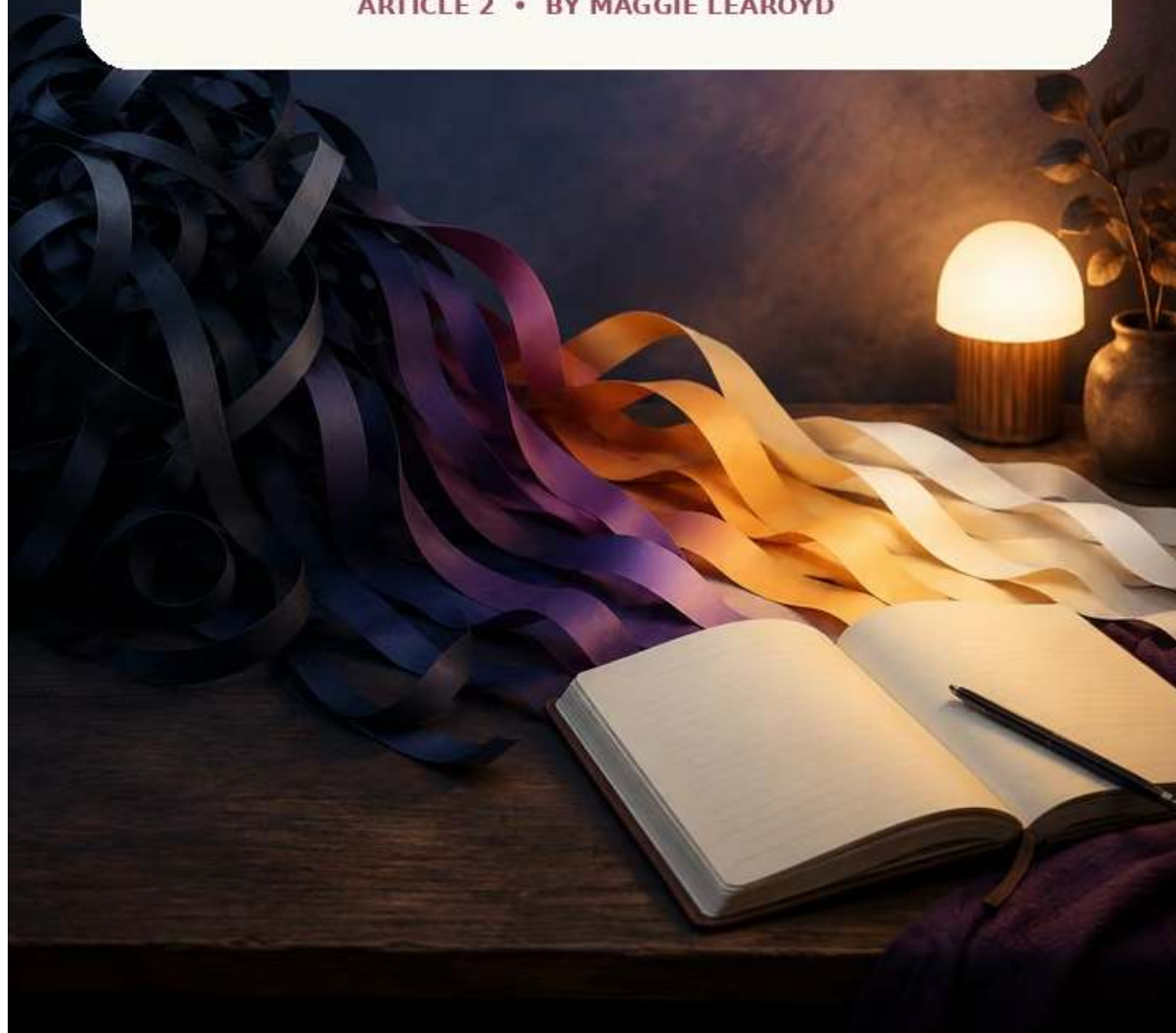


LGBTQ+ CONFIDENCE

OVERCOMING SELF-DOUBT

Challenging internalised negative beliefs with compassion

ARTICLE 2 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Overcoming Self-Doubt

Challenging internalised negative beliefs with compassion

Almost everyone experiences self-doubt at some point in their lives. We may question our abilities before a job interview, worry about what others think of us or wonder whether we are "good enough." While occasional self-doubt is a normal part of being human, persistent negative beliefs about ourselves can have a significant impact on confidence, relationships and mental wellbeing.

For some LGBTQ+ people, self-doubt can be shaped not only by personal experiences but also by the messages they receive from the world around them. Growing up hearing negative stereotypes, experiencing bullying, facing discrimination or feeling pressure to hide part of who they are can gradually influence how they see themselves. Even in accepting environments, the impact of earlier experiences may continue long into adulthood.

These negative beliefs are not a reflection of a person's worth—they are often learned responses to difficult experiences. The encouraging news is that learned beliefs can also be challenged and changed. Building confidence begins with recognising where self-doubt comes from, understanding that it is not the same as truth and learning to develop a kinder, more compassionate relationship with yourself.

Understanding Self-Doubt

Self-doubt is the tendency to question your own abilities, value or decisions.

It might sound like:

- "I'm not good enough."

"I'll probably fail."

"People won't accept me."

"I don't deserve happiness."

"Everyone else is more confident than I am."

These thoughts can feel convincing, but they are not always accurate reflections of reality.

Learning to notice self-doubt without automatically believing it is an important step towards building confidence.

Where Do Negative Beliefs Come From?

Our beliefs about ourselves often begin developing during childhood and adolescence.

They may be influenced by:

- Family experiences.

School environments.

Friendships.

Cultural expectations.

Religious beliefs.

Social media.

Workplace experiences.

Messages about gender and sexuality.

For LGBTQ+ people, experiences such as rejection, bullying or hearing negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identities can contribute to beliefs that they are somehow "different," "less than" or "unacceptable."

These beliefs are learned—they are not facts.

Understanding Internalised Stigma

Internalised stigma occurs when someone unconsciously adopts negative messages they have heard about their own identity.

This may lead to thoughts such as:

- "I should hide who I am."

"People won't respect me if they know."

"I have to prove my worth."

"I'm a disappointment."

These thoughts often develop as a way of trying to stay safe or avoid rejection.

Recognising internalised stigma helps people understand that these beliefs are responses to external experiences rather than reflections of who they truly are.

The Impact of Self-Doubt

Persistent self-doubt can affect many areas of life.

It may lead to:

- Avoiding new opportunities.

Difficulty making decisions.

Fear of being judged.

Overthinking conversations.

Difficulty trusting others.

Perfectionism.

Low self-esteem.

Anxiety.

Depression.

Difficulty accepting compliments.

Over time, these patterns can reinforce feelings of inadequacy, creating a cycle that becomes increasingly difficult to break.

Challenging Negative Self-Talk

Our inner voice has a powerful influence on our confidence.

Negative self-talk often includes:

- Self-criticism.

Catastrophising.

Comparing ourselves with others.

Assuming the worst.

Focusing only on mistakes.

When these thoughts arise, ask yourself:

- What evidence supports this belief?

What evidence challenges it?

Would I say this to someone I care about?

Is there a more balanced way of viewing this situation?

Replacing harsh self-criticism with realistic and compassionate thinking takes practice but can gradually change how we view ourselves.

Letting Go of Comparison

Comparing ourselves to others is a common source of self-doubt.

Social media, in particular, often presents carefully selected moments rather than everyday reality.

Remember:

- Everyone has insecurities.

Confidence looks different for different people.

Someone else's success does not reduce your own worth.

Your journey does not need to look like anyone else's.

Focusing on your own growth rather than comparison supports healthier self-esteem.

Practising Self-Compassion

Self-compassion means treating yourself with kindness during difficult times.

It involves:

- Accepting that everyone struggles.

Speaking to yourself with understanding.

Allowing yourself to make mistakes.

Recognising your efforts.

Celebrating progress.

Research consistently shows that self-compassion is linked to improved mental wellbeing, resilience and confidence.

Being compassionate towards yourself is not self-indulgent—it is an important part of emotional health.

Building Self-Worth

Self-worth grows when we recognise that our value is not determined by other people's opinions.

Healthy self-worth develops through:

- Living according to your values.

Recognising your strengths.

Accepting your imperfections.

Building meaningful relationships.

Looking after your wellbeing.

Allowing yourself to grow.

Your worth is not something that has to be earned—it is something you already possess.

Finding Safe and Supportive Relationships

Confidence often grows in environments where people feel accepted.

Supportive relationships may include:

- Trusted friends.

Family members.

Partners.

LGBTQ+ community groups.

Support groups.

Inclusive workplaces.

Therapists or counsellors.

Surrounding yourself with people who respect and value you helps challenge negative beliefs developed through earlier experiences.

Celebrate Progress, Not Perfection

Confidence is rarely built through one major event.

Instead, it develops through many small moments.

Celebrate achievements such as:

- Speaking up in a meeting.

Setting a healthy boundary.

Trying something new.

Asking for help.

Expressing your identity authentically.

Challenging a negative thought.

Each step contributes to long-term confidence.

When Additional Support May Help

Sometimes self-doubt becomes so persistent that it affects everyday life.

Professional support may be helpful if:

- Negative thoughts feel overwhelming.

Anxiety prevents you from doing things you value.

Low self-esteem affects relationships.

Past experiences continue to impact daily life.

You feel stuck despite trying to make changes.

A qualified counsellor or psychotherapist can provide a safe, supportive space to explore these experiences and develop healthier patterns of thinking.

Key Takeaways

Self-doubt is common, but it does not define your worth or your future.

Negative beliefs are often learned through life experiences rather than reflecting reality.

Internalised stigma can affect confidence, but it can also be challenged.

Self-compassion is a powerful alternative to self-criticism.

Comparing yourself with others often undermines confidence.

Building self-worth involves recognising your strengths and living according to your values.

Confidence grows through small, consistent acts of courage and self-acceptance.

Final Thoughts

Overcoming self-doubt is not about becoming fearless or never questioning yourself again. It is about learning to recognise that the critical voice in your mind is not always telling the truth. Many LGBTQ+ people have spent years navigating messages that suggested they should hide, change or apologise for who they are. Those experiences can leave lasting impressions, but they do not determine your value or your potential.

Building confidence begins with challenging the beliefs that no longer serve you and replacing them with compassion, understanding and self-respect. Every time you choose authenticity over fear, kindness over self-criticism or connection over isolation, you strengthen your confidence and reinforce the belief that you are worthy of acceptance exactly as you are.

Ultimately, confidence is not about seeking approval from others. It is about recognising your inherent worth, embracing your identity with pride and allowing yourself the freedom to live a life that reflects who you truly are.