

What Self-Love Means: 20+ Ways to Be Good to Yourself

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“Self-love requires you to be honest about your current choices and thought patterns and undertake new practices that reflect self-worth.” ~Caroline Kirk

If one more person told me to “love myself” I was going to levitate into the air and pull one of those impossible martial arts moves from Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. I was sick of it!

What the heck does loving myself mean? Were they talking about bubble baths, pedicures, and cucumber masks? It turns out there is so much more to self-love than just pampering ourselves. I found this out the hard way.

About a year and a half ago, I almost died after a bad breakup. I had devoted so much of my energy to making the relationship work that I had completely neglected my own needs, and had given away my power and my responsibility for happiness.

As I wrote about here, when I finally developed the courage to end an addictive and painful relationship, I had to live with the effects of lack of self-love.

I struggled to eat, sleep, or continue my daily functioning. I spent every waking hour to myself, trying to understand how and why I had gotten there. I had to know, because whatever it was, if I did not attend to it, this was going to be the end of the road for me. I knew it.

I made mixed media collages, journaled, watched *The Notebook* five more times, cried, and called up friends to keep me company while I ate my few bites each day.

During this whole time, I found places in my story where I was not present to my own life, my body, or my spirit. I was just there. I found the places where I had abandoned myself and then gotten mad at the other person for not meeting my needs.

The truth was, I did not have a big enough inner container to hold the love I so desired even if I received it, because my self-love tank had shrunk down to the size of a bottle cap.

It finally became very clear to me that there was one core reason I had gotten there: I did not know anything about self-love.

This realization launched me into a relentless search for the meaning of self-love, internally and externally.

I found that self-love is not a destination; it's a practice. Self-love is the foundation on which we build a happy life. Without self-love, we have nowhere to put the love or abundance that comes to us.

Not sure what it looks like to love yourself? Here is what I've learned. Self-love is...

1. Choosing ourselves, even if it means upsetting others and not being popular anymore. Even if it means we leave a party before anyone else because we feel tired, overwhelmed, or just plain feel done with the crowd.
2. Telling what is true for us, not swallowing words that express what we truly feel, think, or want to do.
3. Giving our body the nurturing, rest, exercise, and comfort it needs to the best of our ability.

4. Wearing clothes that make us feel good and fit our personality instead of wearing clothes that are in fashion that we use to impress others.
5. Building a life that we love while we are single instead of waiting for our prince/princess to show up to explore life and to be happy.
6. Accepting ourselves with the good, the bad, the ugly, the sexy, and the smelly—all of it—and appreciating ourselves as whole people.
7. Making time to do whatever we love, just to play, without worrying about wasting time.
8. Owning our inner and outer beauty and complimenting ourselves without feeling guilty, arrogant, or entitled.
9. Not rehashing our past mistakes and dragging ourselves to a dark place when we know that we can only learn from the past; we can't change it.
10. Spending some quality, connected time with ourselves instead of always watching TV or wasting time on the Internet.
11. Using discretion when sharing our heart, self, and dreams with others.
12. Trusting the path that our soul is on and making a genuine effort to become a conscious co-creator of our destiny.
13. Not blaming our parents for our current issues, and looking for ways to heal our wounds and change our dysfunctional patterned behaviors by reaching out to ministers, therapists, coaches, and healers.
14. Following what our gut/intuition says instead of living out of our brain and ego.
15. Staying in our integrity, both when it comes to ourselves and when interacting with others out in the world. This includes keeping ourselves in check regarding patterns such as lying, manipulating, co-depending, withholding, and pretending.
16. Allowing ourselves to dream big, without contaminating these dreams with judgments, our perceived limitations, or a lack of sense of deserving.
17. Knowing how we're spending our emotional, mental, financial, and physical energy, and whether these activities bring back joy, connection, nurturing, rest, and creativity to our lives.
18. Taking responsibility for all of our experiences. Knowing that we have the ability for deeper self-awareness and access to our intuition when it comes to making life choices.
19. Not labeling ourselves with others' opinions of us, while having the courage to look inside to see if there might be some truth to them.
20. Learning to set boundaries that protect and nurture our relationships, with ourselves and others.
21. Allowing ourselves to make mistakes and not berating ourselves for making them. Instead, choosing to appreciate our desire to learn and grow.
22. Refusing to seek permission or approval to be ourselves. Recognizing that we, like everyone else, deserve to take up space on this planet just as who we are right now.

And lastly, self-love is:

23. Loving and accepting ourselves even when we fail miserably at some of these self-love goals.

No one else can offer these things to us. No one else can take our vitamins for us or prevent us from going into a self-loathing attack.

Even if we land the best partner on the planet, this person won't be able to make us happy and feel loved unless we create the space for it inside by practicing self-love. This is why self-love is an inside job.

From my heart to your heart...