

Step 2: Reliving

Once you have begun recognising your good qualities, the next step is to help them to sink in, to make them real. One way of doing this is to use your memory for experiences of acting in line with them as a resource.

Give yourself a few days to notice more items to add to your list and then, when you feel you have taken it as far as you can for the time being, once again find yourself a comfortable, relaxing spot and read the list to yourself

Don't skip through it at top speed. Pause and dwell on each quality you have recorded. Let it sink in.

Lin, for example, recalled a time when she had been home by herself and a friend had telephoned, apparently for a casual chat. Lin picked up something in her friend's voice which prompted her to ask gently, "Are you OK?" Her friend burst into tears and confided that she had had an argument with her boyfriend and was feeling really depressed. She was pleased to have an opportunity to talk. Lin was able to accept this as an example of her own sensitivity.

In remembering it, she recalled the soft light in her living room and the shapes and colours in the painting opposite where she sat, the sound of her friend's voice, the softness of her sofa cushions, the smell and taste of the coffee she had poured just before the call, the combination of affection and concern she had felt for her friend, and the pleasure of helping and supporting her.

When you have read slowly and carefully through your list, go back to the top again. Now, as you consider each item, bring to mind a particular time when you showed that quality in how you behaved.

See if you can find a relatively recent time, so that the memory is still clear in your mind.

As you do this, you may find it helpful to close your eyes.

Take time to recall the experience as vividly as you possibly can — almost as if you were reliving it, right now.

When was this experience?

Where were you, and who with?

What exactly was it you did that expressed this good quality in action?

What were the consequences?

See with your mind's eye what you saw at the time;

hear with your mind's ear what you heard.

What sensations were you aware of in your body (taste, smell, touch, a sense of your body position)?

See too if you can call up the emotions you experienced at that moment.

Take all the time you need to allow the memory to develop fully in your imagination.

Notice what effect this exercise has on your mood and how you feel about yourself. If you can absorb yourself in it fully, you will find that the items on your list become much more vivid and meaningful to you. You should find your mood lifting, and a sense of self-acceptance and confidence creeping in.

If this does not happen, it could be that in some way you are disqualifying what you have written. Throughout the exercise, keep a watchful eye for feelings of shame, embarrassment or disbelief. These feelings may be a cue that self-critical thoughts are going through your mind. Are you, for example, telling yourself ...

That it's wrong to be so smug?

Do you feel as if you are showing off?

Are you thinking that what you did was trivial — anyone could have done it?

Are you telling yourself it was only what would be expected of any decent human being?

Or that you could have done it better? Or faster? Or more effectively?

Or that you may be kind/supportive/competent or whatever some of the time, but not all of the time, and if it's not 100 per cent then it doesn't count?

Are you devaluing qualities because other people have them too — they are too ordinary to be worth considering?

When 'yes, buts' like these intrude, simply notice their presence and put them to one side. Then return your attention fully to focusing on your list of positive qualities. And if the disclaimers are too strong to be easily put aside, you can use the skills you have already learned for dealing with self-critical thoughts to rethink them.

Adapted from: *Overcoming Low Self-Esteem: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques* (2016) by Dr Melanie Fennell