



Mental Health 365, Inc.

How To Start Your Journey Towards Self-Acceptance

Learn the philosophy behind self-acceptance and discover effective ways to cultivate acceptance for yourself.

Self-acceptance is an act of embracing all of your attributes, whether mental or physical, and positive or negative, exactly as they are (Morgado, Campana, & Tavares, 2014). From time to time, we may struggle to accept certain qualities that we have. Whether we were criticized as children or compare ourselves to what we see in popular culture or on social media, it is not always easy to find ways to extend compassion to ourselves. Nevertheless, accepting who we are remains vital for our happiness and overall well-being.

Self-acceptance is necessary for our psychological health and overall well-being. Read below for a more in-depth explanation of each of these facets.

Self-Acceptance for Psychological Health

Low self-acceptance can be one way that our psychological health suffers. When we don't fully accept ourselves, we put ourselves at a higher risk for experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Macinnes, 2006). In particular, when we reject negative qualities about ourselves, it can lead us to ruminate about these attributes, which can encourage negative self-talk. Examples of negative self-talk may include statements such as:

- "I'm not good enough."
- "I am such a failure."
- "That person is so smart. I could never be like that."

Negative statements that we tell ourselves can thus evolve into feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, sadness, and anxiety. However, when we do accept ourselves, especially the qualities that we are not always proud of, we have more control over our emotions. In other words, self-acceptance can prevent anxiety and depression.

Self-Acceptance for Happiness and Well-Being

Similar to psychological health, self-acceptance is a key to our happiness and overall well-being. When we have more control over our thought patterns and feelings, we can manage negative self-talk better, too. In fact, higher levels of self-acceptance boost our self-esteem, allow us to be more confident about ourselves, and give us the power to handle criticism better (Szentagatoi & David, 2013).

Self-Acceptance as a Means for Change

Perhaps you've read this far and may have the impression that self-acceptance means staying stagnant or being complacent. This is easy to think about, especially because the philosophy of self-acceptance encourages us to embrace every part of ourselves. However, self-acceptance lets us recognize and wholeheartedly embrace our weaknesses so that we become aware of the things in our lives we do want to change.

Personal growth is amplified through a lens of self-acceptance. We cannot improve ourselves without being in touch with who we are. In turn, becoming more self-accepting lets us practice more acts of self-love and self-compassion, which help us transform into our most authentic selves (Boyras & Kuhl, 2015).

How to Practice Self-Acceptance

The theory behind self-acceptance sounds great, but how do we begin to practice this in our daily lives? Let's take a look at a few techniques you can try.

- **Remind yourself that you are a work in progress.** Have you ever started a new hobby? Perhaps you've been wanting to expand your skills in the kitchen and start taking a baking class. You notice your classmates make a delicious batch of chocolate chip cookies, but you accidentally burned yours in the oven. When you make mistakes, negative self-talk may be peeking around the corner, ready to break into your mind. Maybe you tell yourself, "I'm a horrible baker" or "I'm never coming back to class because I'm not good at this." An alternative to this cognitive response is to tell yourself you are a work in progress. Next time you find yourself in a new situation that you are not automatically good at, try saying, "I will get better at this", or "It's okay, this was my first time, and mistakes happen." Allowing yourself to accept that you messed up this batch of cookies can release the expectation of perfection and enable you to happily try again (Carson & Langer, 2006).
- **Keep a gratitude journal.** If you catch yourself thinking about things that went wrong during the day or ruminating on what your negative qualities are, you may want to think about ways to shift your focus to a more positive mindset. One way to accomplish this is by having a journal (or maybe even the notes app on your phone) to write down a few things you are grateful to have in your life every day. When we focus on the positive, we begin to reduce feelings of lacking and negativity, which can boost

our ability to accept ourselves more mindfully (Carson & Langer, 2006).

- **View your experiences from a different perspective.** Find yourself ruminating on a situation that evokes discomfort or unhappiness? Try looking at the situation from a different perspective, or try to find a silver lining. Maybe you are headed to a party on a hot summer night, and suddenly the sprinklers come on and get your clothes wet. What a frustrating experience, right? What could you do to make it less frustrating? Maybe you laugh at the situation or find the positive (e.g., it was a hot day, and the water did cool me down). Or perhaps you talk to a loved one for their perspective on the matter. Sometimes we can remain stuck in our feelings. When we look at situations with fresh eyes, we can find things we didn't notice before that may help us accept the experience (Carson & Langer, 2006).

In Sum

Self-acceptance is not a practice that we can master in a day, and that is completely okay. The important thing is to familiarize yourself with the concept and slowly find ways to incorporate self-acceptance into your own life to better support your psychological well-being and promote happiness.

References

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