

Celebrate

THE PROGRESS YOU'VE MADE



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*“The lizard that leapt from the lofty Iroko tree said,
If no one applauds me, I will applaud myself.”*



African Resource Center of West Michigan
Grand Rapids, Michigan



*Our elders say,
“The lizard that leapt from the lofty Iroko tree said,
‘If no one applauds me, I will applaud myself.’”*

*In a world where criticism often echoes louder than praise,
you may find yourself surrounded by friends, colleagues,
or family members who overlook your efforts,
yet never miss a chance to point out
where you've fallen short.*



*Sometimes, their words come from a place of care,
meant to help you grow by addressing your weaknesses.*

*But other times, their remarks are simply unkind,
meant not to build you up, but to chip away at your confidence
and make you question your innate worth.*

Here are some ways others may erode your Self-Worth:





1. Unrealistic Societal Standards

Ideals around beauty, success, masculinity, or femininity can make us feel inadequate or flawed. Social media often bombards us with unattainable images of what it means to be beautiful, strong, or funny, distorting our self-perception.

2. *Systemic Bias and Discrimination*

Racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of systemic bias can quietly erode self-esteem, especially when reinforced by silence, exclusion, or microaggressions.



3. *Projected Pain and Internal Struggles*

People who feel insecure or unloved may project their pain onto others—criticizing, belittling, or controlling them to feel superior.



4. Toxic Power Dynamics

*Some people use shame or fear to maintain control,
especially in relationships or institutions
where authority goes unchecked.*





5. *Lack of Emotional Awareness*

*Even well-meaning individuals
may offer “tough love” or unsolicited advice
without realizing the emotional toll it takes.*

*If you allow these external voices to shape your self-image,
you may grow bitter, not only toward others,
but toward yourself.
Now, here are some ways to reclaim your self-worth.*



1. Reflect on Your Gifts

Take a moment to reflect on what makes you unique.

*Gently challenge the negative thoughts
that cloud your self-image.*

No one knows you better than you.

*Set your own standards—ones that reflect who you are
and who you're becoming.*





*If you love to sing,
don't measure your voice against anyone else's.
Sing for yourself.
Sing with others.
Find joy in expressing your gifts,
not in comparing yourself to others.*

2. *Be Kind to Yourself*

*Notice when your thoughts turn critical,
and gently interrupt them.*

*Thoughts like “I’m not good enough” aren’t facts,
they’re patterns that can be unlearned.*

*Replace them with affirmations
like “I am capable” or “I am growing every day.”*





Don't dwell on past mistakes.

Learn from them, then move forward.

No one is perfect.

Speak to yourself with compassion.

Use affirmations that uplift and affirm your value.

Treat yourself with the same kindness you'd offer a loved one.

3. Celebrate Small Wins

Acknowledge your progress, even if it feels minor.

*Recognizing achievements builds confidence
and reinforces a positive self-image.*

*Treat yourself when you reach a goal
by having dinner with a friend, writing in a gratitude journal,
or sharing your joy with someone who brings you joy.*





It's easy to let others set the standards by which we live.

*But instead of allowing the indifference
or criticism of others to define your worth,
learn from the lizard that leaps from the tall Iroko tree.*

And whisper to yourself:

“If no one applauds me, I will applaud myself.”

6. Reclaiming Your Self-Worth

Reflecting on Your Gifts

- What are three things you're good at that no one can take away?
- What brings you joy when you do it—whether or not anyone notices?
- How do you feel when you express your gifts without comparing yourself to others?

Being Kind to Yourself

- What negative thoughts do you catch yourself repeating?
- What affirmation do you need most right now?
- How do you speak to yourself when you make a mistake?
- What would it look like to treat yourself with the same compassion you offer others?

Celebrating Small Wins

- What is one small win from this week that deserves applause?
- How do you usually celebrate your progress?
- What stops you from acknowledging your achievements?
- Who in your life celebrates you—and how can you celebrate yourself even when they don't?

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7. Reclaiming Your Self-Worth

A. “Applaud Yourself” Circle

Each person shares one small win from the past week.

After each share, the group gives a round of applause—teaching youth to normalize celebrating progress.

B. “Rewrite the Script” Exercise

Invite participants to write down a negative thought they often hear internally.

Then rewrite it into a compassionate affirmation.

Example:

“I’m not good enough” » “I am growing, learning, and improving every day.”

C. “Gifts That Make Me Me” Collage

Participants create a collage (digital or paper) of images, words, or colors that represent their strengths, passions, and gifts.

D. “The Iroko Leap” Role Play

In pairs, youth act out:

- Someone taking a brave step (the leap)
- Someone responding with criticism or silence
- The person choosing to applaud themselves anyway

Then discuss what courage looks like in real life.

E. Celebrating Your Gifts

- What is one way you will applaud yourself this week?
- What gift will you honor without comparing it to anyone else?
- What standard will you set for yourself that reflects who you truly are?

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Portions of this handbook and its accompanying video—including draft text, images, and narration—were generated with the assistance of AI tools.

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