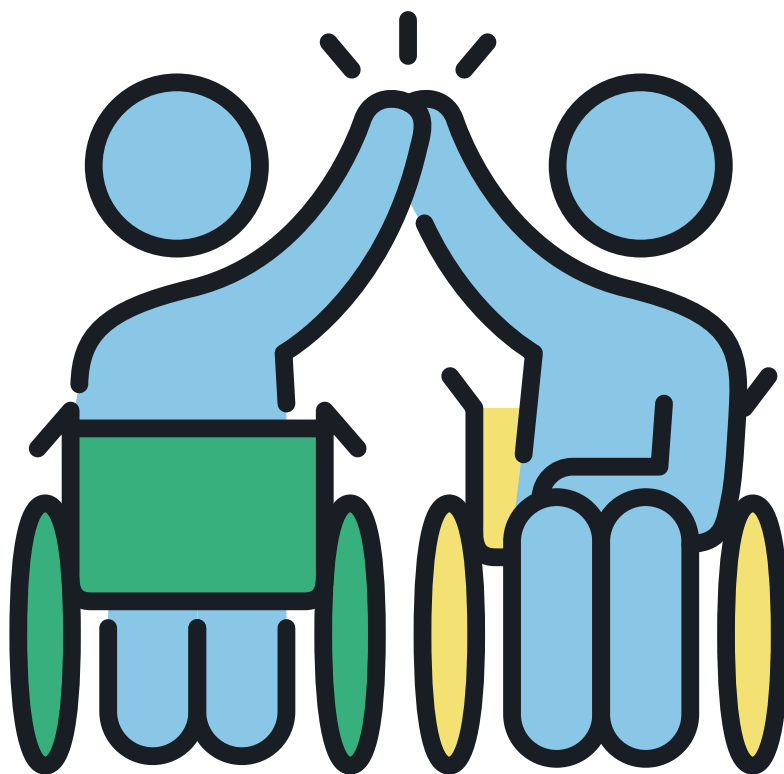


# Developing Positive Sexual Esteem



This information sheet is about ways to feel confident in who you are and how to build positive and pleasurable sexual relationships.

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Health Canada Santé Canada

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**sieccan**  
Sex Information & Education Council of Canada  
Conseil d'information & d'éducation sexuelles du Canada

# What is positive self-esteem and sexual esteem?

Positive **self-esteem** means feeling good about yourself and recognizing your worth.

Positive **sexual esteem** means **feeling like you have the potential to have positive and pleasurable sexual relationships with yourself and others.**

## Having positive **self-esteem** can include:



Feeling confident about who you are.



Feeling good about your personality.



Knowing what you are good at.



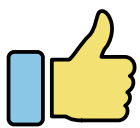
Knowing what you can offer to others and to society.



Embracing the way you look.



Accepting that there might be things you cannot do.



Accepting that there are things you are working to get better at.

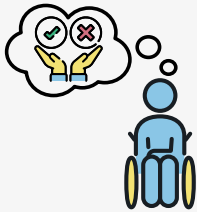


Respecting yourself.

## Having positive *sexual esteem* can include:



Being informed about different sexual health topics.



Exploring your body and figuring out what feels good and not good.

Remembering that bodies come in many different colours, shapes, and sizes. There is no such thing as a “normal” body. If a person has an issue with your body, how you look, and your accommodations, they may not be the person for you.



Knowing your boundaries when it comes to your body (e.g., where you like being touched, what types of touch feel good).



Figuring out what makes you feel attractive or sexy (e.g., wearing certain clothes or moving in a certain way).



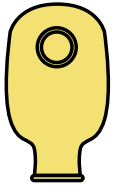
Exploring different types of attractions. Attraction can be physical, sexual, romantic, psychological, emotional, etc. Some people are attracted to a person’s looks, while other people are attracted to a person’s characteristics or energy.

Some people are *sexually* attracted to others (e.g., heterosexual, bisexual), but not *romantically* (e.g., aromantic). Some people’s attractions are fluid and change depending on who they are with or environment they are in (e.g., demisexual).



Embracing your sexual orientation and gender identity.

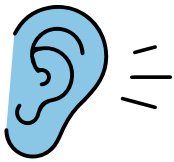
## Having positive *sexual esteem* can include:



Figuring out what adaptations you need, such as sex toys or tools. For example, if you have incontinence (when you have trouble holding in your pee or poop), use a waterproof sheet.



Exploring the things that make you feel aroused.



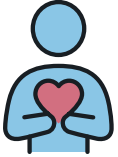
Everyone experiences arousal differently. Some people take more time to get aroused. Some people get aroused by stimulating different parts of their body (e.g., ears, thighs, toes), rather than just their genitals.



Exploring your own sexual goals and capabilities. Some people's sexual goal is to have an orgasm, while some people's goal is to focus on other forms of intimacy (e.g., emotional intimacy). The goal of sex does not always have to be on having an orgasm. Not everyone can have an orgasm; not everyone wants to have an orgasm.

## Why is positive sexual esteem important?

### Positive sexual esteem can help you:



Feel better mentally and physically about your sexuality.



Take better care of yourself mentally and physically.



Have the confidence to try new things.



Keep trying, even when you do not succeed right away.



Have the confidence to express your thoughts and feelings.

**In romantic or sexual relationships, positive sexual esteem can help you:**



Express your needs and set boundaries.



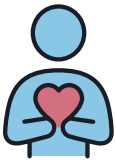
Be more supportive towards your romantic/sexual partner(s).



Stay confident in who you are, even if you meet people who are not nice to you.



Not believe the mean things that some people might say about you.



Feel like you deserve to be treated well when someone is nice to you.



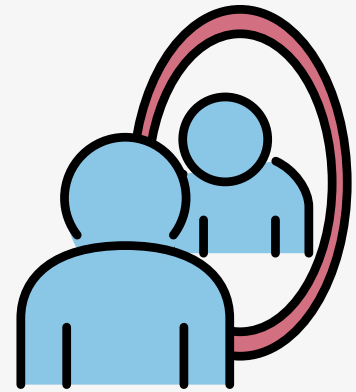
Feel more confident and secure in your relationships.

## Things that can make having a positive sexual esteem hard

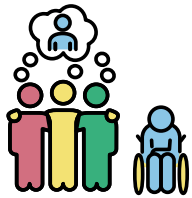
How you feel about yourself can be influenced by how you think other people in society see you.

When someone says something mean to you, it can make you feel bad about yourself, even if what the person says is not true. Many times, people will focus on the mean things that other people tell them, more than the nice things.

This can make it hard for anyone to feel good about themselves.



### Things that can make it harder for disabled people to develop positive sexual esteem:



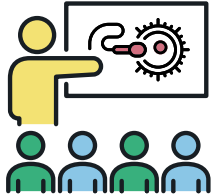
**Ableism.** Ableism is the negative beliefs and feelings some people in society have towards disabled people. When people in society say negative things or things that are not true about disabilities, it can be easy to start to believe these things.



**Past experiences of trauma.** Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to be abused. This is because many people in society do not see and treat disabled people like they should be treated.

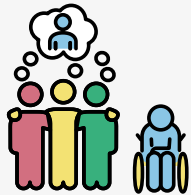
Being abused may cause some people to feel scared, sad, angry, ashamed, or that it is their fault they were abused, even when that is not true.

## Things that can make it harder for disabled people to develop positive sexual esteem:



**Being excluded from sexual health education.** Disabled people often do not get the sexual health education they need. An important reason is because many people in society think that disabled people do not need sexual health education. This is not true. This makes it hard for disabled people to learn about important sexual health information to have safe sexual relationships that they enjoy.

Also, when disabled people do get sexual health education, it is usually not about disabled people's experiences. This can make disabled people feel like their experiences are not valid or lead to misinformation about their bodies or needs.



**Being desexualized by society.** Many people in society think disabled people cannot have sexual experiences or are not interested in being sexual. Because of this, non-disabled people often do not think to date disabled people or do not talk to disabled people about sexual health. This can also be because contemporary media does not represent disabled people as sexual. For all of these reasons, disabled people may believe that they cannot be sexual.



**Requiring support for personal care needs.** Asking for help with personal care needs can be hard, especially in a society that puts a lot of importance on being independent. This can make disabled people feel like they are bothering people when they ask for help. This might be especially hard for disabled people with complex support needs.



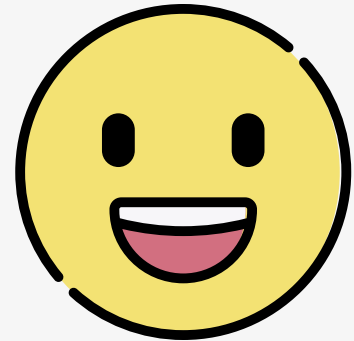
**Disability symptoms.** Some disability symptoms like pain, being tired, or incontinence can be hard on disabled people. Feeling unwell or not being able to do the things that a person wants to do can make it difficult for disabled people to feel good about themselves sometimes.



## Things you can do to feel good about yourself

Finding things that you can do to feel confident and good about yourself is an important step to taking control over how you feel about yourself.

When you are more confident and happier with who you are, the mean things that other people in society might say about you will not affect you as much. You will be better at ignoring them because you will know who you are and that person's opinion will not matter.



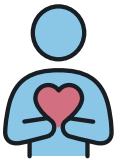
### Get to know all the different aspects of who you are. For example:



What are you good at?



What do you like to do?



What are the things you care about?



What are the things that interest you?

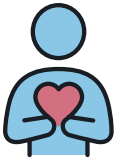
**Get to know all the different aspects of who you are.  
For example:**



What do your friends appreciate about you?



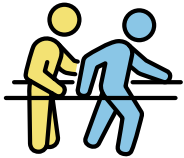
What does your family appreciate about you?



What are the personality traits you like the most about yourself?

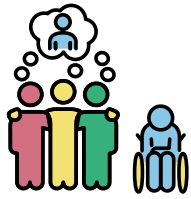


What are qualities that you feel are important for you to have and what can you do to have those qualities?



What are the things you want to get better at and are there things you can do to get better at them?

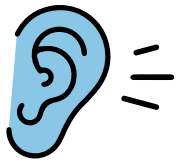
## Learn to accept the parts of yourself that you might not like but cannot change.



Trying to change these parts of yourself might only make you dislike them more.



Sometimes the best thing to do is understand that this is only one part of who you are and that there are many other things that make you who you are.



Also, sometimes our least favorite things about ourselves are the things that contribute to the best things about who we are. For example: maybe you wish you were more social and talkative, but being quiet and reserved might make you a really good listener.



Try to reflect on why you don't like those parts of yourself. Sometimes we confuse the opinions of others or of society with our own opinions.

## Do the things you like to do, care about, or are good at.



For example: this can be an activity, a sport, a job, volunteer work, or advocacy. It feels good to do things that you like, care about, or are good at.



This will also help you meet other people who have the same interests as you. Being around people who like the same things as you can make you feel good.

## Connect with other disabled people.



Find online and/or in-person communities.



Meeting other disabled people can help you find mentors and role models and learn from other people's experiences.



Other disabled people might also want to learn from your experiences. You can support one another and share ideas.

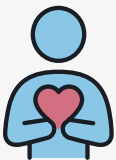


Surrounding yourself with people who are supportive of you can make you feel good.

## Set realistic goals for yourself.

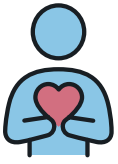


Make a list of things you want to do and have a plan for how you can do them.

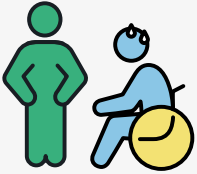


Meeting goals can give you a feeling of accomplishment. This can help you feel good about yourself.

## Prioritize your physical and mental health.



Listen to your body. Do not push yourself to do too much.



Do not feel pressured to do things just to please other people if you know that doing something will not make you feel good.



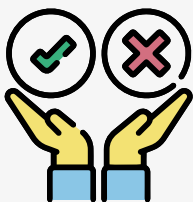
It is okay to cancel your plans if you experience “flare-ups.”

## Make your own choices.



Sometimes people around you will want to make decisions for you. This can include your parents, other family members, friends, or service providers. It is usually because they want to help you.

When this happens, remind the people around you that it is your right to be involved in making decisions about your life.



Some decisions involve more risks than others. For these types of decisions, it is important to think about what can happen so that you can try to make the best decision for yourself.

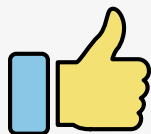
It can be helpful to ask people you trust to help you make these important decisions.

Check out [Communicating Consent: Information Sheet](#) for more information about putting together a supported decision-making team to help you make decisions.

## Make your own choices.



Remember that the decisions you make might not always give you the results you want. It can be helpful to have people who can support you if you make a decision that does not give you the result you wanted.



It is also important to know that it is okay to make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes.

## Help the people around you feel good about themselves.

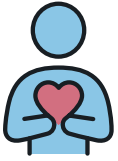


Making other people feel better about themselves can have a positive effect on them and on yourself.



Knowing that you are supporting the people around you can make you feel good.

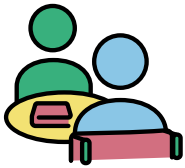
## When you encounter ableism, remember that this is a problem with society and not a problem with you.



Know that you are valuable and important, and that you deserve to be respected.



When people in society think or say negative things about disabled people, it is because they need more education about disability. The negative things they think and say about disability are not true.



It is not your responsibility to change the negative thoughts and feelings that some people have about disability. If you feel comfortable, you can try having these difficult conversations but be aware that these discussions can be hard on you mentally, physically, and emotionally.



It can be helpful to have people support you when you are having these difficult conversations.



Ableism can also intersect with other parts of a person's identity, such as their race, sexual orientation and gender identity. People with more than one identity that is discriminated against (such as being disabled and Black) can experience multiplying forms of discrimination.

No matter what others say or think; there is power in embracing your full and authentic self.

Check out Sins Invalid's "[10 Principles of Disability Justice](#)" for more information on embracing your disability and intersecting identities.

## When you encounter ableism, remember that this is a problem with society and not a problem with you.



Sometimes it can feel good to join advocacy groups that try to change the negative beliefs and feelings about disability that exist in society. Joining these groups can allow you to make a positive difference in society without having to directly interact with people who have negative thoughts and feelings about disabled people. Feeling like you are making a difference can help you feel good about yourself.



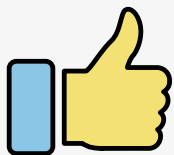
Try to be around people who have positive thoughts and feelings about disabled people.

## Explore and try different things when it comes to your relationships and sexuality.



The way people in society talk about or think about relationships and sexuality might not always work for you. Do not feel like you have to do things the same way as another person. Explore and try different things to figure out what works for you and makes you feel good.

Check out [Disability and Sexual Activity: Information Sheet](#) for different ways you can have sex.



Doing things differently can lead to new opportunities to have healthy relationships and pleasurable sexual experiences for everyone.

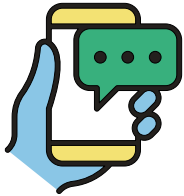


## For more support

### If you feel sad or angry for long periods of time, it can be helpful to talk to someone you trust.

If you feel there is no one you can talk to, you can call or text the **Kids Help Phone**:

- **Call:** 1-800-668-6868
- **Text:** 686868



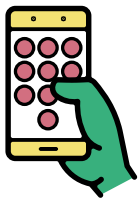
Kids Help Phone is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to Canadians aged 5 to 29 who want confidential and anonymous care from trained responders.

Kids Help Phone also has a chat on their website:

<https://kidshelpphone.ca/> (Please note the chat is not 24/7).

**The Canadian Mental Health Association** has a free mental health coaching program, called BounceBack, for people aged 15 and over who are experiencing low mood, mild-to-moderate depression and anxiety, stress, and worry. You can find more information here:

<http://www.cmha.ca/bounceback>.



If you are in a crisis or have suicide-related thoughts, you can **call or text 9-8-8** for the **Suicide Crisis Helpline** at anytime for support in English or French.