



Learning to love yourself: A guide

Michael Masser and Linda Creed wrote it, Whitney Houston sang it and made it popular—a song entitled “The Greatest Love of All.” In it, the lyrics speak of learning to love oneself and its place as the greatest love of all. Yet for many, the concept—let alone the actual practice—of loving oneself is challenging. It has unfortunately become entangled with the concept of selfishness in American culture—and yet nothing could be further from the truth. Self-love enables us to love and give to others, without the well running dry. Self-love and taking appropriate care of ourselves is what allows us to re-charge and replenish our energy.

The Foundation

Are you harder on yourself than anyone else? Focus for a moment on one of your best friends or a close family member. Choose someone who loves and accepts

you for who you are--warts and all. Now consider this question: Are you at least that good to yourself? That accepting and supportive? If not, it's never too late to start.

What are some practical ways to appreciate and nurture ourselves? Following are suggestions to begin to do just that.

- Take care of your body and its overall health. Eat a healthy diet and maintain some type of exercise regimen. Treat yourself to things that make you feel good, such as a regular massage to rid your body of toxins and relieve stress, a manicure and pedicure, or a facial.
- Make time for fun! Take breaks and participate in activities you enjoy on a regular basis—whether it is an afternoon matinee at the movies, a concert or nice dinner out, or something as simple as a bubble bath by candlelight, reading a book for sheer pleasure, or indulging in a favorite hobby.
- Be aware of your self-talk. That critical voice in our heads is often out of control! It is a struggle for virtually everyone—make a mistake and that inner critic is off and running: “Nothing you do is right—you’re such a loser!” Pay attention to that voice and practice substituting positive, self-affirming statements when those tapes start to play. “We all make mistakes—it’s okay. Making mistakes is how we learn and that’s what’s truly important!”
- Catch yourself doing something right! In tandem with beginning to silence your inner critic, acknowledge yourself when you do something well. Do it in the moment, or take a few minutes for a quick review of the day’s events each evening—and recognize yourself for positive accomplishments, or those qualities you brought to a situation that made a difference. Consider treating yourself to something special as a reward for a time you really sparkled!
- Practice using positive affirmation. What are some personal or life qualities you want to magnify or create? Decide on two or three and focus on them for at least a month—with statements that acknowledge their reality as if it’s already happened. These are called affirmations. For example, “I am loving, caring, and worthy of love,” or “I am powerful and self-confident,” or “I feel healthy and lead a life that is in balance.” Say them aloud throughout the day. You may even want to write them out and post them around your work or home environment. And while it may seem silly at first, they are a

powerful tool for bringing about genuine positive change and attracting more good into your life.

The Benefits

Loving and treating yourself is a no-lose proposition. You will feel better about yourself and approach your world from a more optimistic frame of reference. People will want to be around you, and you will have more to give to others as a result. If you have children, you will be modeling something that is critical to their development of a healthy esteem—perhaps the greatest gift you can provide as a parent. So go ahead, make this a priority and start now!