**QUESTION:** Despite the fact that I have been successful in many areas of my life, I still have low self-esteem. What can I do about it?

**Answer:**  
 Low self-esteem is an issue we hear about frequently in counselling. I've had many clients who initially present themselves with such confidence that you would have no idea of the fears and

doubts bubbling beneath the surface. We think of self-esteem as an individual quality but it develops through, and is sustained by, our relationships with others.

We begin to build our self-esteem from the moment of birth through the countless actions, interactions, and reactions in our daily efforts to survive our psychosocial environment. Though many of these experiences are not remembered, deep in our psyche they are added up and their sum is the experience we call self-esteem.

Fear is at the centre of low self-esteem. People with higher self-esteem are able to face their fears and take on stressful situations without being intimidated by their own anxiety. Basically, self-esteem is about our reputation with our self. If our self-esteem is low, we need to improve that reputation. The secret is to take on a challenge that will stress the system but not overload it. So, if you are working on your fear of water, you don't jump into the deep end of the pool. You want to have a success not a repeat of

the problem. It has to be the right amount of stress in the right situation and at the right time. You are trying to break down the old brain circuitry around a particular fear and build a new one.

My client Joe (not his real name) is a good example of a success story. Joe is the youngest of four siblings in a family that had a lot of problems. Unable to focus in school and falling behind, he dropped out in Grade 10 and started working. All of his siblings finished university and even though Joe was successful, he felt inferior, especially when together with the whole family. He was quick to make comparisons, and he felt inadequate and overidden in discussions. He was pretty sure that going back to school was important but he'd convinced himself that he couldn't do it.

Eventually, he took on the challenge and with great trepidation registered for one class. "I was scared stiff," he said, "but I worked like a dog and I did well and as soon as I finished that course I took

See Self-perception page 17

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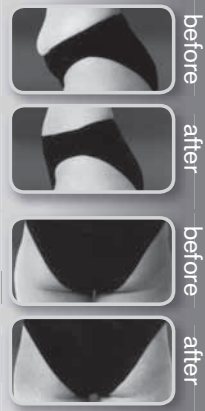
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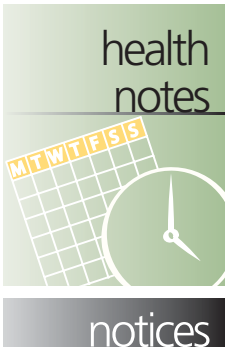
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**Diabetes and Food:** Learn how to adapt recipes on Tuesday, Nov. 20, 1:30-2:30 p.m. in the Diabetes Education Centre at Lions Gate Hospital, 231 East 15th St., North Vancouver. Info: 604-984-5752.

**Caregiver Support Groups:** If you are caring for a family member or friend and would like some support, drop in to free sessions on Tuesdays, Nov. 20, Dec. 4, 18 from 2-4 p.m. or Thursdays, Nov. 29, Dec. 13, 6-8 p.m. at North Shore Community Resources, 201 935 Marine Dr., North Vancouver. Info: Cindy Bouvet, 604-982-3320.

**Strong Choices, Real Power:** North Shore Women's Centre will offer a workshop of exploration through relationships,

self-esteem, media and creative expression, for girls ages 15-17, Tuesdays, until Nov. 20, 5-8 p.m. at 131 East Second St., North Vancouver. Info and registration: 604-984-6009 or info@northshorewomen.ca.

**North Shore Grief Recovery:** Learn about the grief process and begin healing in a safe, confidential group environment, Tuesdays until Nov. 20, 7-9 p.m. Registration: 604-979-1600.

**Blood Donor Clinic:** Wednesday, Nov. 21, 2-8 p.m. and at St. Andrew's United Church, 1044 St. George's Ave., North Vancouver. Book appointments at 1-888-236-6283.

**Canadian Mental Health Association:** Yoga and nutrition instructor Karen Zebroff will

speak on Eating Well, Aging Well, Wednesday, Nov. 21, 7 p.m. at John Braithwaite community centre, 145 West First St., North Vancouver. Admission by donation. For more information, phone 604-987-6959.

**ActNow B.C. Road to Health Community Tour:** Have your cholesterol and blood pressure tested, your waist girth and body mass index measured and receive your Heart Health Passport Thursday, Nov. 22, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. at Norseman Park

(next to Centennial Theatre) North Vancouver.

**Understanding and Managing Depression:** A free workshop in the Women's Health in

See more page 19

**Men and Osteoporosis:** Dr. David Kendler will lecture on Monday, Nov. 19, 7 p.m. at John Braithwaite community centre, 145 West First St., North Vancouver. Info: Sheila, 604-987-9395.

## Self-perception begins at home

From page 16

another one. It took me nine years to get a BA but it did more for my self-esteem than anything I had ever tried."

Joe's success in school gave him the courage to look at other insecurities that affected his self-esteem and he started counselling to get some coaching around his relationships. He agreed that much of how we think about ourselves begins in the early years of family experience and he was ready to look at his part in the ongoing tensions with his siblings. He had an older sister who wouldn't let him forget that he was the youngest. "It

ticks me off," he said, "and I want to get to the place where I don't react." Just as with his education, Joe's efforts with family have been about small thoughtful steps towards doing better with his own anxiety during family visits. He's pretty sure that he's on the road to another success, but at this point, he simply shows up, tries to be a better observer, and breathes!

*Margaret Anne Speak, M.A., C.C.C. works with couples, individuals and families from a Bowen Family Systems perspective at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca or call 604-988-5281.*

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