

Take It Up

by

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Preface

"Take It Up" is a comprehensive program designed to help adolescents change their lives, regardless of their past or current situations. The goal of this course is to help bring about change, and to help make a young life work better. "Take It Up" will provide the necessary tools to take life up a notch.

Given the difficulties that adolescents face today, most are not equipped with the essential ingredients that will make their lives more successful. Whether adolescents are in a church youth group, therapy group, foster or group home, drug rehabilitation center, or incarcerated in the Juvenile Justice system, the principles in "Take It Up" are designed to change their thinking, feeling, and behavior. Our goal is success, and a life of success can be determined only by one's self. "Take It Up" will help teens see that they have what it takes. We all need help to learn how to access and to implement our natural gifts, strengths, and abilities. That is what this program will accomplish.

The core premise of this program is that every teenager has great value, and with that value comes significant purpose. The combination of recognizing your value and knowing you have purpose will enable you to love and to be connected to others in positive, healthy relationships. Value, purpose, and connection are the essential ingredients to a successful life. Most teenagers, as well as most adults, do not even begin to understand their value and purpose. Unfortunately, that often leads to unhealthy and dysfunctional relationships. Unhealthy or dysfunctional relationships further undermine a person's value and purpose. It is a destructive cycle that causes damage to children, and those children grow into hurting teens. Then those teens develop into unhealthy adults who start the cycle all over again.

This negative cycle can be changed only through active intervention. Intervention must come on all levels - emotional, psychological, mental, social, spiritual, behavioral, and physical. "Take It Up" is designed to provide intervention at all of these levels. The following will describe the format, the structure, and the goals of this program. Change will happen if these interventions are implemented correctly and consistently.

Overview

The six major categories addressed in this program are as follows:

- Who are you?
- What do you want?
- Where are you going?
- What is interfering?
- How do you fix it?
- Who is going to help?

The first category, "Who are you?" will help to address your strengths and weaknesses, and the impact of both on your life. Self-esteem, and the building blocks for developing a solid foundation of esteem, will be explored. We will also discuss ego issues that impact perceptions, defenses, and motivation.

The next category, "What do you want?" will basically be a checklist to help teenagers figure out what they want out of life. In order to create a life that works better and is more successful, it is important to develop a picture of what that looks like. This section will help develop that picture.

In "Where are you going?" we will begin by taking a look at where you have been, and at where that road will lead if you don't choose to change course. We will then explore the issue of where you desire to go. We will also look at what will motivate you to take a different course of action, and at what will help you to sustain that action.

"What is interfering?" In this section, we will look at the factors that have impeded growth and change in a positive direction. We will look at internal factors such as beliefs, emotions, and behavior, and also at external factors such as parents, friends, health, finances, the educational system, and the legal system.

In "How do you fix it?" we will encourage self-responsibility and acknowledgement of past and current weaknesses, mistakes, and choices. Once self-responsibility is established, a plan for life is developed. This will include short and long term goals, a step by step outline of the process, and a strategy for managing setbacks and failures.

The category, "Who is going to help?" is vital for the program to work and be successful. It is crucial to develop the right team of people for each adolescent. This team may include a therapist, tutor, coach, teachers, psychiatrist, social worker, pastor, youth leader, financial counselor, a support group, parents, or a mentor. To implement this phase of the program, it will be necessary to create a volunteer recruiting plan and volunteer contact.

Goals

"Take It Up" provides a systematic program that can be implemented in any group setting that focuses on helping adolescents. This can include group homes, juvenile justice programs, psychiatric centers, long or short term therapeutic treatment programs, or in any type of youth group that has adult supervision.

The program's goals are designed so that each teen involved in the program is able to work through each section at their own pace, with the guidance and help of adult supervision. By the end of the process, the following goals should be accomplished:

- Greater awareness of and appreciation for self.
- Knowledge of specific abilities and desires that will give direction and hope.
- Understanding of external influential factors that are interfering in life, and utilizing that knowledge to increase your ability to overcome or to cope with these factors.
- Acknowledgement of failures and weaknesses that can or did impede success in life, and gaining motivation to overcome and minimize those weaknesses without

- damaging self-esteem.
- Renewed motivation and direction for the future.
 - An increase of both internal and external resources that can be utilized to provide success in the future.
 - An increased ability to give and to love, instead of to take and to use.

Introduction

"Take It Up" is a workbook designed for you. You can work at your own pace and you cannot fail unless you just don't do it.

The purpose of this program is to help you get what you want in life. Chances are, that is not happening right now. If you are willing to do the work here, then your life can gradually become more and more of what you want it to be.

As you have already figured out, life is difficult. You may not like it much. You may not even like yourself much. Everyone needs some help with figuring out how to make life work well.

All I ask is that you give this a chance. You are in control of your life. Only you can decide what kind of person you, want to be. Only you can decide how you want to live your life. This workbook is a tool that could help you along. Think of a place in the world you want to go ... any place. What is one of the main things you are going to need to get there? Directions, right? In making all your preparations before you go on your journey, you will need either a map or help from someone who knows how to get there.

This workbook will be your map to success. It will give you direction and help, along with some key people in your life. I hope you will take advantage of it. I wish you good luck on your journey of life.

Chapter One

Who Are You?

Who are you? I'm sure you have some ideas about how to answer that question. But for most teenagers, this is the question you are trying to figure out. Adolescence is the time in life when you are developing a sense of self. You're trying to figure out who you are, what you want, and how you feel. This is combined with the questions of how do you fit in, how should you act, how should you express yourself, and are you okay?

Hopefully this section will give you a better picture of yourself. It is hard to know what direction to take when you don't know who you really are or what you really want. It is even harder to be yourself if you think that you are not okay.

The goal here is to help you see your strengths and weaknesses, and to see how both will affect your life. It is also the goal to help you develop a healthy sense of ego and self-esteem, which will be explained later.

I have good news and bad news. Are you ready? The bad news is that you have weaknesses and faults. You will fail, and you will be rejected. You are not and never will be perfect. You will never have all of your needs met or be completely satisfied in this life. Kind of stinks, right? Reread that sentence. The sooner you accept this reality, the sooner your life will improve. Life is difficult and imperfect and so are you. It is the world we all live in, and it will not change. You are not the King or Queen. Life is not supposed to go your way. Now is a good time to accept this reality. Reread it again. Think about it, absorb it, believe it. This is crucial. If you don't really get this, then you will continue to mess up your life and this program will not be as effective.

Now for the good news. It is okay. You are okay. Life is good. It doesn't matter if you are not perfect or that you have weaknesses. Everyone does. You still have great value. You still have significant purpose. Though life is imperfect and difficult, it is still good - sometimes very good.

Now we need to take a look at both your weaknesses and strengths. Then we will figure out how to build your self-esteem and strengthen your ego. Those things are the building blocks of success.

The following is a checklist of possible strengths and possible weaknesses you may have. To determine what strengths and weaknesses you have, read the descriptive words and put a number from one to five in that space. A five means you feel very strongly about having this weakness or strength. A one means you feel strongly about having very little of this strength or weakness. A three means you are in the middle and feel that you somewhat have this strength or weakness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

After you have ranked your strengths and weaknesses, make two lists. Fill in the list of your strengths and weaknesses. Anything that you have numbered from three to five, put that on your summary list. This will give you a practical look at some of your personality characteristics.

Possible Personality Characteristics

Strengths:

- _____ Strong willed
- _____ Productive
- _____ Decisive
- _____ Practical
- _____ Visionary
- _____ Positive Thinker
- _____ Born Leader
- _____ Strong need for change
- _____ Must correct wrongs
- _____ Not easily discouraged
- _____ Independent
- _____ Self-sufficient
- _____ Won't give up when losing
- _____ Exerts leadership
- _____ Establishes goals of others
- _____ Motivates others to action
- _____ Knows the right answer
- _____ Organizes others
- _____ Will work for group activity
- _____ Excels in emergencies
- _____ Outgoing, charismatic
- _____ Warm, friendly
- _____ Talkative, life of the party
- _____ Compassionate
- _____ Generous, sincere heart
- _____ Good sense of humor
- _____ Memory for stories
- _____ Enthusiastic, expressive
- _____ Good on stage, animated
- _____ Wide-eyed, innocent
- _____ Lives in the present
- _____ Is liked by others
- _____ Turns disaster into humor
- _____ Is the circus-master
- _____ Makes friends easily
- _____ Thrives on accomplishments

Weaknesses:

- _____ Unsympathetic
- _____ Insensitive, or inconsiderate
- _____ Sarcastic
- _____ Unforgiving
- _____ Controlling
- _____ Argues
- _____ Stubborn
- _____ Proud
- _____ Impatient
- _____ Difficulty relaxing
- _____ Not complimentary of others
- _____ Unemotional
- _____ Tends to dominate others
- _____ Too busy for friends or family
- _____ Holds others to high standards
- _____ Tends to use people
- _____ Doesn't need others' approval
- _____ Feels he's/she's always right
- _____ Possessive
- _____ Undisciplined
- _____ Restless
- _____ Disorganized, unproductive
- _____ Naïve
- _____ Self-focused
- _____ Exaggerates
- _____ Insecure
- _____ Dwells on trivia
- _____ Self-centered, obnoxious
- _____ Controlled by circumstances
- _____ Weak-willed
- _____ Forgetful
- _____ Undependable
- _____ Seems phony at times
- _____ Needs center stage
- _____ Dominates conversation
- _____ Answers for others

_____ Admired by others
_____ Apologizes quickly
_____ Likes spontaneous activities
_____ Likable, diplomatic
_____ Efficient, organized
_____ Dependable
_____ Conservative
_____ Reluctant Leader
_____ Loyal
_____ Easy-going, relaxed
_____ Patient, well-balanced
_____ Quiet, but witty
_____ Sympathetic, kind
_____ Keeps emotions hidden
_____ Practical
_____ Makes a good friend
_____ Is not in a hurry
_____ Can take good with bad
_____ Doesn't get upset easily
_____ Good listener
_____ Dry sense of humor
_____ Has several close friends
_____ Compassionate
_____ Positive Thinker
_____ Considers others
_____ Loyal
_____ Sensitive
_____ Self-sacrificing
_____ Self-disciplined
_____ Serious, purposeful
_____ Unique
_____ Talented, creative
_____ Artistic or musically gifted
_____ Philosophical, poetic
_____ Appreciative of beauty
_____ Sets high standards
_____ Wants everything done right
_____ Picks up after everyone
_____ Sacrifices for others
_____ Encourages scholarship
_____ Makes friends cautiously
_____ Content in the background
_____ Avoids receiving attention

_____ Fickle
_____ Makes excuses
_____ Unmotivated
_____ Spectator
_____ Selfish
_____ Stingy
_____ Self-protective
_____ Indecisive
_____ Unenthusiastic
_____ Stubborn
_____ Avoids responsibility
_____ Fearful
_____ Too compromising
_____ Unchangeable
_____ Doesn't organize well
_____ Takes life too easily
_____ Dampens enthusiasm
_____ Stays uninvolved
_____ Indifferent to plans
_____ Judges others
_____ Sarcastic and teasing
_____ Moody, negative
_____ Critical
_____ Rigid, legalistic
_____ Self-centered, touchy
_____ Revengeful
_____ "Poor me" attitude
_____ Unsociable
_____ Impractical
_____ "Acts" humble
_____ Has selective hearing
_____ Low self-esteem
_____ Worries about being ill
_____ Unrealistic goals
_____ Too picky
_____ Becomes a martyr, sulks
_____ Lives through others
_____ Socially insecure
_____ Critical, unforgiving
_____ Holds back affection
_____ Hard to forget hurts

Hopefully, after doing this exercise, you now have a better idea of your strengths and weaknesses. It should also give you a better idea of who you are. Keep in mind that your strengths and weaknesses are unlikely to change. The goal will be to develop your strengths and minimize your weaknesses. When we concentrate on developing our strengths, then we shift our focus onto what we can do instead of on what we can't. As a result, our weakness will have less impact on our behavior and lives.

When we understand ourselves better, we can learn how to work to achieve our highest potential. Now that you have an idea of some of your basic strengths and weaknesses, it might be helpful to see where they might lead you. Do the exercises on the next page with the help of someone you trust.

List ten potential results if you are able to exercise your strengths. For example: Intelligence may lead to education.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

- 4. _____

- 5. _____

- 6. _____

- 7. _____

- 8. _____

- 9. _____

- 10. _____

List ten results if you operate primarily in your weaknesses. For example: Anger may lead to damaged relationships or even to criminal behavior.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

- 4. _____

- 5. _____

- 6. _____

- 7. _____

- 8. _____

- 9. _____

- 10. _____

It is very important to know how and where your strengths and weaknesses may take you in life. The more aware that you are about yourself, the more likely that you can make good choices and operate out of your strengths instead of your weaknesses.

Generally, when a person is able to operate primarily out of their strengths, it will increase self-esteem. Operating out of your weaknesses usually lowers self-esteem. Self-esteem is critical in that it influences your life for the better or for the worse. In the remainder of the chapter, we will explore self-esteem and the ego in more depth.

Self-Esteem

Simply put, the definition of self-esteem is how you think and feel about yourself. To have high esteem means that you regard yourself highly, you like yourself, you see your value, you recognize your strengths and gifts, you expect to succeed in life, and you expect others to like you as well. Though it doesn't feel good when you fail or get rejected, you are able to admit your weaknesses and faults, yet still are able to maintain a high regard for self.

Low self-esteem is when you think and feel poorly about yourself. You do not like or appreciate yourself much, and you tend to focus on what is wrong with you. You have difficulty seeing what your strengths are, and you really don't expect to succeed. You also expect others to see what's wrong with you, and you fear rejection. It may be difficult for you to admit failure and weaknesses, or it may be the opposite. You may over- focus on your weaknesses, faults, and rejections. You keep hoping that one day you can prove to yourself and others that you really are okay. Now on a scale of one to ten, rank your level of self-esteem. Ten is the highest, meaning you regard yourself as the highest level and you completely like and accept yourself. By the way, this is not being conceited. Being conceited actually is a reflection of low self-esteem. A rank of one means that you don't like yourself at all, that you expect to be a failure, and that you are frankly surprised when someone likes you. Ranking yourself low does not mean that you're humble or modest. It means that you don't value yourself much. Now that you've determined where you are on the scale, let's look at where self-esteem leads you. Do the exercise below:

Low self-esteem may cause:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Now let's see how close your list is to mine:

Low self-esteem causes:

1. Negative emotions such as depression, guilt, anxiety, anger, shame, fear, etc.
2. Leads to choosing unhealthy people in your life, people who are more selfish, self-destructive, or otherwise destructive.
3. Tendency to underestimate your abilities and potential, thereby picking jobs and interests that are less than desirable.
4. An overall tendency to watch life instead of doing life, such as sleep more, eat more, watch TV more, play video games more, etc.
5. Tendency to act out more with drugs and addictions to help numb the pain.
6. Tendency to have a negative focus on life - more critical of self and others.
7. Develop an expectation of failure, loss, rejection, and bad things happening. It often leads to a "poor me" attitude.
8. Interferes with the ability to give and love in healthy ways. Tends to be either self-centered with a weakness in loving and giving, or the other extreme being too other-centered, giving and loving to the degree that it is damaging yourself.
9. Tendency to be over-competitive and having to win or to be right. May also be the opposite: too fearful of competing or of trying something new for risk of failure. Not able to assert self.
10. May desperately make new friends and try too hard, or else to isolate yourself from others and tend to be a loner.

High self-esteem may result in:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Here's my list of what high self-esteem might lead to:

1. More positive emotions of peace, contentment, and joy.
2. Tendency to pick healthier people to be around, people who make good choices and who are going in a positive direction.
3. Will exercise your abilities and gifts to maximize your life, leading to more success.
4. Will utilize appropriate coping skills when faced with the difficulties of life.
5. Will be involved in doing and experiencing life, not just watching it go by.
6. Have a tendency to be more positive and focus on the good things about yourself and about life.

7. Have an expectation of success and acceptance, with a greater ability to handle failure and rejection.
8. Have a greater ability to give and love in relationships, even when not directly benefiting from the love you give.
9. Will be assertive and enjoy competing, but will not always have to be right and can handle losing.
10. Will have a desire and an ability to connect and develop intimacy with others in an appropriate manner.

Developing Healthy Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, whether it is high or low, is developed by a combination of three factors. The first is your genetic predisposition, meaning the personality and the temperament you were born with. Second are the messages that you have received about yourself, both verbal and non-verbal. The more significant the source of the message, the more powerful that message will be. Typically, our parents are the most significant. Third are the experiences you have had. For example, if you have been abused mentally, physically, sexually, emotionally, or mentally, then those experiences would damage your self-esteem. On the other hand, if you had lots of positive experiences, such as acceptance, success, and safety, then that will contribute to higher self-esteem.

If it was possible to calculate your level of self-esteem, it would be determined up adding up the above three factors. Regardless of where your self-esteem is now, the good news is that it is possible to improve your self-esteem level. Actually, it is rather simple to begin increasing your self-esteem level. The three factors that established your current level are the also the factors that will increase self-esteem.

A. Personality Temperament

Though you are unable to change your personality (who you are), you do have the ability to focus on and develop the strengths of your specific personality temperament. If I was to give you a personality test, that test or profile would classify you with a specific personality temperament. All personality temperaments have strengths and weaknesses. The goal is for you to accept who you are, and for you to develop the positive characteristics and strengths of your personality. So then, to increase self-esteem it is important to shift the focus from your weaknesses to the strengths of your personality. Of course, you may need some help in doing this, which is the purpose of this program. It might also be helpful to take a personality temperament profile to reveal your specific temperament. I would recommend administering the Myers-Briggs or Disc Profile if possible.

B. Messages

What you tell yourself and what others tell you will either increase or decrease your self-esteem level. You don't have much power over what other people say to you or over how they treat you.

But you do have a choice about what you do about it. For example, you can choose to believe what people say or choose not to believe it. Just because a parent, teacher, or friend says things about you, that doesn't make it true. You are not lazy just because someone tells you that. You are not stupid just because someone said that about you. You are not bad just because you tell yourself that. Just because something is said, it does not mean it is true. Everyone acts lazy at times, and everyone does bad or stupid things. It still does not mean you are lazy, bad, or stupid. However, if you believe those kinds of messages, then your self-esteem level will continue to drop.

What you tell yourself has the most power. If you constantly put yourself down and tell yourself bad things about you, then that will significantly contribute to your low self-esteem. If your self-esteem is to improve, then that negative self-talk has to end.

Everyone has a critical voice inside them. If you listen to it and believe it, that voice gets louder and stronger. The more you ignore it or dismiss it, the quieter and weaker it becomes. Messages determine self-esteem. Stop giving yourself negative messages, and stop believing negative messages.

C. Experiences

What we experience in life is a strong determining factor of self-esteem. In general, the more positive experiences we have, the higher our self-esteem. The more negative experiences, the lower our self-esteem will be.

But it is not just what we experience. It is also the significance of the experience and our perception of the experience. For example, the significance of being sexually abused is typically much more powerful than verbal abuse. Of course, both are destructive, but some experiences have more power than others. Also, how we interpret what happens to us can increase or decrease the significance of the experience. For example, when rejected by their peers, one child may experience much more damage than another child. Failing a class could be devastating to one person, and nothing more than a mild irritant to another. So, the way that we perceive an event determines the degree to which it affects our self-esteem.

A Solid Foundation to Healthy Self-Esteem

Developing a healthy self-esteem will be a gradual process of:

- A. Focusing on our personality strengths and developing the positive aspects of our character.
- B. Learning how to treat ourselves and speak to ourselves in positive, constructive ways. In addition, we have to learn how to ignore, minimize, and handle the negative messages we get from others as well as from ourselves.
- C. Begin to pursue and create possibilities where we can experience success.

Most people need help in developing a healthier self-esteem, be it from parents, friends, teachers, a boss, a counselor, or a mentor. Seek out those who will help you, those who will not hinder your ability to improve in this area. As we discussed earlier, a healthy self-esteem is a significant

factor in determining how well your life goes. It is up to you to work on moving your self-esteem up to a higher place.

The Ego

We have all heard the word ego. "Boy, does he have an ego!" Or, "She sure has ego problems." Ego is similar to self-esteem, but a bit different. This might sound confusing, but pay attention now and I will explain. Ego is our perceived identity, whereas self-esteem is how we feel and think about our perceived identity. So, you might ask, what is my perceived identity? To put it simply, perceived identity is who we think we are. Notice that I am not saying that it is who we are, but who we think we are. True identity and perceived identity are two different things. And of course, our self-esteem can be based on who we think we are or on our true self.

Now if our perceived identity is different than our true identity, we are operating out of a lie. For a person to truly be free to be themselves, they have to know their true self or identity. Unfortunately, very few people know their true selves, so the vast majority of people will have ego issues.

Let me use an example to help explain this theory. Think of the actress Jennifer Aniston in her role as Rachel on "Friends." If she started believing that she was really Rachel, then that would be her perceived identity, or her ego state. The way that she felt about Rachel would be her self-esteem. But her true identity is still Jennifer Aniston. However, since she believes she is Rachel, then she would go about acting like Rachel instead of her true self. This would put her in a position of constantly having to prove herself and/or protect herself because she is not truly being herself. If she could get in touch with her true self and accept it, then she could relax and not have the need to prove or protect her ego - her perceived self.

Most of us are driven by the need to prove, protect, and to feed our ego. What does this look like?

A. Proving

Trying to prove:

- We are worth something.
- We should be loved.
- We are somebody.
- Our feelings, wants, and needs are valid.
- We are okay.
- We are not bad.

Now we may use various strategies to prove what we so desperately need. Some strategies may work better or be healthier than others. The problem is that you constantly have to be proving yourself because you don't know your true self. You are operating out of your ego, instead of just knowing these things about yourself. Once you know who you are, then you can relax and be yourself.

B.

Protecting

Trying to protect:

- My weaknesses from being exposed.
- Myself from rejection.
- Myself from failure.
- My inadequacies from showing.
- My doubts, insecurities, and difficulty with life.

Because we don't have a solid sense of self or true self-acceptance, then we are put in a position to protect our fragile ego. Protecting our ego keeps us from acknowledging weaknesses, keeps us from maturing and growing up, and keeps us operating out of fear instead of confidence.

C. Feeding

Trying to feed ourselves by:

- Needing to be beautiful.
- Having to win.
- Being perfect.
- Being smarter, stronger, or better than others.
- Getting attention.
- Having a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Having money, education, or abilities to show others that
- I'm really okay.
- Showing off or bragging.

Our ego drives us to feed it. We need others to perceive us a certain way and then to validate us. Because we don't have any internal validation, we then try to get it from the outside. Therefore, we are constantly looking for ways to get others to see how great we are, so we can then convince ourselves that we are okay.

There are basically three possible ego states:

A. Unhealthy Ego

Unhealthy ego is having a low opinion of yourself. You do not much like the self that you see. You don't treat yourself like you have much value. You will have low self-esteem because you perceive yourself from such a low perspective. With an unhealthy ego, you will be more likely to develop strategies to prove, protect, and feed your ego. You are never at peace with who you are, or never even know who you are.

B. Healthy Ego

The typical goal in the mental health profession is to help people develop a healthy ego, a positive perception of self. That leads to high self-esteem. But even a healthy ego needs protecting and feeding. Creating a healthy ego is a positive, though not ideal, goal.

C. No Ego

The ideal state is no ego. I know this is contrary to popular thought, but allow me to explain. A person without ego, which is probably not possible, is a person who operates only out of true self. A person with no ego would be one who has developed total self-acceptance even in light of weaknesses, inadequacies, and rejection. This person would have the highest level of self-esteem, and would not need external validation. He/she has achieved complete internal validation. There is no need for proving oneself, no need to protect self by denying, minimizing, blaming, or justifying areas of failure and fault. There would also be no need to feed the ego since this person is already filled up and doesn't need to be something to get validation from others. This state of ego would require attributes like forgiveness, healthy spirituality, inner joy, and peace. These attributes are not dependent on external circumstances, but on an internal state of being. It is something that is a lifelong quest, and an ongoing process of growth.