



Am I normal?

We all have days where we feel like we just don't fit in. You can't put your finger on why, but you just get out of bed and feel – well – out of place. Maybe you are having a fat day, a PMT day, or a bad hair day. You might be feeling old, tired or just lonely.

An attack of the doldrums can occur at any time, in response to a cutting comment, stressful life event, or even just your hormones. But when your self esteem is low, you can feel as though you are the only person who can possibly be feeling this way – you're an oddity, even a social misfit.

It's normal to feel this way

It's normal to feel like this sometimes, anyway. So at least you know that box is ticked. What is 'normal' anyway? The dictionary definitions are, "conforming with or constituting a norm or standard or level or type or social norm" and, "being approximately average." How boring is that? Who wants to conform – and who wants to just be average, anyway?

Reasons for feeling alienated

We're bombarded day and night by images and opinions about who and what we should be. We're told what to wear, how much we should weigh, what type of car we should drive, and sold the ideal lifestyle – a make believe fantasy life that the advertising gurus think we should be living.

It's easy to feel that you don't fit in, if you're worried about your small breasts, large bottom, or that because you're a lesbian, or belong to a minority religion, you have no place in this homogenised, identikit vision of life sold to us by the media. You have to remember that the ideals represented on the television, or in fashion magazines are just a vision. They aren't real life; we're just encouraged to aspire to them. Think about this logically, if everybody else really was living this perfect lifestyle, if we were all rich, wearing designer clothes, living in fantastic houses and married to Mr Perfect with two kids – who would the advertisers sell the dream to? We'd all have it.

Low self esteem

Of course, everyone feels low sometimes. But what if you feel bad about yourself all of the time, and can't seem to shake it off? You could be suffering from low self esteem.

What is self esteem? Psychologist and self esteem expert Nathaniel Branden describes it as:

“The disposition to experience oneself as being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life, and of being worthy of happiness.”¹

If you feel that you can't cope, or you're not worthy, ask yourself where this opinion of yourself has come from, and challenge the feelings of inadequacy with evidence that proves otherwise.

If you feel bad because you think that you don't 'fit in' – question yourself. Why do you think your face doesn't fit? If you haven't been invited out by your friends for a while, don't assume it's because people don't like you. Think about why you might have been overlooked – have you had to drop out of social events recently, or are people assuming that because you have children you won't be able to make it? Maybe they just don't think that you will enjoy it? There could be a whole host of reasons that people just assume you won't be able to socialise with them. Take action, and arrange your own social events, then invite as many people as you like.

Self esteem really does come from within, and we are all entitled to it. You do have to work at it though, so be prepared to put in some effort to resolve your issues if your low self esteem is deep rooted. There are many books on self esteem, pick one up from your local library, and get to work.

“I am what I am”

When you meet someone for the first time, or even when you spend time with people that you already know, your first thought shouldn't be “What do they think of me?” – It should be, “What do I think of them?” Who cares what people think of the way you look, your job, your religion or your lifestyle. Why should you live your life paralysed with fear that you're inadequate, not normal, or don't measure up? The ironic thing is that the more you look outside yourself and concentrate on other people, the more people are naturally drawn to you. Show an interest in what other people are doing, and spend less time stressing about whether they like you. The chances are that they will like you anyway.

Although not the same, self acceptance and self esteem go hand in hand. How can you accept yourself when you're too fat, not rich enough, getting old, or you don't have a job? Well, think about it for a minute. You might think that in order to accept yourself you have to be perfect right now. That's absolutely not the case. If we aren't acceptable until we've achieved certain things or unless we live a certain way, we'll never be happy. We're all works in progress. Accepting yourself as you are doesn't mean that there aren't things you'd like to change, or that you've done everything you need to do. It just means that you've accepted yourself, as you are now.

We're all different – and that's normal too

Normal is relative – and you should celebrate the fact that in the 21st century, in the UK at least, it's OK to live an alternative lifestyle, or belong to any religion you choose. It doesn't matter if you are a minority – that just makes you more interesting! Celebrate the fact that you have something about you that stands out from the crowd. Embrace your purple hair, discuss your religion, don't apologise for being gay. All of these things make you who you are, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Of course, if you're married, with two children and a Labrador, live in the suburbs and drive a 4x4, that's fine too...

References

1. *The Six Pillars of Self Esteem* by Nathaniel Branden

A wide range of women's health resources are available at www.healthywomen.org.uk

Disclaimer: This article is for general information only and is not intended to replace a consultation with a healthcare professional, nor is it intended to provide specific medical advice and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions.

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