

Where does 'empowerment' come from?

Although we can do things to help other people feel more or less powerful, ultimately we can only empower ourselves - by making best use of the resources we have. Here are some of the factors that release and block our sense of being powerful, in control and confident.

Factor	Helpful	Blocking
Skills	Engaging in activities that match our skills and natural abilities.	Engaging in activities in which we lack skills and feel no 'natural' ability.
Responses from others	Receiving encouragement and praise from others for our actions (particularly as children).	Being 'put down' by others for our actions – for example, by being teased, criticised, humiliated or punished.
Values	Engaging in activities that match our values, so that we feel what we are doing is worthwhile in itself.	Engaging in activities that are at odds with our values, so that we feel what we are doing is pointless.
Ongoing feedback	Getting regular, positive feedback (from people, our environment) showing that we are making progress.	Getting no feedback, so we don't know if our actions are taking us any closer to our goals.
Results	Experience of a match between effort and outcome – belief that our actions will result in our achieving our aims.	Believing our actions will make no real difference. 'Learned helplessness.'
Attitude to learning	Being in an environment where it is OK to learn, to make mistakes and try again.	Being in an environment where anything less than perfect is seen as failure.
General well-being	Having access to an underlying resource of energy (physical, mental, emotional), including a history of success.	Feeling that you're 'running on empty', that you can only act in an area on the basis of an enormous effort of will.