

How To

Practice Self-kindness



Self-worth

The core issue I see time and time again is low self-worth. Whether it manifests as anxiety or depression, often, when you dig a little deeper, the root cause comes down to having a poor relationship with the self.

Usually, this stems from our earlier years and core beliefs which we may have formed around being unlovable, insignificant or not being good enough. This will reflect in every part of our lives, including our relationships, family, work, goals, health, to how we think, feel and behave.

The saddest part about these unworthy beliefs is that they are not usually ours to begin with. Nevertheless, given time to take root, they can become the pervasive and corrosive thread that runs through our lives, keeping us small, in the shadows and limiting us from reaching our true potential.

If something was learnt in childhood, then that means we need to unlearn it. These beliefs came from others, from the messages we received from those around us. This is not about blame either, as we may not have caused it, but it is certainly our responsibility if we want to change it. Staying in the blame game just keeps us in victim mentality which is a disempowering place to be. When you decide you want better for yourself and take responsibility, that is an empowering standpoint. Think about that for a moment.

Many of us are too quick to judge ourselves harshly, criticising the way we do things, over analysing everything we said in that conversation, worrying about what others think and the list goes on.

Treating ourselves poorly and negative self-talk can be extremely damaging to our self-esteem, self-worth and how we see ourselves in general. Most of us underestimate how deeply critical we are toward ourselves. If we looked a little deeper and became more aware of the cruel way in which we speak to ourselves, we would be devastated. We would not dream of speaking to someone else in the way that we do ourselves!

As I mentioned, these messages may relate to the messages we were given by our caregivers or could stem from that one teacher who said that we were no good. Whatever the reason, it is time to take a different stance so that we can feel good about ourselves and nourish this inner relationship. When you decide to take better care of that relationship it will result in a healthier sense of self, improved self-confidence and encourage more positive emotions and wellbeing.

The relationship we have with ourselves is the most important relationship we will have in this lifetime and one to be honoured, cherished and nurtured, not neglected, scolded and blamed.

The journey to self-acceptance and self-love is not a straight-forward pathway but learning how to be kind to oneself is a great start! Self-kindness is a beautiful practice which over time, will provide a multitude of lovely benefits, but as with all practices, it takes commitment and patience.



On the following pages you can find some ideas about how you can improve the relationship with yourself through self-kindness practices.

Self-Kindness Practices

• Setting Intention

One of the simplest ways to self-kindness is to start the day off right! When you wake up in the morning think about your day ahead and how you would like to treat yourself during the day.

Here is a simple formula that I like to use:

What are you going to feed yourself today?

Are you going to feed yourself with criticism, loathing, berating, name calling, harsh words, rigidity, impossible expectations, negative thinking, worry, comparison or neglect?

All of which could result in feelings such as sadness, emptiness, loneliness, anxiety, depression, stress, worthlessness, anger, irritation, shame or guilt.

Or

Are you going to feed yourself with kindness, compassion, gentleness, praise, love, friendship, realistic expectations, care and encouragement?

All of which could result in feelings such as wellness, self-confidence, worthiness, peace, calm, contentment, accomplishment, joy, fulfilment, pride or bliss.

A simple question to start your day, which could potentially change the direction of your entire day!

• Avoid Comparing

Comparing yourself to others is a fruitless and often self-defeating task which can leave you feeling unworthy, envious, and not good enough. The other side of this of course, is that you may feel smug or better than others. Neither of which is healthy for the soul.

Social Media is a huge culprit when it comes to playing the comparison game. Check it out for yourself, scroll down your news feed and see which posts cause you to have that internal flinch. Become aware of when you compare and who triggers you. Write down how this negatively affects you. You may be surprised to discover the feelings and emotions that are coming up for you.

When you become more aware of your own comparing, you will be able to manage it better by avoiding your triggers and to remind yourself that how others appear on the outside is not necessarily what is happening on the inside.

Additionally, we all have strengths and weaknesses. You have your own unique journey so recognise that other people's paths are not the same as yours. What is right for them is not necessarily what is right for you. Get out of other people's lanes and be your own unique, beautiful self!

And most importantly, learn to love your own unique journey. Trust me, it won't be the same as anyone else's.

• Self-praise

How easy is it for us to give others praise? Much easier than ourselves, right? We are all so quick to look at the things we didn't do well or did not quite go according to plan but how often do we sit and reflect on what we achieved or what we did well in our day?

Take a few minutes at the end of your day and acknowledge your wins. These don't have to be huge achievements as even the small things may be achievements for where you are in your own personal journey. For some, even getting out of bed in the morning may be an achievement.

The important thing here is to really start noticing and feeding that part of you that needs some care and attention. See if you can write down 3 things at the end of each day that you can give yourself some credit for. Keep it simple and avoid over-complicating this exercise.

• Inner Voice

As mentioned earlier, the inner critical voice is so damaging and detrimental to your inner wellbeing so start warding off those negative thoughts about yourself and flip it on its head. Choose a more positive and nurturing thought that supports who you are. For example, instead of “I am rubbish at writing essays” choose “I do find essays a challenge, but I always try my best.”

You will also notice that when you speak to yourself in a kind and caring way, the tone and energy of what you are saying is much softer and gentler. If you do struggle to find a more supportive thought, think about how you would speak to a 5-year-old child. You wouldn't tell a 5-year-old that they did a rubbish job would you? When we imagine what we might say to a child, it changes the whole essence of the message as it will be communicated with tenderness, care and kindness.

This is how you can speak to yourself, and I know it sounds strange and it might feel silly or weird at first but explore, experiment and eventually you will start to use a whole new language with yourself. This gets easier over time and with practice.

• Self-compassion

Self-compassion really is a magical tool and can transform the way you treat yourself and encourages more positive emotions.

Self-compassion is the ability to be compassionate towards the self in times of perceived inadequacy, failure or suffering. Kristin Neff has defined self-compassion as being composed of three main components – self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

The easiest way to think about self-compassion is to think about what you would say to a good friend in times of struggle and basically give yourself the same kindness and care that you'd give to that friend. So, for example, if you were having a difficult morning which meant you were late for work, instead of beating yourself up and calling yourself all sorts of names, you might think about what you would say to a close friend in the same situation. You might say “I am so sorry you are having a difficult day.” Try saying what you would say to another, to yourself. Isn't this so much better than giving yourself a tough time?!

For more information and resources on Self-compassion visit <https://self-compassion.org/>

• Self-care

I am a huge advocate of self-care because I do not believe that you can access wellbeing without adding the intention of self-care to your routine. So, what is self-care? Self-care is the purposeful activities you choose with the sole purpose of improving your wellbeing. It is also a great message to yourself that you value yourself enough to take care of your wellbeing.

Self-care is wonderfully flexible and open, so it will mean different things to different people. Essentially, it is about you knowing what action to take that will nourish your soul. For some people, this might be a walk-in nature whilst for others it might be relaxing and watching a movie.

Listen to your body and soul and tune in to what it is craving right now. It could be to move, to dance, it could be to find stillness in meditation, it could be healthy food or time with friends. The point is that you are doing it because you know it is good for your wellbeing. We are all ignoring our needs too often, to tend to the daily grind!

• Self-appreciation

Self-appreciation is the process of appreciating and being grateful for yourself. Our minds are so often filled with self-criticism and self-blame that leave us feeling rubbish about ourselves. But what if you purposefully took some time to reflect on the parts of you that you appreciate? This could be related to your qualities, your strengths, your nature, what you are good at, your skills, your talents but it could also relate to physical parts of the self, such as your body, your face, your hair, how you look or your clothing style. I realise this may not be easy for some but challenge yourself to find something about your appearance or body that you can appreciate. We can also take time to appreciate our health, our senses, our ability to breath, move and function.

Take time at the end of your day and see if you can write 3 things down that you appreciate about yourself. Or you could write a gratitude list and see how many things you can identify. Another great tool is to write a letter of appreciation to yourself. Perhaps you have been going through a hard time and you could write a letter to yourself, telling yourself how proud you are for your strength, courage, and resilience. You can be as creative as you like with this as long as the purpose is to appreciate yourself.

If we take the time to really look at what we like or love about ourselves, we can find many things that perhaps we had taken for granted in the past. If you do struggle with this practice, then get a friend or family member to help you. You may be surprised what others can see about you that you cannot see in yourself.

• Self-acceptance

We all have strengths and talents that we are proud of and we also all have weaknesses and flaws that we hide from the world. Accept this as part of being human and learn to love yourself and accept yourself just as you are.

Write a list of all the things you feel you do not accept about yourself and then beside each one, ask yourself, "Can I accept this as part of myself even if I do not particularly like it? Can I accept that I am not perfect?" You can also ask yourself if you would be happy to accept this in someone else. If you can accept it in someone else, then why not give yourself the same kindness. You can also practice self-acceptance by saying affirmations in the mirror, such as "I fully accept myself, just as I am." It is a wonderful way to start the day and you can put a post-it on your bathroom mirror or somewhere where you will see it first thing.

Again, this will feel very strange in the beginning but with plenty of practice, you will start to feel good about who you truly are. Find an affirmation that works for you, but most of all, embrace and accept who you are.

• Self-forgiveness

This practice is so important and such a beautiful way of healing the relationship we have with ourselves.

Making mistakes is a normal part of the human experience and something that we all do. Sometimes, it is not even our past mistakes that hurt us the most, but the story we create around it about who we are. Forgiving ourselves is part of letting that story go. If you are not continuing with the same behaviour and mistakes, then why are you still carrying it around with you? I know it is not quite as simple as this depending on the circumstances, but I am sure that there are many things that we all carry that on-one else even thinks are a big deal and yet we continue to drag it through our lives.

A lovely way to do this, is to write a forgiveness letter to yourself. It is best to do this when you have some time and space to reflect and think about all the things you would like to forgive yourself for.

This exercise can bring up emotion but know that that is part of the healing process and on the other side of healing is lightness and wellbeing.

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