

Self Love Campaign



2021

Thank you to all our participants!!!!

The Mental Health Association
in Atlantic County

Climbing My Way to Self Love

My journey with Self Love is synonymous with climbing a mountain.

When I go hiking and get halfway up the mountain, the view is already starting to look beautiful.

There was one point in my life when I thought that was enough. I'd think, "Well, it was hard enough to get here and I've never gotten this far or seen this view before, so I guess I'll just stay right here." But, a strong force inside of me insisted I keep moving. So, throughout life as I kept growing and working hard to love myself, the "view" kept becoming all the more beautiful. Then, what seemed like the impossible happened – I made it to "the top."

The best view comes after the hardest climb. This is true to any hiker, yet also true in my own journey with Self Love. It was an exhausting trek marred with slippery rocks of doubt. But, despite the challenges, I made it and you can do it too. You are deserving of ALL the love. Keep Going.

Much Love, Bern

Photo 1- A collage I created to memorialize my Self Love journey through hiking.

Photo 2- A photo I took from the top of Mount Mansfield, Vermont.



For someone who is a beacon for others, my fear of vulnerability turns me into a small child ready for shame. My fear of rejection and being called “bad” carries with me. Just be good, do the right thing, make people love you.

This journey has been a long one, but always leading to a happier me.

I used to think I was ugly. That no one would like me. That I wasn't good enough. I know now I am beautiful, lovable, more than enough.

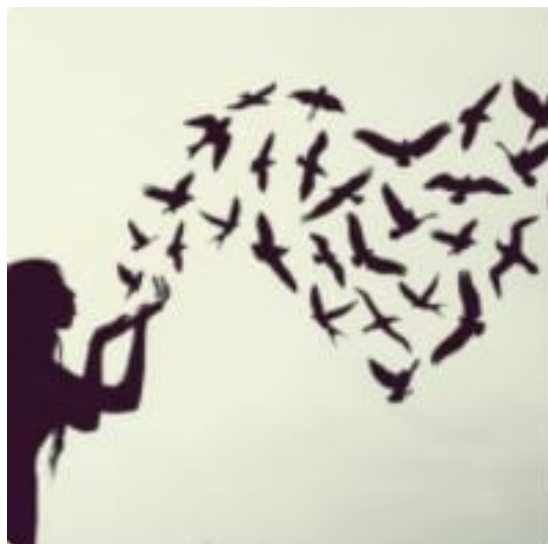
There are pit stops. I practice honesty, even if the other person doesn't like it. I have to get myself there, knowing I'm worth such a boundary.

Self love is complicated. You are loved, loving, lovable.. Everyone is hoping to be treated the way we want to feel inside.

Allow yourself to sift through all of your brokenness, to dig below the muck that has hidden it away, to that soft mushy part of you that you're afraid to touch for fear of it completely breaking.

Let it break. You can only grow by holding the small child in your soul close, and saying “I see you, I hear you, I love you.”

-Mandi Dorrell school librarian and adjunct professor at Rowan



My story of self love is probably similar to the story of many others out there, 2020 was a tough one for me, emotionally, physically, and spiritually speaking, lost my father to Covid 19 and my oldest brother to cancer eight months later, I got depressed, I was anxious, I was mad, I had many questions without answers, I was getting desperate for HELP. Until one day, one day I stopped, Started realizing that I was the only one that had to do something for myself, of course my family were there for me, I had sessions with therapists, Dr visits, but something was still missing, somehow I came across this phone number 609 6523800, you guys may recognize this number, I called and a person pick up, she explained and guided me on how to join emotional support groups, but wasn't until I joined my first support group for depression and anxiety, that voice of a compassionate young woman that assisted me like no one before, she understood my pain, my emotional pain, I knew then that I was on the right track, the connection was made. Self love is about stopping and looking at your own self, meeting your own needs, your own emotional needs. compassion, understanding others without judging, self loving, be kind, honesty, some of the things I have experienced joining the MHA support groups, thank you to all the peer facilitators, and to all the wonderful people I have meet at the groups, with much respect and admiration. This is what self love means for me, Thank you. -Sergio Lopez.



Daily, I get out of bed, there are so many out there that have trouble getting out of bed. Then I think about that day so long ago that I vocalized that I wanted to shave my head bald: a time when I wanted to throw away the word self-love that moment when you realize or have that aha moment that: "you matter" and there are people that you don't even know that are working in your favor. In all honesty, I wanted to be vocal at a time when I was careless that is when someone said: "Did you take your medicine?" or "Your crazy to do something like that chop off all your beautiful hair off!" Then I realized that everything that they were trying to instill in my feeble brain was self-love. It's that person that cheers you on in silence, or gets in your face for not thinking straight, and above all it's the intent behind someone's actions...that person that breaks down the barriers and reaches into your heart that's self-love to me; for, it does not matter the external but the internal; the heart.

- Chantele Olivo



Self Love

A thought, a feeling or emotion, followed by behavior
Separated myself between a person and disorder, this point
did not waiver

Self Love came from within and surfaced with effort and toiled
labor

A kiss on the cheek before hitting the sack

A self given pat on the back

Validation from others, still security I did lack

Thought it was acid reflux in my throat

Was really strong feelings that I did not emote

Used invisible ink so no one could see what I wrote

Self love is a fire within

Not selfish and certainly not a sin

Connected with my inner child and asked my adult self, 'Where
have you been?'

Trickled the idea that I was caring and intentions were pure

Gratitude and Relaxation better than any medication in store

With reflection and mindfulness, closer to a cure

Lost the self-love for a while, yet was always there, down to the
very core

So looked in the dictionary under soar

Then i knew my guardian angel was with me for sure

p.s. When I looked up "unconditional support" I saw a picture
of all of you.

-Donna L Haring



I used to sit on the vanity in the bathroom with my dad while he shaved his beard. As I did this, he would compliment me and encourage me to do the same. My mom could hear us down the hall saying, "we are so beautiful," and "look at how gorgeous our eyes are." To this day, I find myself staring in mirrors and talking myself up. Some have jokingly called me cocky, among other things. They know as well as I do though that I'm a humble person, I just refuse to give myself less than others.

Despite my strong and early beginnings of self-love, I am no stranger to dark times and moments of doubt or weakness. In 2017, after experiencing two incredibly tough break ups within a year of each other, I found myself completely lost. The previous 7 years of my life was spent giving most of my love to others. So the summer of 2017 was spent finding and falling in love with myself again. I spent every day with myself; getting to know myself again, taking care of myself, and loving myself as passionately as I had been loving everyone else.

-Britt



Being able to love one's self looks different to everyone. For me it was accepting what some consider flaws and own them like the gifts they are. That is easier said than done when we are constantly bombarded with images or ideas that are unrealistic. These ideas are just not about standards in beauty but expectations about how we parent, being smarter, faster, richer or having the better life. I heard someone make a comment after making a mistake, "now its imperfectly perfect." That's when it clicked for me. The grey hairs, the extra pounds, glasses, being over 40 in college, others might see as flaws but they are MY imperfect

perfections.
This is my story.
I am proud of it.
This is who I am.
I accept me, all of me.
It's about loving myself,
It's also respecting myself.
This is what I need in my life.
And I will always remember,
It's not always about what we want,
But sometimes about getting what we need.
That is me being imperfectly perfect.

-Mary



I used to struggle to find the selflove in the #selfcare culture. I would see on instagram, pintrest, even on TV #selfcare and a glass of wine, or an elaborate purchase. Everyone should determine what feeds his/her love for him/herself, but I started to wonder if #selfcare was always working. When I tried what I saw in the hashtag world of selfcare it did not seem to work long term. At the same time, I saw the community overall struggling to love themselves. So, I started to wonder why selfcare was not affirming people's love for themselves.

I looked at what actions fed my wellness. Often the things that helped me feel the best, were not fun to do in the moment. I realized that #selfcare did not reflect what fed my soul. The pesty things on my to-do list- such as following up on doctor's appointments, cleaning my house, turning the TV off early, preparing healthy meals, taking screen breaks actually helped me feel better longer. Sometimes loving myself meant doing something uncomfortable. So now as I fold my laundry or exercise, I remind myself these are little acts of self-love I choose to do to care for myself.

-Carolyn Quinn



Self love is

Listening to the voice
To the pinch in my gut
To the hunch that has no tangible reason
For existing
Yet begs to be followed anyway

It is deconstructing
Years of flagellating doubt
Tearing down walls
Built for protection
But with barbed wires facing in

It is quite
It is patience
To make mistakes
To grow
To gift myself

With healing
That abides by no timeline but
Its own

Self love is

Denying the lie
Of should
And accepting the Truth
Of being

Enough

Andrea Sornberger

2/1/2020



Having had a troubled childhood, self-hatred began stewing inside me at a very early age. I believed that everything that went wrong just had to be my fault, and this belief just fueled my attachment to self-hate.

On the surface, I worked hard to be responsible, gentle, kind, funny, charming, and polite, but I felt like a performer in a show that just would not close. I gravitated toward multiple addictions and endured consequences that only validated the deep self-loathing that coated my spirit in its muck and mire.

Then, in 2001, I entered my first 12 Step meeting. Years of being in program and working the steps multiple times, together with therapy, slowly cleansed my insides of self-hate. As I did increasingly estimable things, and began the long process of reforming my character, I learned to respect and like myself.

These days I take the actions of love in the way that I nurture myself with self-care. I am not sure that I love me yet, but I believe that continuing to act as if I do will bring that day soon.

-Randy

**“In reality, other people
liking you is a bonus.
You liking yourself is
the real prize.”**

-UNKNOWN



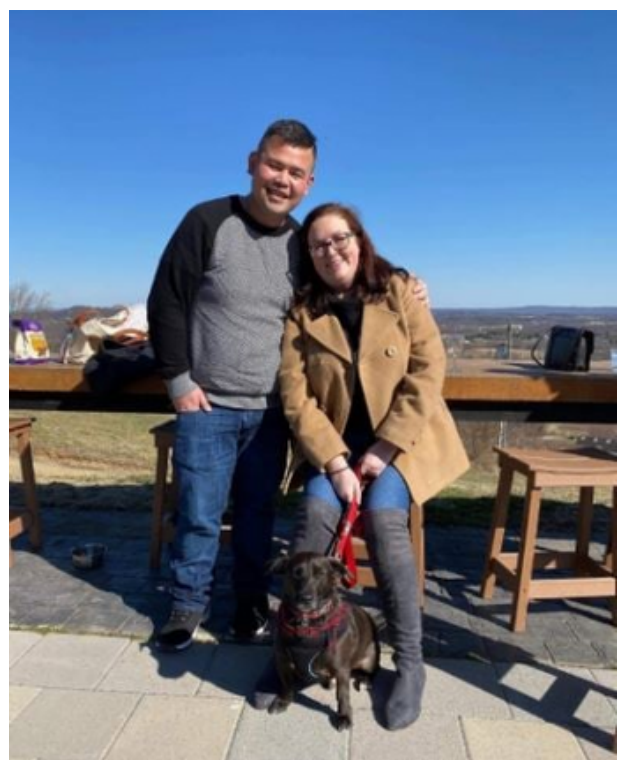
I have been moving from understanding self-love as an activity (yoga class, meditation session, hot bubbly tub, walk through the woods, dinner with a loved one) to a way of being in the world. Some days when I am completely exhausted, too tired to do yoga or drum up enough interesting or funny things to have a conversation, I sigh, then I rest, not the guilty/shameful rest of, this is weakness I should be doing more, I always must be doing more type of rest, but the type of rest where I find a quiet space, close my eyes and completely surrender to the moment. I place my hands over my heart and feel the love present there, letting go more and more until tears fill my eyes and suddenly there is no separation, just love, giving itself away completely in that moment. When I experience love as my true nature, the foundation of this existence, and that love is always there always waiting for me, (just as long as I am willing to open and surrender to it), there is a freedom that makes the challenges in life suddenly small and manageable.

-Nate Morrell



The most important thing about self love for me is to remember it's a journey - not a destination! Every day I make intentions to practice self love and respect. It's most helpful when I'm surrounded by others who treat me the way I should treat myself. I feel as though I thrive in self love when I practice mindfulness, spend time outdoors, or am in a safe and cozy place with family, friends, and my dog Finn. I am definitely making self love a priority during the loving month of February.

- Meghan Co



Hi, I would like to acknowledge not only my Modern Self Love but the dedication it led me to each day. I always looked and never found. At times, I would see but could not touch. Some could call that suffering. Some called it normal. It also could always re-occur when I was not looking.

There were places and things that led me to look. It always entailed a physical and mental release . Things like hiking or just breathing salt air. I since the age of 8 have found lighthouse's my source of Strength, Faith and Hope. Always there to guide those looking for guidance and relying on a beam of faith to be able to touch that shoreline.

As I share my efforts with others, some support it and some cannot commit. I have to commit daily and with GROWTH. To me, releasing it is MY MODERN SELF LOVE. Releasing it in any way daily outdoors and always looking forward to my growth.

Be well,
Brian B.



Modern SELF Love by Naida Burgess

It's taken quite a few years to know I deserved self love, as taking time to nurture myself felt selfish and egocentric. As a daughter, sister, wife, mother, friend, teacher, counselor, and business owner, I felt I didn't have time for such things and put the needs of everything and everyone around me first. I felt exhausted, angry and stressed out.

I realized to survive, I had to take care and love myself first (and that wasn't easy) before I could take care and love anyone else. Forgiving myself was a huge part of this, and realizing that the past was, the past. Learning to set healthy boundaries, actually saying no, speaking my truth and learning to love myself flaws and all, has and continues to be a process.

I practice self love for my mind by being present with all of my thoughts and feelings in daily meditation. I practice self love for my body through yoga, being outdoors and mindful eating. I practice self love for my spirit through prayer. I can look in the mirror and give myself a thumbs up, and know I'm ok just as I am.



“Self love is not a light switch you flip. It is a garden you grow.

Patience, dear one.” -Jaiya John

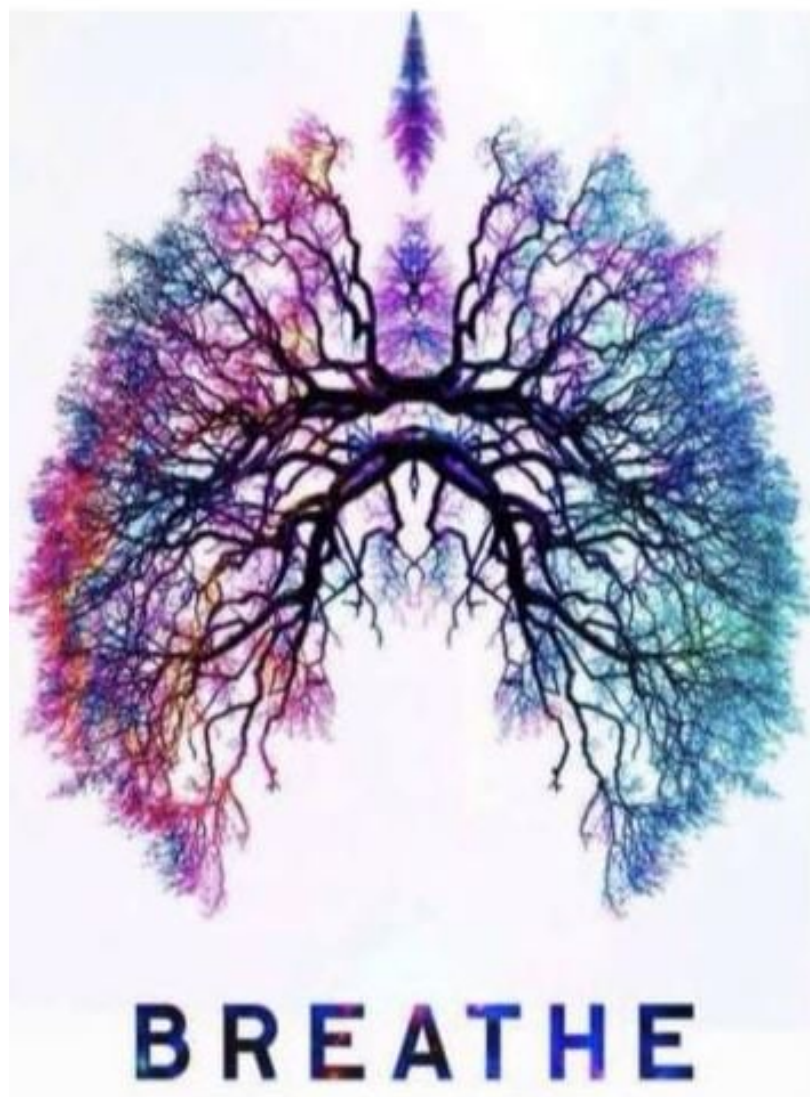
I have been told too many times to count that you need to love yourself before you can love anyone else. The way we view and treat ourselves reflects how we treat others around us. This may be easier said than done, however, there is so much power in personal growth and changing your view of yourself. I love this quote because self-love looks different, and grows at its own pace, for everyone. For some people, self-love can be seen in their daily routines of positive affirmations, journaling, and 6 AM yoga sessions. For others, it may be shown through taking a long shower, making a phone call to an old friend, or getting a few extra hours of sleep at night. I have found a healthy balance between both while I am finding my way in practicing my own self-love. What has helped me the most is acknowledging that I am worthy of love, especially from myself. I encourage you to find the strength within you to do the same, and from there, your garden will blossom.

-Michaela K.



Submission by: Jennifer Cella-Roe

Breathe in. Hold...Exhale Again,
In. Hold for five....out
Repeat calming breaths



In November, I purchased a journal for the first time since middle school. I notoriously never completed a journal due to a lack of interest, little motivation, or other uncontrollable events. However, I am determined to finish this one. Writing an entry is an act of gratitude, an act of self-love, and an act of expression. I have learned new secrets about myself and new ways to embrace myself when I need it the most. Specifically, I learned about my love for collaging (as pictured below). Now, I encourage everyone to pick up some paper or an unused notebook and just start writing- about anything and everything.

-Morgan Pfau



This picture is worth a thousand words, but one word sums it all up for me, Love. I love my grandma more than she will ever know.

I am so grateful that I was able to have such a loving relationship with her. For my dog squishy, her love for my family is unconditional. Together, these two have changed my life in unimaginable ways. This month I celebrate the both of them.

Here is to love!

-Carolyn



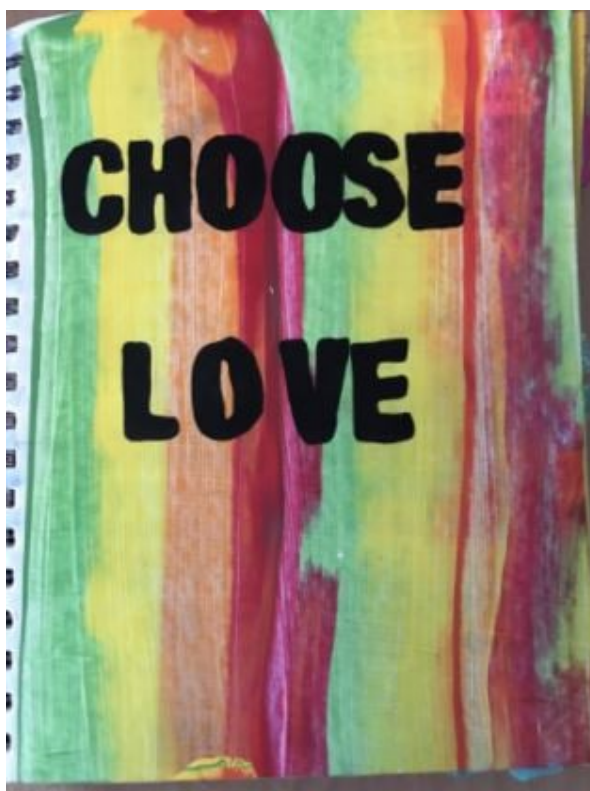
Self love has never come easy to me. From as far back as I can remember, the thoughts racing through my head told me a barrage of false truths: "I wasn't good enough". "I wasn't worthy of love". These statements were a reflection of how I felt and were not predicated by things others may have said to me. In the past year, a specific exercise and art journal has changed my mindset.

As an artist, my favorite thing to create would be art journals.

Since I was struggling with my self love and feeling poorly about myself in general, I started a positive affirmation journal. Most days, I challenged myself to decorate the pages with different art mediums and then included a positive affirmation that I have to believe deep down is true.

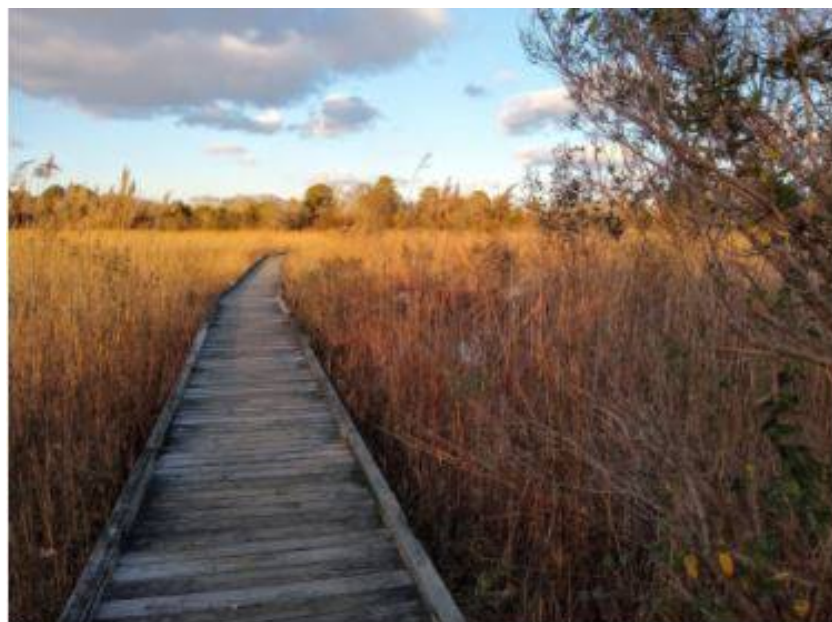
Doing this has made a huge difference in my daily routine. I've started to see myself differently! Now, when I start to feel poorly about myself and need a tangible reminder or pick me up, I go through that journal. It helps me to remember that I am someone worthy of self love and the love of others.

- Court



One of my good friends asked me to take a walk one day. She didn't mention the word hiking... at first. The year before Covid-19 we went to Estell Manor County Park trail in Mays Landing NJ to walk the boardwalk trail of it. It wasn't a traditional trail and it actually had boards like if you were walking on a boardwalk. That day was the first time I had been on a trail in a long time. In my senior year in college. A fellow student and I traveled to Washington Crossing State Park. This was the first trail I've ever been on in my life. Back then coming from an environmentally friendly college. I really wasn't an outdoorsy person. The beach once in awhile but nothing major and go figure I grew up near the sea. I only went camping twice in my life and I never got a thrill for it. So as my friend and I were walking through Estell Manor Park on the boardwalk trail. I became relaxed and comfortable like I've been doing this all my life. It was very peaceful. In working at a mental health crisis job, it is very stressful. I soon realized how much I missed that peacefulness and tranquility in my life. And then Covid-19 hit and everything grinded to a halt. My depression and anxiety was increasing. Everything around me was life or death. I literally couldn't function. I was worried about my family, about my friends. The stress level increased to the point, I couldn't function or focus in the job. I took a medical leave and immediately became introverted. Then I was laid off and the isolation became deafening. So I used it to my advantage and started mindfulness meditation. I needed to find a way to get back to the peace that I missed by taking that walk in the early stages of my hiking. When things started to loosen up, that's when I was able to come back to work after my layoff. After buying hiking boots and a walking-stick. My friend and I resumed going on hikes in the late summer, early fall and winter. It was amazing. Edwin B Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, Batona trail at Carranza Memorial, Franklin Parker Preserve, Batsto Lake Trail, Cape May Point State Park, Bass River State Forest on my Birthday, Mullica River Trail, Atsion Lake Loop, Long Bridge Park. Any trail my friend would take me on it was always new adventure. A new sense of calm and peacefulness came into my life. Something that I didn't know inside of me that I missed so much. Because like anybody in the health care field. We can and will take care of everybody else but we can't take care of ourselves very well. The beauty and wonder of the woods was my mindfulness meditation at that time and still is. So if you ever get outside and find yourself on a trail and always stay on that trail. You will realize there is so much beauty out there to be seen that we take this for granted. I have a favorite quote, "I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order." John Burroughs. -anonymous

This is my picture from one of the trails at Cape May Point Park.



This week is eating disorder awareness week. Over the years I have had a lot of different feelings about this week. Shame when I was hiding my eating disorder, proud when I learned how to be an advocate. Acceptance of myself, including having an eating disorder, was a lesson on my self-love journey. Another lesson came this year. I have an internship that taught me about the therapeutic benefit of mindfulness. The part that really sticks out to me, is nonjudgmentally. This is the idea of losing judgments. I can be critical of myself, which is the opposite of showing myself love. This skill helps me catch when I am being too hard and then I can take a step back and be kinder to myself. Self-love did not come naturally to me. One way I remember to slow down and be kinder to myself is by taking care of plants. When I was young, my grandma taught me that plants grow better by saying nice things to them. I realized that I also could grow better by having better self-talk.

-Kathleen



Ugh, the topic of self love in the month of Valentines Day felt to me way too much, and I wondered why it bothered me soo much. The answer was an uncomfortable admission of my long standing practice of putting other's needs before my own. Even to the extent of putting my own health at risk, I looked after everyone else around me.

I always thought if I had everyone else taken care of then I would be able to breathe and take care of me. That never happened, something always came up, they all needed something. Taking time for my own needs and wants was selfish, family always came first...yet my turn never came up, or was made to feel guilty for wanting my own happiness.

I no longer have to care for anyone at 50+ years old, I can do what I want and it seems so foreign to me. Even buying things that I need causes uncomfortable feelings for me. Splurging on a luxury item is a major feat, ordering simple take out when I have the extra funds makes me feel horrible that I just not cook something myself.

Going to doctors and getting check ups and tests done is my current form of self care and some self love. Avoiding the idea of preventing any new medical issues from happening has been a scary road. It would have been easier to ignore and just worry like I did for a number of years. I had to show myself some tough love and face the fears, only to discover my fears were the worst part of it and soo much time and energy was wasted.

This Self love, I know is needed and way more self compassion has to remind me that I would not let my friends treat themselves as poorly I was treating myself. Nobody else is spoiling me, so I need to do it myself.

-Anonymous



It took me nearly 50 years to learn what my friends and family already knew — I'm not perfect, but I'm still worthy of love. Let me be clear: I've always known I was loved; it's the part about being perfect that I kept getting wrong! I was a child with anxiety raised by a parent with anxiety, so I grew up believing that any problem was a failure, and that needing help was a burden others didn't want or couldn't handle. At 46, I experienced a series of misfortunes and after much struggle, realized I couldn't keep things going, especially not alone. My path to self-love began by accepting myself as a vulnerable human being who sometimes couldn't even take the first step without help. Amazingly, as I stepped off my pedestal of perfection, others reached out to me. I saw then how many people had wanted to connect by helping me, and I understood how I had shut them out by striving not to need them. In that way, my journey to loving myself became a journey to opening up to the love of others.

Ronda Cluff



As an expert in poor self care choices and unskilled self parenting (read none whatsoever), I learned one most valuable characteristic about myself; I require TIME. I require time to adjust, think about and eventually practice new ways of caring for myself.

Unfortunately the amount of time we need is not always what we are allowed to give ourselves. Work, school, kids, house and relationships divide my days up into blocks of time spent on doing boring tasks, helping others and managing my own thoughts and feelings; All. Day. Long. It can be exhausting for someone like myself living with a mood disorder. It is challenging since I learned to do things when I am 'in the mood'. Well you know how that works? You are never in the mood to anything you don't like to do even if it is exactly what you need to be doing to care for yourself!!!!

Ahhh the conundrum!!!

I had to learn to bite the proverbial bullet and 'just do it'. After some time, like my poor self care, the positive self care became more of the go to. Will I sit here and tell you I am a great example of this all of the time? Absolutely not. Can I tell you knowing the 'stages of change' and having the ability to identify where I am in the process is helpful? Absolutely. Because instead of beating myself up with negative self talk, I now know why I am not doing what I need to do and can find ways to overcome the barriers to moving to the new and more progressive stages. I have learned that coupling what I like to do with things I don't particularly enjoy but need to do to care for myself. Time for some exercise? I listen to music while I am doing it. Have to cut back on some calories? Scour the fridge and freezer, pull out all the healthy stuff and I play my own version of 'Chopped'. This was a game changer.

So how does time figure into all of this? I need to be patient with myself and take advantage of whatever time is available to me. If I catch myself doing nothing, I try to find something to do that benefits my wellness. No matter if it's a walk around the block, getting sweaty and dirty in the garden or reading a book in the hammock, I try to do it. "If not now, when?" The answer is now! Two discoveries helped overcome some barriers to my self care. I sat for one minute doing nothing and I realized a minute is much longer than I ever thought! So 15 minutes is long enough to do SOMETHING good for myself. The other is if I really love doing something, I have to do it and not judge myself while doing it. I just do it.

I love to get sweaty and dirty in the gardens and I love to sing! Poor choices have limited my previous vocal abilities and I have no idea what I am doing in my garden. But guess what? I do both anyway and sometimes simultaneously! Both make me happy and have physical and emotional benefits. And like the flowers and plants in the gardens and the sounds I make when I am singing, I become stronger and improve as time goes on. - Gail Christian



I am trying to get better at loving myself. There's a lot of things I don't love about myself. But there's things that I want to love about myself. One thing I love about myself is that I try to give others positive feedback. One of the things I love about myself is that I care about not offending people. It's important to be positive because you never know when someone really needs that. It's so easy to think about what I don't like about myself. But, writing this helped me see there's a lot that I do like about myself.

Love, Sean



Loving myself has been a journey I did not expect to be tumultuous. However, that is the case indeed. For me, I started to notice how unkind I was being to myself in my early twenties.

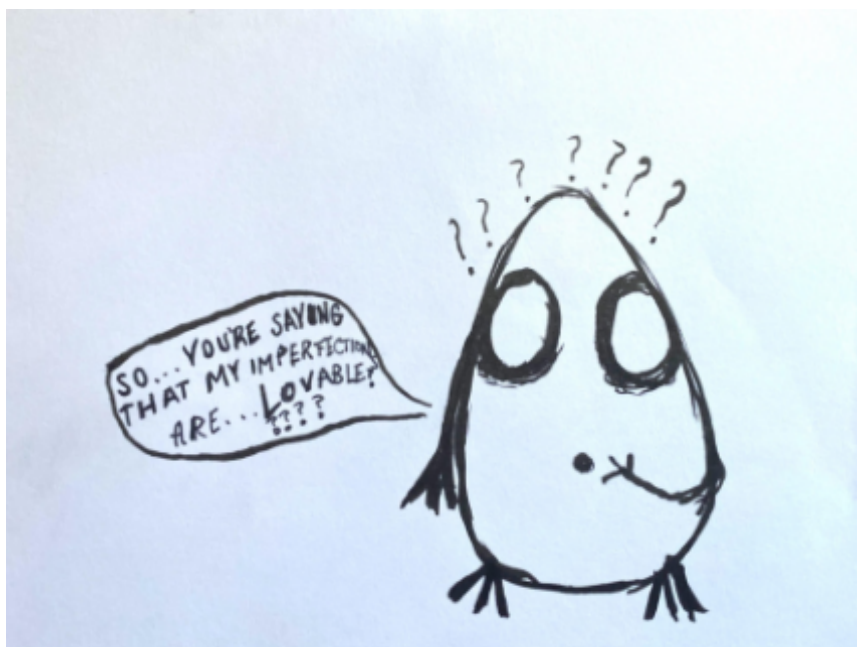
It's a hard cycle to break, and I floated in that cycle for what seemed like it was going to be forever. Thankfully, through techniques that changed my life, I was able to snap myself out of the circle of self hate. The most successful tool I found for myself was loving other people. A very common expression I heard repeatedly growing up was, "you can't love someone else until you learn to love yourself." I never resonated with that and thought I'd never be able to fully love. In retrospect, I wish someone had told me everyone's experience to love is different. Loving others brought me such joy and is something that comes very naturally to me. The more love I gave, the more love I received. The more love I felt, the realization that I was deserving of love and have attributes that are great came easier and easier. Being kind to yourself is hard, but it's been one of the most rewarding feelings I've ever fought to have.



My road to self-love has been a bumpy one. For most of my adolescence, my self-contempt sat very quietly inside of me. I had a rough childhood, but I mostly coped with it very much in isolation. Unbeknownst to those around me, I was incredibly hard on myself. Only seldom would it come pouring out, whether it be through my outward self talk or sudden bursts of anger with myself. I look back on those small moments as my own self-hatred pouring out. It would sometimes be too much for me to cope with. It had been trapped inside of me for so long and I only did things that re-affirmed my negative beliefs about myself.

It wasn't until about 5 years ago where things started to shift for me. I began what would eventually be a long-term relationship with my current girlfriend and a lot of our vulnerabilities came to the surface. We both struggled with self-love in our own unique ways. We also found that we were both the first people of whom we allowed to show our full, vulnerable selves. We saw each other's perceived blemishes as strengths and challenged one another to break down our own beliefs about who we were. I felt the courage to also go to therapy for the first time and I began untangling the messy web of negative beliefs I'd held about myself for many years. With the support of my therapist, girlfriend and many friends of whom I began to share my struggles with, I began to genuinely love who I was wholeheartedly. I began to challenge my own beliefs about myself and saw how those beliefs connected to the unrealistic pressures I was constantly putting on myself. Of course, It has been a non-linear process with peaks and valleys, but I can say that this is the first period of my life where I've been able to know who I am and fully accept that. The biggest thing I can attribute to that change is having chosen to make myself vulnerable to another person. Without vulnerability, I would not be able to accept my own imperfections and realize they are also things to be loved.

-Eric



Self Love

Self love is listening to my body and being aware of what my intuition reacts to. loving myself allows me to surround my being with things that serve me, and nothing more. self love helps me make my mistakes with grace, and remembers that there is no dwelling, only learning.

loving yourself is the first thing needed to create a fulfilling life.

-T

