

Self-Love and Self-Compassion: Our Relationship to Self

Listen to any relationship coach or self-help book these days and you are bound to find something on self-love. Actually so much so, that I would often find myself muttering “who the heck doesn’t love themselves?” Turns out though, it isn’t that they don’t truly love who they are, it’s that there are parts of themselves they just have a hard time accepting (or liking). I have yet to meet a human who loves EVERYTHING about themselves. Not one of us is perfect (and perfect for me is not the same perfect for you). We all have a definition of our “perfect”.

Our relationship with ourselves is the foundation for all other relationships in our lives. You are the only person who will be with you for your entire life (even if there are days you wish you could hide from yourself). Human, remember!! So building a healthy relationship with ourselves is not only valuable, it is vital.

A healthy relationship with ourselves is multi-layered. It’s complicated. It consists of many elements, just like relationships with others. And just like any relationship, there are important ingredients to cultivating a loving, compassionate partnership.

So how do we cultivate a healthy relationship with ourselves? Note I don’t have all the answers but a good place to start is making room for your entire self which includes your imperfections, insecurities and flaws. Taking this one step will help you feel free to be you! Let’s look at other ways:

- Because I spend a lot of time working in mental health and as a happiness and life coach, one of the things that is huge for me is **self-compassion**. In other words, be kind and gentle to yourself. There are going to be days you will be drained, times you will regret something you said or did and, in those times, remind yourself “tomorrow will be better”. Unless you have gone out and intentionally harmed someone (and if you have then take ownership and apologize), we are all going to fuck up. Ask yourself how would you talk to a friend, a loved one? Then do that for yourself. *A simple practice I like to engage in is to place my hand firmly on my heart, take a couple of deep breaths and remind myself that it’s okay. (This simple act is almost like getting a hug).*
- **Notice how you talk to yourself** especially when you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed or challenged. Do you use positive language? Once you start to notice your internal dialogue, you can then draw connections to how you are feeling and the physical effect it is having on your body. Notice, and be your own internal cheerleader.
- **Surround yourself with loving people.** Ultimately building a healthy relationship with self is an individual thing but having people in your life that love and care for you is very important. Although building a healthy relationship with yourself is ultimately something you have to go through on your own, it can help tremendously to have a positive, supportive community.
- **Check in with yourself.** It’s been a rough couple of years with a global pandemic and paradigm shifts appeared to be our modus operandi, especially in the beginning. We can become so preoccupied with *doing* that we stop to really reflect on how we are *feeling*. (And staying busy can be symptomatic of avoiding things rather than dealing with them and that’s not truly self acceptance).

Questions you can ask yourself to check in might include:

- How am I really taking care of myself?

- Is there one small thing I can do to improve my self-care practices?
 - How content do I feel in my personal and professional relationships?
 - Are there any changes can I make to improve the quality of these relationships?
 - What is taking the most time out of my day? Am I content with the activities I'm spending the most time on? If the answer is no, what changes can I make?
 - Do I feel connected to something I think is important and valuable? (A sense of purpose)
- **Practice digital nutrition.** You know the social media accounts that fill your newsfeeds – are they leaving you feeling better or worse about yourself. Be intentional about what you expose yourself to.
 - **Set boundaries.** I get it – it doesn't feel comfortable. But we do need to get in the habit of defining our boundaries and sticking to them. The only people who will truly get upset are perhaps the ones who were not respecting them anyway.

Remember – we are all perfectly imperfect and that is perfectly okay.