

QUESTION: I get embarrassed easily and it is something I wish I could change about myself. I've always been shy and I feel left out when my friends are having fun and I'm afraid to join them. I even get embarrassed when people give me compliments. Can you help me understand and overcome this problem?

ANSWER: Someone may say to us, "That's a beautiful dress" or "That's an attractive suit." How do we respond? How we respond may be less a statement of our fashion preference and more an indicator that is self-revealing. So often we say or do things, or do not say and do things, because of how we feel about ourselves. Typically, unfortunately, we respond in ways that play down, minimize, what comes to us in a positive way. For example, we may be tempted to respond to the above two compliments like this. "Oh, it's just something that's been hanging in the back of my closet for years," or, " I probably purchased it at Goodwill." Deflecting compliments may be revealing a sad sense of self, what is sometimes called having a "low self-esteem" or "an inferiority complex."

Over many decades of living I have been observing others and myself. Slowly an idea has come to me. How does this sound to you? "How I REALLY feel about myself to a large extent determines what experiences life brings to me." A crucial issue throughout life is our own sense of self.

When we capitalize the first letters of each word "sense of self" we get "S-O-S" – a call for help. Most people who come for counseling are coming with a call for help of

some kind. Professional counselors are committed to exactly that – responding in a caring, sensitive and confidential way to your need.

For simplicity's sake, let's divide our sense of self into three "parts", the body, the mind/emotions, and the soul/ spirit. There are natural concerns with our bodies. After all, our bodies are our vehicles through this life. I confess a personal opinion I hold on this. Our bodies are "loaned" to us from a Higher Power, the Creator. Our bodies are to be used, not misused or abused. My hunch is that a person who is misusing or abusing his/her body does not realize that our bodies are "on loan", and we need to really take care of them. At another level in this sense of self, when we fail to take good care of our bodies we are showing how poorly we think about ourselves.

Many clients come to counseling with a negative S-O-S about their bodies. They feel ugly, unattractive, and/or undesirable. Some are panicky when the body doesn't function as we, or others, expect it to do or as it once did, especially in the area of sexuality. An extreme sadness, depression, is a major reason many people seek help in counseling.

Some S-O-S's, calls for help, come that pertain to the mind/ emotions. An example is the person who is very concerned about not being able to concentrate, to focus on a task, to complete one task before bouncing off to another one. We often detect, sadly, an issue that was not detected earlier in that person's life called, "ADD, Attention Deficit Disorder".

Notice that I use "mind/emotions together. This is done because I believe that to a large extent what we think determines how and what we feel. So often negative experiences from our past are with us in the present. Our present, and future, are

bogged down by our past. Someone refers to this as “stinkin' thinkin’”. Some people coming to counseling request an attitude adjustment.

The area of soul/spirit is sometimes a part of the call for help, although usually this is not uncovered immediately. There is a deep inner sense that something really basic and terribly valuable in our lives is missing. Two big words for this are “existential emptiness.” We somehow are not in personal contact with a Sacred Deity, however we call God, Life Force, Universal Source, Love, etc.

You are invited to look carefully and deeply at the "real you". Honestly and bravely investigate your sense of self. If there is any area in your life in which you do not feel good about yourself, you may find counseling helpful.

A healthy response to compliments? Simply, "Thank you." "Dr. Remington, this is a helpful article." My response, "Thank you".

Questions may be sent to the Samaritan Counseling Center, 302 Cedar St., Niles, MI 49120, faxed to (269) 926-6780 or emailed to pbambrick@samcounseling.org. Dr. Jim Remington, a therapist at the Center, answered today's question.

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