



**M**any factors affect how we see and feel about ourselves. A person's upbringing, schools, jobs and friends are all factors, as are physical traits, economic status and personal preferences.

Chemical dependency can also affect a person's self-image and self-esteem, whether currently using or sober. Many chemically dependent people have feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, shame and remorse. They may feel that they have no hope for happy or successful futures.

If you are a chemically dependent person who has chosen sobriety, improving your self-esteem can be a rewarding part of your recovery. It can also help keep you sober, because feeling good about yourself makes sobriety seem better than life with drugs.

### **CONFUSION, DISCOVERY, ACCEPTANCE**

Alcohol and other drugs mask emotional pain and numb feelings. If you're newly sober, it may take you some time to discover how you really feel about many things. This is normal.

Just ask yourself, each day, "Where am I today? What are my needs, and what am I going to do about them?" Look, listen and let yourself feel the answers.

You may find it helpful to meditate or join a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. You can find

out about local groups through your employee assistance program or from your telephone



book. As you practice noticing your own feelings, you will probably become aware of some reflexes and fears that you don't like. This, too, is normal. Be as honest with yourself as you can, even if it's unpleasant. Recovery can't be founded on lies. Talk with a supportive friend, AA sponsor or counselor about your feelings. Acknowledge what you do and don't like about yourself, then forgive yourself for the parts you don't like. Demanding perfection from yourself is like carrying around a heavy weight, but forgiving yourself for having faults lets you connect with the rest of the human race.

### **RESPONSIBILITY AND CHANGE**

Have you accepted who you are? Great! You're ready for the next step: taking responsibility for becoming who you want to be.

You may not feel too confident about this. As a chemically dependent person, you may have gotten used to failing. The key to successful change is to choose realistic goals, and then take it one day at a time.

Do you want to become healthier? You can start by taking a walk or a bike ride today. Do you want to have a more enjoyable life? Make a list of activities you enjoy or would like to try that won't involve you in drinking or drug-taking, and do one today. Choose small goals at first that can be achieved one day at a time, and have some alternatives ready. If you can't sign up for kayaking lessons today, you could probably have a relaxing hot bath, visit a friend or borrow a good book from your local library. You may sometimes be afraid. Change can be scary. But, by taking action, you're likely to find that you gradually become braver and happier, as you practice living a sober, worthwhile and enjoyable life.

**SOBER SELF-IMAGE**  
BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM