

Learning to Love Ourselves
by Marlene Neufeld

Learning to love ourselves is one of the most essential skills in both healthy living and in creating a conscious loving relationship with someone else. We can't genuinely love others if we can't love ourselves. If we don't love ourselves then we are constantly looking for love from others and constantly believing that we are not getting enough. Our focus becomes whether or not they love us, rather than how much love we can offer. Loving others can only come from a place of genuine self-love.

Trying to get others to love us from our place of not loving ourselves doesn't work either. The paradox is that the more we try to get people to convince us that we are loveable, the less we believe them. When we finally learn to give ourselves the love we want, then other people can love us and it will feel satisfying because it is not filling a void.

But, why don't we love ourselves? There are a number of reasons why self-love is not automatic. We inaccurately believe that there is not enough love to go around (we believe that if I love myself, I won't love others). Also, even with the best of parents and life situations, we experience events in our formative years where love is conditional or not available to us. We make generalizations (that's how we learn – we generalize from specific situations) based on these events that there isn't enough love to go around. We base our future actions on this belief. We then make up reasons so our belief makes sense. We think, "maybe I did something wrong" or "maybe I'm not really loveable." Reasons are positions the mind takes under stress. Whenever we are in too much pain to look at what is really going on, our minds will make up a reason to make things fit a little better. Ultimately, in order to grow, we have to go beyond our reasons.

Each of us must take responsibility for sourcing love. We need to find our own way to meet & greet all parts of ourselves with love. True self love is not conditional. It is there whether we are being good or bad, weak or strong, performing up to expectations or falling on our faces.

In order to love ourselves we need to separate ourselves from our actions. We need to go beyond appreciating ourselves for what we believe is positive, or the good things we do or are. Love is the ability to greet the

dark parts of ourselves with the same gracious embrace as you greet the light. Love draws no distinctions.

Here's an activity for you to explore loving even the dark parts of yourself:

1. On the left half of a sheet of paper finish the following sentence, "I'll love myself when....." For example, you might write, "I'll love myself when I lose 30 pounds." or "I'll love myself when I no longer smoke." Make the list as long as you can.
2. Then on the right side of the same sheet, beside each sentence, write "I love _____ completely now." For example, "I love my weight completely now." or "I love myself even though I smoke."
3. Now read each sentence from the right side of your sheet out loud, and pause and notice your response. Take your response and use it in the following sentence, "I love myself for _____". For example, if you shudder when you say "I love my weight completely now." then you would say "I love myself for shuddering" or if you feel hopeless when you say "I love myself even though I smoke." then you would say "I love myself for feeling hopeless."
4. Keep following your responses until you begin to feel more love and acceptance.

True self-love is not about condoning your hurtful behavior or about being conceited. It is about celebrating who you are no matter what you do or how well you perform.

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