

A Seven-Step Prescription for Self-Love

Self-love is an action, not a state of feeling good.

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KEY POINTS

- Self-love is a state of appreciation for oneself that grows from actions that support one's physical, psychological, and spiritual growth.
- The more self-love one has, the more one can attract people and circumstances that support one's well-being.
- Ways to cultivate self-love include setting boundaries and living intentionally.

Self-love is a popular term today that gets tossed around in normal conversation: "You have to love yourself more." "Why don't you love yourself?" "If you only loved yourself, this wouldn't have happened to you." "You can't love another person until you love yourself first." These are just a few of the self-love directives we give or get to suggest a way to more living fulfillment.

Self-love is important to living well. It influences who you pick for a mate, the image you project at work, and how you cope with the problems in your life. It is so important to your welfare that I want you to know how to bring more of it into your life.

What is self-love?

Is self-love something you can obtain through a beauty makeover or a new set of clothes? Can you get more of it by reading something inspirational? Or, can a new relationship make you love yourself more? The answer to all of these questions is no. Although they feel good and are gratifying, you can't grow in self-love through these types of activities.

Self-love is not simply a state of feeling good. It is a state of appreciation for oneself that *grows from actions* that support our physical, psychological, and spiritual growth. Self-love is dynamic; it grows through actions that mature us. When we act in ways that expand self-love in ourselves, we begin to accept much better our weaknesses as well as our strengths, have less need to explain away our shortcomings, have compassion for ourselves as human beings struggling to find personal meaning, are more centered in our life purpose and values, and expect living fulfillment through our own efforts.

How to cultivate self-love

1. *Become mindful*. People who have more self-love tend to know what they think, feel, and want. They are mindful of who they are and act on this knowledge, rather than on what others want for them.
2. *Act on what you need rather than what you want*. You love yourself when you can turn away from something that feels good and exciting to what you need to stay strong, centered, and moving forward in your life, instead. By staying focused on what you need, you turn away from automatic behavior patterns that get you into trouble, keep you stuck in the past, and lessen self-love.
3. *Practice good self-care*. You will love yourself more when you take better care of your basic needs. People high in self-love nourish themselves daily through healthy activities, like sound nutrition, exercise, proper sleep, intimacy, and healthy social interactions.
4. *Set boundaries*. You'll love yourself more when you set limits or say no to work, love, or activities that deplete or harm you physically, emotionally, and spiritually, or express poorly who you are.
5. *Protect yourself*. Bring the right people into your life. I love the term *frenemies* that I learned from my younger clients. It describes so well the type of "friends" who take pleasure in your pain and loss rather than in your happiness and success. My suggestion to you here: *Get rid of them!* There isn't enough time in your life to waste on people who want to take away the shine on your face that says, "I genuinely love myself and life." You will love and respect yourself more.
6. *Forgive yourself*. We humans can be so hard on ourselves. The downside of taking responsibility for our actions is punishing ourselves too much for mistakes in learning

and growing. You have to accept your humanness (the fact that you are not perfect) before you can truly love yourself. Practice being less hard on yourself when you make a mistake. Remember, there are no failures if you have learned and grown from your mistakes; there are only lessons learned.

7. *Live intentionally.* You will accept and love yourself more, no matter what is happening in your life, when you live with purpose and design. Your purpose doesn't have to be crystal clear to you. If your intention is to live a meaningful and healthy life, you will make decisions that support this intention, and feel good about yourself when you succeed in this purpose. You will love yourself more if you see yourself accomplishing what you set out to do. You need to establish your living intentions, to do this.

If you choose just one or two of these self-love actions to work on, you will begin to accept and love yourself more. Just imagine how much you'll appreciate *you* when you exercise these seven steps to self-love. It is true that you can only love a person as much as you love yourself. If you exercise all of the actions of self-love that I describe here, you will allow and encourage others to express themselves in the same way. The more self-love you have for yourself, the better prepared you are for healthy relating. Even more, you will start to attract people and circumstances to you that support your well-being.