

Strategy: Regularly share your thoughts and feelings with others and be open to receiving their feedback.

Self-regard is rooted in authentic self-understanding. Sharing our thoughts and feelings with other people and getting their feedback are great ways to increase our self-understanding.

Sharing Thoughts and Feelings

Research by pioneering Canadian-born psychologist, Sidney Jourard, has shown that self-disclosure is an important component of mental health. He concluded that mentally healthy people have at least one significant person they trust and know well enough to share important thoughts and feelings with. Less mentally healthy people tend to be unable or unwilling to engage in the kind of self-disclosure and sharing that would enable them to truly know themselves. If we don't know ourselves, we risk becoming more alienated from other people, according to Jourard.

By disclosing ourselves – sharing our inner ideas, concerns and emotions with family members, partners or close friends – we come to know ourselves better. When we express ourselves, our thoughts and feelings often become clearer and take on an even fuller meaning in several ways:

- Putting thoughts and feelings into words in a way that someone else can understand requires us to think more carefully and deliberately about our ideas. Then, as people listen to us, they sometimes ask questions, forcing us to consider our ideas even more deeply.
- Our thoughts and feelings do not exist in a vacuum. We experience them in the context of our social world. As a result, what we think and feel is influenced and partly informed by experiences with other people.
- Our self-understanding is also partly shaped by the ways people experience and respond to us. Receiving feedback from others increases our self-awareness because it helps us to refine and validate our own impressions.
- When we share with other people, they often share with us as well. This expands the range of knowledge and ideas we are exposed to and also helps others be more open with us.

Thus, open communication with others is a very important way of increasing our understanding of the world around us and our place in it.

The Importance of Feedback

Making the most of sharing with others requires not only that we share what we honestly think, but that we are ready and able to hear and try to understand what people think about us.

Receiving feedback can be scary. We know we might hear something we don't really want to hear. But, when you think about it, we've heard feedback all our lives. It is one of

the main ways we gather information and learn (e.g., teachers' comments on school projects, someone saying, "Nice catch!" or "Thank you for helping out.")

Asking for Feedback

If you haven't been in the habit of asking other people for feedback, getting started may take a bit of courage. Here are some ideas that might help:

- Start by approaching close friends and family members you trust (people who are most likely to be helpful and least likely to give feedback in a hurtful way).
- Ask for feedback at a time and place when you know you'll be able to have the person's full attention. For example, ask them out for coffee or a drink at a quiet café or lounge.
- Ask for the feedback directly. Say something like, "I'm trying to work on becoming a better listener. Can you give me some honest feedback on how you experience me as a listener?" If you're looking for feedback on a specific thought or feeling, you could say something like, "I'm very upset with one of my co-workers because of something he/she said to me last week. I'm wondering if I'm over-reacting and I'm not sure what to do. Can I tell you about it and get a little feedback?"

There is no way of guaranteeing that someone will give you wise, insightful feedback. However, people understand that it is an honour to be asked directly for feedback – it's a sign that we respect their opinion. So, most people should respond in a respectful and positive way to your request.

Receiving Feedback

- Try to stay relaxed and open minded. Take a deep breath and keep telling yourself, "I want this feedback. It will help me learn and grow."
- Let the other person talk. Don't argue with them if you don't think they are right. But do ask neutral questions that will help you understand what they are telling you (e.g., "Can you give me a specific example of a time when I did that?").
- Say, "Thanks for the feedback. You've given me some things to think about." Then, go and reflect on what the person said.
- If, after reflecting on a person's feedback, you still disagree, or are confused, try asking someone else for feedback.

If you're not used to sharing your thoughts and feelings with others, it may take some time to develop your skills and become comfortable with sharing, but practice makes perfect. Chances are, the more you practice, the more you'll become comfortable sharing your ideas with others, and you'll learn something about yourself in the process. In short, self-disclosure and sharing with others can help us to become our most "authentic" self.

Reference: Jourard, S. M. (1971). *The transparent self* (rev. ed.). New York: D. van Nostrand, pp. 32-22.