



**The Top Five Secrets of  
Body Confidence!**

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This edition was first published in March 2017 in the Republic of Ireland & updated 2020 by Astrid Longhurst

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# Five transformational steps to body confidence

## The top five secrets to Body Confidence

By Astrid Longhurst

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Feeling good about you is a conscious choice. If you feel negative about your body in any way it may be a clue to look at the beliefs you have about yourself and if they support or undermine your feelings of confidence. Making peace with your body and fully embracing who you are invites you to embark on a journey of self-discovery. At the heart of the journey are the two most profound and potentially transformational questions you can ask yourself.

These are:

- Who are you?
- What is the meaning you give to your life

The paradox of being body confident is that it isn't about having the "perfect" body or conforming to a specific body stereotype. True body confidence recognizes that your body is where you live and that YOU are not your body. The "real" you has a body through which you are able to experience your life. Once you begin to make this mental and emotional (even spiritual) shift, your perceptions, actions, behaviours and attitudes about your body transform. My own beliefs are that whenever we suffer over (or with) any part of our body we are being asked to deeply connect and fall in love with ALL of who we are. The search for body confidence is the quest for the deepest love of all – our own! We can take steps to transform our body from the outside in. We can have our bottoms lifted, our breasts augmented, our tummies and thighs drained of excess fat. However, the one thing that surgery can never do is transform the eyes of the person who is looking in the mirror.

### **Your body – your home!**

Our body is where we live. It is our home through this lifetime. When you come into this world you are naturally and fully in love with your body. There is no separation. No thought that tells you that you don't match up or aren't good enough. As a baby you have no awareness of whether your body is too small, big, heavy or light. You are just completely fascinated by this amazing body that you have been born into. Your earliest days are spent exploring your fingers and toes and every movement you make brings more delight and pleasure! It is only later, as we grow into the families and culture of our times that we begin to feel separate from our true self. As we begin to notice that there is a world that is *not* our body, we begin to embody more of this external way of being. We are soaking in every opinion, belief and story from our immediate family about who we are and whether we are okay. We may be told certain things about our body or watch how other people in our family treat and value their *own* bodies. We are learning what it means to have a body and whether our body is acceptable, lovable, valuable and good enough just as it is. Instead of being delighted by our toes we now may look at our toes and compare them with *other* toes. Where we find a difference we may conclude (if our messages from our environment have been overtly negative) that our toes aren't good enough or pretty enough as our friends toes.

Whenever and wherever we have received a judgment or criticism of our body, we become a little more disconnected from it. When this is extreme, it can lead to feeling that we never fully live in our body and exist about two feet from it. This feeling of body disconnection may also come as a result of early trauma in our lives, be it emotional, sexual or physical. We may always feel as if some part of us is missing or that there is emptiness or a void within. As we grow up we may seek to feed this void or separateness in ways that either make us feel better for a short while or completely numb us out so that we don't have to be fully present to how we are feeling. Food, alcohol, toxic relationships, overwork, body dysmorphia, eating distress, addictions of all kind may surface here.

### **The key secret to Body Confidence is getting back into your body!**

If separateness keeps you away from feeling good about yourself, your life and your body, then fully inhabiting your body brings you "home!" We have wandered for far too long away from the beauty of our being. We may have spent what seems an eternity looking for ways to make us feel loved, acceptable, comforted, valued and safe in this world. We may have tried to find this in the arms of other people or in the hundreds of chocolate bars we have consumed. We may have sought its presence in the hours of endless exercising or the latest fad diet or body treatment that has hit the market.

Ultimately all of these things may have brought you pleasure for a short amount of time. However, it is usually a temporary respite and sooner or later the old feelings, beliefs and doubts will reassert their old body story. As we travel on this pathway home to our body and feeling safe and happy in the skin we're in, we begin to recognize what hasn't worked and we begin to enquire and get curious about what *will*. It is in these moments that you may begin to move a little *closer* to the real truth of who you are. This is exciting because it means that you are beginning to *inhabit* your body instead of inhibiting it or judging and condemning it. You may want to find out more in the body confidence coach certification-training programme that I teach. Please visit [www.instituteforbodyconfidencecoaching.com](http://www.instituteforbodyconfidencecoaching.com) This is where the seeds of change and transformation are sown. The course takes you through the seven core body confidence modules. The first module is about the mental body as it is here that you can begin to rewrite a new body blueprint and create a new body story that empowers and enriches your life! Read on to discover how your mental body shapes how you feel about your actual physical body and how you can change it!

### **The body in your mind**

There is a saying that we get more of what we focus on in life and this appears to be true especially in body image psychology. Essentially it is our *focus* that determines what we will make part of our lives and it is our beliefs that direct this focus. When the beliefs we have about ourselves are negative, it is as if we are running a computer program in our subconscious mind that says go out and create everything you possibly can to support this belief. Our brain will pick things out of the environment that match the beliefs we have and bring those things to our attention, discarding the input that does not match. Our feelings and behaviour then also act accordingly.



More power is added to this state of being in that every time we notice something that fits our belief, we believe it even more, and it becomes like fact. One of the most interesting things about working with body confidence issues is the fact that the body and the mental image or “story” that the mind has about the body don’t align. When you look in the mirror you may not even be seeing the *physical truth* of your body. You may be “seeing” a lifetime of being compared to your sister or best friend. You may “see” and feel unkind words or criticisms about your shape and size. Everything that you have ever learned about yourself and your body is reflected back to you through the filters of your mind and in particular your subconscious mind. Very often the image you see is a *constructed mental picture of the past* projected onto your present physical form. The following five tips help you to become aware of when and where you may be not seeing the *truth* of who you really are. By beginning to become more *conscious* about how your mind is shaping your beliefs and feelings about your body, you are able to change the old “story” and move into the real and authentic you.

**Use these five-body confidence-boosting tips to change your beliefs and feel great about you!**

1. **Become aware of the “inner critic” in your mind.** This is the internal dialogue that you have with yourself. It is the tiny voice in your mind that sees fit to make a running commentary on all that you do. It is the voice that criticizes, judges, scolds, puts you down, is unkind, self-limiting or down right rude. The key thing to be aware of is that this critical voice *isn't you*. It is a recording of everything you have “learned” about yourself from the day you were born up until around the age of seven. Think of it like an old recording that has just been left to play again and again. Once you can become aware that this voice is simply the past repeating itself in the form of old worn out judgments, beliefs, attitudes and imprinted events and feelings, you have the opportunity to change it. This is powerful because it means that you are able to press, “stop” on the recording and then begin to record a new, more positive programme of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

Your subconscious mind retains everything that you experience in your life, from the very beginning of your life. It is a mixture of both positive and not so positive inputs. We all “download” the story of what it means to belong in the family we were born into and its own personal ‘rules’, beliefs and attitudes. The key thing to remember is that the thoughts that prevent you or stop you from feeling good or doing the things you love were never yours! They didn’t belong to you. They were simply fears, attitudes and “stories” of your family of origin, the environment you grew up in and also the cultural beliefs of the time. Wherever you have experienced a block or fear you simply know that this area of your life wasn’t supported by strong positive beliefs. For example, you may be brilliant at generating an income and coming up with endless creative ideas, however you may find yourself struggling with relationships. If you were to look at your family history, you may find that money and creative ideas came easily, however there were always issues with relationships. In my own family “story” creativity was highly

valued and came easily to both my sister and I. However, there was a huge fear and judgment about weight and size mixed together with early family trauma when my father died at the age of thirty-five. I know that this early upbringing, fear, loss and grief shaped both my sisters and my own relationship with ourselves, our body and with life! Whilst we both excelled creatively, we both also struggled with addictions and feeling disconnected from our bodies.

### **How to understand the language of your inner critic**

Once you are aware of the kind of things you are saying about yourself you can take steps to change them. The “inner critic” often hides behind things like “*should’s*” “*must’s*”, and “*ought’s*”. For example, “You **should** look like the models in the magazines” or “You **must** lose weight in order to be happy, fit in, be a “**perfect**” person etc ” It also loves to compare and will use this to *order* you to “shape up or ship out!” Any time you are aware of only giving yourself two options to choose from it is usually your inner critic or voice from the past at work. The messages from our past are heard (or experienced) in different ways for every single person. Being aware of how you “talk” to yourself (or listen to the inner negative self talk) is key in really understanding the language of your old programmes and conditioning.

### **Ask yourself this question to help you understand your own “inner critic’s” dialogue:**

- What is the tone like of your inner critic? Is it soft and seductive or loud and demanding? Does it whisper incessantly to you or does it get angry and cross with you? How does it get you to do what it wants? In what ways do you agree to believe the negatives or self-limiting thoughts?

I recognized the fearful voice of my mother replaying in my own head whenever I wanted to do something new or change something I was doing. She would always respond with the comments of “Do you think you should? What if it doesn’t work?” I had previously thought that this was my own belief and fear and felt liberated when I realized that this didn’t belong to me. It was my mum trying to keep me safe and not wanting me to take any risks that might not work. This understanding was huge in my own healing and transformation!

**What is the character of your inner critic? Have a look at the following “identities” that the inner critic can take on and see which are applicable to you. Your inner critic may have more than one identity but one may be stronger than the others.**

**How does your inner critic get you to obey its commands? What is its primary identity?**

- **The Guilt Tripper!** Do you feel guilty about doing things for yourself first? The voice and story of the guilt tripper makes you believe that you should *always* put others before you and

that you are “bad” or “selfish” for looking after your own needs first. The guilt tripper identity will often feel shame or embarrassment about looking after his or her own needs. In extreme cases it may mean that a person negates much of their life in favour of meeting another’s needs or desires. They may seek to go out of their way in order to make someone else happy or facilitate another person, however they woefully neglect themselves. The guilt tripper may bring along with it great undercurrents and feelings of resentment and anger. Underneath the feelings of guilt that you *should* be doing what someone else wants is often huge resentment. This in turn often adds into even *more* feelings of guilt. The message is often heard internally as “I *shouldn’t* be feeling angry about helping my mother, neighbour, work colleague or friend. I’m such a mean person to feel this way.” I always remember being told that I was selfish and a spoilsport when I didn’t want to get up and entertain my family with what I was learning at ballet class. My mum was proud of me and wanted to show me off, however, I usually felt mortified at the thought of “performing” to my aunts, uncles and cousins! I usually gave in and danced for them but never really enjoyed it. Ask yourself who does this identity belong to? Where have you been aware of feeling guilty if you didn’t do what was expected of you?

- **The Comparer – mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of us all?** The voice of the comparer is the voice of never being good enough as YOU! Other people will always be better, greater, happier, more successful or worthy? The comparer tells you that no matter what you do or how far you go, someone else will have done it better than you. You may have been aware of people in your immediate family either comparing *themselves* with others or pointing out how wonderful your friends were. Society and schooling often reinforces the message of the comparer by its exams, tests, reports and competitive activities. The comparer often makes you feel as if it’s pointless to try or even bother as what you do will never match up or be good enough! Where has this appeared in your family history/schooling/community?
- **The High Achiever!** This one can be confusing for many people because being a high achiever is often seen and promoted as a positive trait. However, when this is out of balance it can lead us into endlessly searching to be better and better without full acknowledgment of what we have achieved. This is often seen where someone may have achieved a high result in an exam or has made some huge changes in their life. Although they may have achieved great success, they continue to focus on what they *haven’t* done or achieved. The person who gets 98% in an exam feels frustrated and disappointed that it wasn’t 100%. The person

who loses eight pounds in a month may feel desperate because she/he didn't achieve their goal of ten pounds! The voice of the high achiever is never fully satisfied with where they are. They constantly focus on what *wasn't* achieved or done well; never fully seeing or congratulating themselves on all of the things that they did beautifully! The problem with this is that you never fully *have* your life. Any achievements are brushed away along with compliments because in the high achiever's mind, they haven't yet reached their ultimate goal and so nothing else counts! There is a sense of not fully owning who you are and therefore this then prevents you from giving to someone else or yourself. We can't give what we don't have.

- **The Procrastinator.** This inner identity hides behind fear and a disbelief in your own capabilities. There are many reasons for putting things off. It may be because you really *don't* want to do them. It may be because you feel that you're not *able* to do them. It also may be because if you start to do the things you've promised yourself to do, you will change. There can be a great deal of *fear* in how others will respond to you if you change in some way. Sometimes it feels easier *not* to take action because we can then stay the same as we've always been and, in that sameness, there is security and knowing. Procrastination is a buffer and an excuse for never living your authentic life. It always gives you a let-out clause. If you don't do something then you can't be judged. If you don't try then you will never know if you could have succeeded. You will also never have to address the possibility that things didn't work out in the way you wanted them to. Fear and doubt are behind procrastination. Procrastination is often disguised as laziness. You may hear people say that they're too lazy. However, this laziness often only shows up in the things that they are not certain about or feel fear about doing. For example, you may keep putting off writing that book that you've been talking about for years, but have no problem in helping someone else achieve their dreams! When you hear the voice of the procrastinator in you, it is time to make a tiny, baby step into what you are putting off or delaying. Just doing this signals that you are willing to change and begins to steer a course in the direction you want.
- **The Perfectionist.** The perfectionist is similar in many ways to the high achiever. The main difference is that the perfectionist will put off doing things until they are "perfect" or the timing is "just right!" The high achiever will always look for what *hasn't* been accomplished or achieved whereas the perfectionist will wait for things to be *perfect* before they even begin! Perfectionists are always engaging in some form of waiting. This inner voice will try to persuade you not to begin



unless everything is exactly right. It causes you to wait on the sidelines of your life waiting for everything to line up in perfect order before you make your move! Fear of getting it wrong is behind the perfectionist. In terms of body confidence, the inner voice is often heard as saying things like, “*When* I’ve lost weight, or *when* I look better, or *when* I’ve toned up.... I’ll take that course, apply for that job, get involved in a relationship etc.” The perfectionist keeps you feeling as if your life is on hold. You may feel a sense of waiting for your life to begin.

- **The Worrier (of what others think).** This is a huge one! It can often be easily identified in early childhood as the voice of what others may think or say about you. The worrier is often the internalized voice or “stories” of other people. The worrier is full of fear about truly shining or standing out in any way. It seeks safety and does this by trying to conform and shrink any ideas, creativity, longings or callings you may have. It’s not bad – it’s just scared! The pointing finger is the symbol of the worrier. Whenever you project your mind into the future and find yourself saying, “what if?” the worrier is usually at work. It doesn’t trust that all is well (and will be well) and seeks to look at every single possible thing that *could* go wrong in order to be prepared for any eventuality. The body worrier may say things like, “What if no one will like you if you lose weight?” It will often coerce you to eat when you’re not really hungry by convincing you that it’s rude not to join in, or that others will reject you in some way. One of the best ways to speak to the inner worrier is to imagine that she (or he) is a very small child who is frightened of taking the next step. Use comforting, soothing and reassuring words to comfort and calm this small child.
- **The Realist.** The realist inner critic is often the most difficult to confront because the reasons and ‘excuses’ it comes up with are often completely plausible (or appear that way). It uses “reality” to stop you from even starting a new idea or moving forward. For example, you may have a wonderful idea but you hear the critics voice saying things like, “But that’s not realistic or that would never work etc.?” You will often be aware of your realist critic as saying things like, “In reality that won’t work, or you’ve got to be realistic!” In terms of body confidence or feeling wonderful about yourself it may say things like, “Everyone feels bad about their body, or it’s not possible to love yourself” or even, “who do you think you are to feel great about you?” It seeks an even playing field born out of keeping yourself in a more mediocre way of feeling and being. The inner critic of the realist is often afraid of taking risks, preferring to stick to the tried and tested “norms” of the mainstream. It tries to convince you that the only way to live is how others have lived before you.

Getting to know your own critical or self-limiting programmes from the past means becoming more conscious of how you stop yourself from doing what you want. As soon as you are aware of the limiting voice you are able to communicate with it by talking back.

**2. Talking to your inner critic!** Feeling great about yourself and happy in your body simply comes down to a choice that you continue to make day after day, moment by moment. Challenging your inner critic is *essential* for making these changes. If you allow that inner judgmental voice to rule you without it being challenged, you will continue to *feel* how you have always felt and repeat your old patterns of behavior. Imagine that the critical voice is simply an old CD that continues to play on repeat. Whenever you challenge this voice in your head it's as if you are scratching the CD. It doesn't play so well. The more times you make dents and scratches on this CD the more it is unable to play out the old "song." You do this by refusing to let these critical or self-limiting, unkind thoughts go unnoticed. Challenge the thought as soon as you are aware of it by asking the question, "Is this really true about me? The key is to answer from your heart – not your head. Go into your heart, close your eyes and ask yourself if it's really true that you're not good enough or that you can't shine. Ask your heart if it's true that everyone else is better than you or that you can never match up to others. Your heart knows the *real* truth about you. The voice of your heart will never lead you astray. It will also never be unkind. It can't be because the whispers of your heart are the whispers of your soul. Your subconscious mind may throw up a lot of answers to try to maintain it's old belief. Your head may try to argue with the truth of your heart. All you need to do is just go deeper into your heart. Breathe gently, deeply and fully into your heart and keep asking the question, "Really? Is this really true about me? Do I really believe in the core of my being what these critical thoughts are telling me?" The answers are always "No!" If you keep coming up with a "Yes" answer then you need to spend more time in the truth of your heart and allow it to open a little more. Trust it – it will!

**3. Re-program your subconscious mind with new beliefs.** As you listen to the truth of your heart it is important that you begin to follow and align yourself with this truth and inner knowing about the real you. You do this by simply noticing when the old CD starts to play again with the old thought or judgment and you answer it back gently and firmly. You do this by saying, "Thank you for the thought, however it's not true. What's true is... (and then you add in what the truth is about you and what you desire). For example, if you think that you should be thinner in order to be happier or loved, you may say, "Thanks for that thought, but that's not true about me. I am just right the way I am. I am lovable just as I am and this makes me feel happier, and very peaceful!" This may feel very odd at first. Your mind may act up by saying "But you know you don't really believe that!" This doesn't matter. What's

important is that you keep putting in the truth. It takes a little time to really feel and believe in what you are saying. This is because you have felt that the old beliefs were right for so long. They *feel* as if they are the truth. Give yourself time for your feelings to come into alignment with your new more positive and heartfelt statements and truths about you. Remember that what you are doing is directing your subconscious mind to focus on new things. Essentially you are interrupting the old loop of unhelpful thinking and creating a positive circle of confidence. Some great new beliefs you might choose are:

- A) I feel great about me**
- B) I value who I am and believe I am strong, talented, creative and beautiful.**
- C) I love my life.**
- D) I love the way I look – it's me!**
- E) I am unique.**
- F) I treat my body well because I care about me!**
- G) I feel happy, content and excited by my life**

4. **Trigger your body confidence!** Visualization is a powerful way to help reprogramme your subconscious mind. Everything in your life begins with a thought first. Every action and feeling comes from what and how you are thinking. Use this powerful visualization technique to give you instant body confidence whenever you may need it! Follow these steps:
  1. Define how you want to feel. Be exact and specific. Saying that you don't want to feel anxious is not enough. However, saying that you want to feel energized, totally happy, wonderful, excited and full of life gives a clear, precise message to the subconscious.
  2. Recall a time in your life when you felt this way. It's not so important what is happening but the feelings you have about it. Go with your strongest feeling and imagine it as if it were happening right now. Feel the feelings, hear, see and experience everything in this moment. Make the image bigger, brighter, louder and more intense. Build it to its peak and then...
  3. Make a fist with your left hand at the same time as visualizing a symbol, which represents this feeling. If you want to feel calm and centered this might be a picture of a peaceful lake or Buddhist monk. If you want to feel confident, happy and excited it might be a picture of a fairground, balloons, a rock concert etc. Choose whatever image feels right for you.
  4. Hold this state for a few moments and then release. Repeat steps 1-4 five times. After this, any time you need an extra boost of confidence all you have to do is to clench your fist and think of the symbol you chose.

**5. Fall in love with YOU!** Ultimately, every single change that we make in our lives comes from two directions. We are either making changes that come from love (growth and expansion) or fear (protection and contraction). When we make changes from fear we move into stagnation and limitation. We hide away, unsure of our place in this world. We worry what others will think or say about us and we begin to limit *all* areas of our life. However, when you begin to make choices and decisions based on love, your whole world opens up like a flower on a warm summer's day. There is trust that everything is okay. You feel supported. You stop worrying about what others think and become more interested in what thoughts you are thinking. Falling in love with you means building a new, kinder and compassionate relationship with you. It means that you become your best friend. You refuse to speak harshly of yourself. You stop listening to the cruel or harsh judgments that others may have of their body or yours and you *align* yourself with what feels good. It means that you begin to notice when you are tired or low and you seek to comfort yourself in the most loving of ways. Falling in love with who you are is a journey that will invite you to open your heart to the most beautiful person in your life – YOU! It asks you to put yourself on the list of people to love and care about!

**Love is a daily commitment** – To really love who you are, you have to be there for YOU! It's a different way of living. For me it has meant that I place a high priority on a few areas in my life that previously I ignored. My loving commitment means that I seek to look after my body first. I give myself a quiet time in the morning to just sit and breathe and tap into how I am feeling and how I would like the day ahead to be. I may write in my journal or do some of my gentle mindful movement exercises that I created (Chakranetics™). You can find out more at [www.chakranetics.com](http://www.chakranetics.com)

The other major change that I made was to put food first! My relationship with food had always been so difficult to the point that I really didn't know what to eat anymore or feel worthy of giving myself what I truly desired. Food was always an afterthought except on the days that I was bingeing or eating compulsively. The more I loved myself, the more I made healthful loving choices based on wanting the best for me. I began to eat in alignment with how I desired to feel. I spent time shopping for what foods made me feel alive, happy, healthy and full of energy. I researched and studied how food affects how we feel and think and put all this learning into my choices. I spent time preparing food; making up fruit salads, juices, smoothies and making sure I had what I wanted in the fridge. This was a complete turnaround for me. The "old" me really only used food as an escape or medication when I couldn't bear or manage to feel what I was feeling. The "new" me embraces food as a friend and a joy! I love going shopping for foods that will fill my



body with love and health. It is the most loving thing I can do for me and is now my number one priority.

The other ways that I show my body love is to rest when I need to and also prioritize sleep. I watch less TV and rarely look at the news. I read books that nourish my soul and make sure that I have enough space and time in my day to make heart-enlivening decisions. The result has been more inner peace, happiness and joy than I have ever felt before. I am more open and less quick to judge or make snap decisions. When difficulties or challenges arise I am more inclined to take a deep slow full breath than hit the ceiling in temper, frustration or anger. I allow my body to continually shape and reshape its form, flow and feelings according to this loving way of being. I am home and my wish is for you also to come home to your beautiful self.

### Five Quick Body Confidence Boosters!

1. Decide that the next time you look in the mirror you will smile at yourself!
2. Affirm to yourself daily, "I am so proud of me and I open my heart to loving me more and more each day!"
3. Make sure that the only diet you go on is one from negative thoughts, unkind words and actions towards you!
4. At the end of each day, thank your body for all that you have experienced, done, felt and achieved!
5. Next time you find yourself comparing yourself to the blonde beauty standing next to you in the check out queue, compliment her on how great she looks or ask her where she gets her hair done or where her shoes come from. That way not only do you lift your own confidence but you boost hers too and break the comparison trap!



Astrid Longhurst, the founder and director of **the Institute for Body Confidence Coaching**, is passionately committed to helping people build transformative relationships with their bodies and live their life to their full potential.

A highly acclaimed author, speaker, body confidence expert and master movement energy coach, Astrid combines psychology, mind body spirit wisdom, movement medicine and state of the art body confidence coaching to inspire people everywhere to recharge their energy and reclaim their lives.

Astrid offers blended learning courses, long distance coaching, workshops, inspirational

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To learn more and for more information on Astrid’s work, teachings, training and courses please visit:

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