

How To Build Confidence When You've Been Abused

QUESTION:

How can I learn to feel confident when abuse made me feel powerless and small?

ANSWER:

Abuse strips you of your sense of worth, leaving behind self-doubt, shame, and the constant fear of not being enough. Feeling confident again after a lifetime of abuse isn't about pretending to be fearless or faking it till you make it. It's about rebuilding trust in yourself with your own voice, choices, or needs after years of being told you couldn't be trusted. It's about reclaiming your right to exist, to speak, to want, and to take up space without apology.

Rebuilding confidence after abuse doesn't start outside of you, it starts with the quiet rebuilding of your inner world until standing tall feels natural, not forced. Here's how to do that:

1. Reframe What Confidence Means

Many survivors believe confidence is about perfection, performance, or constant self-assurance. But real confidence isn't loud or flashy, it's grounded. It's the ability to say, 'I matter. My needs matter. My voice matters.'

Abuse taught you to shrink, so confidence begins in the small, everyday acts of expansion: saying no without apology, choosing clothes that feel like you, or voicing your opinion even when your voice shakes. Each act rewires your nervous system to trust your right to exist fully.

2. Heal the Inner Narrative

The abuser's voice becomes your 'inner critic'. The whispers of 'you're not good enough' or 'you'll never make it' play on repeat. Healing means identifying this voice and challenging it. Ask yourself, 'is this my voice or someone else's?' Replace 'I can't' with 'I can'. Replace 'I don't deserve this' with 'I am worthy of kindness.' Over time, your own true voice - strong, kind, and protective - will rise above the echoes of the past.

3. Anchor in Your Body

Abuse often disconnects you from your body, making confidence feel impossible. Rebuilding begins physically. Stand with your feet firmly on the ground. Breathe deeply into your belly. Drop your shoulders and look forward. Confidence is not only a thought; it's a posture. Practicing grounding rituals signals safety to your nervous system, and as your body learns to stand tall, your mind will follow.

4. Start Small, Build Momentum

Confidence doesn't arrive all at once, it's built brick by brick. Start by setting small, achievable goals. Speak up in a safe conversation, share an idea at work. Practice setting boundaries with people you trust. Each success tells your brain, 'I did that and I survived.'

Confidence after abuse grows through repetition, not perfection. Like a muscle, the more you practice, the stronger it becomes.

5. Surround Yourself with Truth-Tellers

Confidence thrives in nourishing soil. If you're surrounded by people who minimize you, dismiss you, or replay abusive patterns, your healing will feel harder. Seek out relationships that reflect your values back to you - friends who celebrate your wins, mentors who remind you of your strengths, communities where your voice matters. Being mirrored in care and compassion helps you reclaim the confidence that abuse denied you.

6. Reclaim the Right to Take Up Space

Abuse trains you to shrink, to apologise for existing. Building confidence means reminding yourself every day: I am allowed to be here. I am allowed to take up space. Whether that's physically walking into a room with your head held high, or emotionally voicing your truth, you

undo the false story that you must stay small. Confidence is the radical act of taking your rightful place in the world.

Affirmation:

My voice, my choice, and my presence matter. I reclaim my confidence one step at a time.

Journal Prompts:

1. What false beliefs about myself did abuse teach me?
2. Where in my life do I still feel small or silenced?
3. What does confidence feel like in my body?
4. Is there someone in my life who makes me feel seen and valued?
5. What is one small act I can take today to stand in my worth?

Visualisation:

Imagine yourself walking into a room where you once felt small. This time, you walk tall, your shoulders back, your breath steady. You feel light radiating from your chest, filling the room. People turn and smile, not because you've performed, but because you've arrived as yourself. Stay with this vision until it feels real in your body.

Conclusion:

Rebuilding confidence after abuse is not about erasing the past but about reclaiming you, the person the abuse tried

to bury. Step by step, you're becoming visible to yourself again.

Final Thought:

Confidence is not the absence of fear, it's knowing you belong to yourself now. You are your own work of art, not someone else's broken mirror.