

Not everyone wants cheering up, new study suggests

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You may want to rethink cheering up your friends who have low self-esteem because chances are they don't want to hear it.

People with low [self-esteem](#) have overly negative views of themselves, and often interpret critical feedback, romantic rejections, or unsuccessful job applications as evidence of their general unworthiness. A new study from researchers at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University found that they likely don't want you to try to boost their spirits.

"People with low self-esteem want their loved ones to see them as they see themselves. As such, they are often resistant to their [friends'](#) reminders of how positively they see them and reject what we call positive reframing—expressions of optimism and encouragement for bettering their situation," said Professor Denise Marigold, from Renison University College at Waterloo, and lead author of the study.

These individuals usually prefer negative validation, which conveys that the feelings, actions or responses of the recipient are normal, reasonable, and appropriate to the situation. So a friend could express understanding about the predicament or for the difficulty of a situation, and suggest that expressing [negative emotions](#) is appropriate and understandable.

The researchers found no evidence that positive reframing helps participants with low self-esteem. And in fact, the people providing support to friends with low self-esteem often felt worse about themselves when they attempted to cheer up their friend.

Some study participants indicated that supporting friends with low self-esteem could be frustrating and tiring. The researchers found that when these support providers used positive reframing instead of negative validation in these situations, they often believed the interaction went poorly, perhaps because the friends with low self-esteem were not receptive and the efforts didn't work.

"If your attempt to point out the silver lining is met with a sullen

reminder of the prevailing dark cloud, you might do best to just acknowledge the dark cloud and sympathize," said Professor Marigold.

The findings appear in the new issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

More information: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, psycnet.apa.org/journals/psp/107/1/56/

Provided by University of Waterloo

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