



People can only appreciate you as far as you appreciate yourself. Believe you are pretty and the opinion of others will not matter. **Dr. Fiona Yip** gives insights on building a positive relationship with yourself.

The American comedy film *I Feel Pretty* is centred on the life of an overweight woman who constantly complains about her unattractive figure, unsuccessful career and painfully ordinary ability. She looks into a mirror and scrutinizes her every flaw daily. Unsurprisingly, she got depressed. Then one day she decided she'd had enough. She had to make some changes. She went to the gym focused on losing weight to become beautiful. That's when everything changed.

Carrying around quite a few extra kilos, the main character was clumsy around the fancy gym equipment. She fell and took a hard hit to the head. When she came to, a miracle had happened! She was totally convinced that she was perfectly beautiful and capable. With this new-found confidence, she entered a dance competition and in an unrelated occasion, got a coveted job as a receptionist in a top cosmetics company. She was brave enough to

pursue her dream career and the result was flourishing.

Self-confidence works miracles

The protagonist's self-confidence comes from accepting, appreciating and believing in herself. When her attitude towards herself becomes positive, she channels her energy into finding opportunities and creative ideas. By believing in herself, she does not give up easily but presses on and gives time for things to get better.

In real life, a bump on the head might not come with instant confidence and success. However, positive thinking gives us an attitude that enables us to be more successful at work, in interpersonal relationships and emotional management.

Building a positive relationship with yourself

Social psychologists suggest that one's self-concept is often created by comparing oneself with others. The comments or judgments of significant others especially influence

what we think of ourselves. If those ideas are positive, then we are likely to have a high level of self-acceptance and therefore self-worth. The inverse is also true. Relying on other people to sustain self-worth is a type of co-dependency, which is unhealthy for the psyche.

I once facilitated a positive parenting workshop to help parents build more positive relationships with their children. At the end of the workshop, a young father shared a very insightful sentiment. He said,

"I need to apply the principles to build positive relationship with myself first. Otherwise, I can't build a positive relationship with my children". The principles he was referring to are acceptance, appreciation, affection, availability, accountability and authority. These are discussed in detail by Josh McDowell and Dick Day in their book *How to Be a Hero to Your Kids*. In a broader context, the statement could be, "Build a positive relationship with myself first, then the ability to build positive relationship with others will follow".

These six principles can help you create a

FEEL PRETTY



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healthy relationship with yourself, which then translates to healthy relationships with others.

Acceptance - Unconditional love develops a sense of security and self-worth. Loving ourselves unconditionally means that we love ourselves regardless of our backgrounds, experiences, strengths, weakness, appearance, physical conditions, right or wrong doing.

Appreciation - Sincere praise and affirmation develops a sense of significance. Some people fear receiving compliments because of low self-esteem, which makes them believe they are unworthy of affirmation. The principle of appreciation encourages us to truly praise and affirm our positive characters such as courage, kindness, persistence and resilience, no matter how small our actions that point to them.

Affection - Caring words and actions develop a sense of lovability. It can be difficult for some

people to get in touch with their emotions. They often suppress their feelings by engaging in harmful activities like abusing drugs. These people are usually harsh and demanding to themselves. They don't allow themselves to show how they really feel and do not meet their own emotional needs. "Affection" here means that we need to respond to both our positive and negative feelings. By developing positive internal self-dialogue, we can show affection to ourselves. We need to show understanding and empathy to ourselves when we are vulnerable or in emotional distress.

Availability - Taking time for yourself develops your sense of importance. You can apply principle of availability by setting aside some quality time to process your own thoughts and feelings or doing some activity to refresh your spirit, mind and body. This can give you a chance to evaluate your life goals and refocus your mind to what is most important for your wellbeing.

Accountability - By being accountable to yourself, you teach yourself to be accountable, which develops a sense of self-discipline and self-control. Denial or blaming others for one's own failure is a way to escape responsibility. Being accountable for your actions is the first step to success. To live by the principle of accountability, you must have self-discipline and self-control for executing life plans and keeping your word.

Authority - Administered with love, provides boundaries for making right choices and develops a sense of self-decisiveness.

To keep ourselves on the right track, we need to set boundaries for ourselves personally, in our work, relationships and even spiritual matters. Most importantly, we must empower ourselves to keep these boundaries to protect our own safety and wellbeing.

Nurturing yourself using the six principles may be the starting point for building a positive relationship with yourself and letting yourself feel pretty, inside and out!

About the Author

Dr. Fiona Yip is a Chartered Psychologist (BPS) with a Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology from Alliant International University in the USA. She also holds a Master of Arts in Professional Counselling from Olivet Nazarene University in the USA and a Master of Business Administration from The University of Hull in the UK. She received pre-doctorate clinical training at Hamilton Madison House in New York City and obtained post-doctorate clinical experience from Research Foundation of the City University of New York – Mental Health Services Corps (MHSC). She resides in Hong Kong where she is in private practice. Dr. Fiona Yip can be contacted at: drfyip@keyfoundation.info or wailinfiona@gmail.com.



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