

You've probably heard about the importance of loving yourself, forgiving yourself, and treating yourself with compassion.

But is it really that vital? Can't you get along just fine without all that mushy, touchy-feely self-love stuff?

As it turns out, you can get along just fine—but you will likely never thrive!

Self-love is a **state of appreciation for oneself** that grows from actions that support our physical, psychological, and spiritual growth. Self-love means having a high regard for your own well-being and happiness. Self-love means taking care of your own needs and not sacrificing your well-being to please others. Self-love means not settling for less than you deserve.

Self-love means accepting yourself as you are in this very moment for everything that you are. It means accepting your emotions for what they are and putting your physical, emotional, and mental well-being first.

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.

Self-love can mean something different for each person because we all have many different ways to take care of ourselves. Figuring out what self-love looks like for you as an individual is an important part of your mental health.

What does self-love mean to you?

For many people, self-love is another way to say self-care. To practice self-love and self-care, we often need to go back to the basics and

- **Become mindful.** People who have more self-love tend to know what they think, feel, and want. Listen to your body.

- **Take actions based on need rather than want.** 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.
- **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.
- **Make room for healthy habits.** Start truly caring for yourself by mirroring that in what you eat, how you exercise, and what you spend time doing. Do stuff, not to “get it done” or because you “have to,” but because you care about you.

Self-love motivates you to make healthy choices in life. When you hold yourself in high esteem, you're more likely to choose things that nurture your well-being and serve you well. These things may be in the form of eating healthy, exercising, or having healthy relationships.

Self-love encompasses not only how you treat yourself but also your thoughts and feelings about yourself. So, when you conceptualize self-love, you can try to imagine what you would do for yourself, how you'd talk to yourself, and how you'd feel about yourself that reflects love and concern.

When you love yourself, you have an overall positive view of yourself. This doesn't mean you feel positive about yourself all the time. That would be unrealistic! For example, I can temporarily feel upset, angry, or disappointed with myself and still love myself. If this is confusing, think about how this works in other relationships. I can love my daughter even though I sometimes feel angry or disappointed with her. Even in my anger and disappointment, my love for her informs how I relate to her. It allows me to forgive her, consider her feelings, meet her needs, and make decisions that will support her wellbeing. Self-love is very much the same. Which means, if you know how to love others, you know how to love yourself!

The following are examples of what self-love can look like in action.

- Saying positive things to yourself
- Forgiving yourself when you mess up
- Meeting your own needs
- Being assertive
- Not letting others take advantage of or abuse you
- Prioritizing your health and wellbeing
- Spending time around people who support you and build you up (and avoiding people who don't)
- Asking for help
- Letting go of grudges or anger that holds you back
- Recognizing your strengths
- Valuing your feelings
- Making healthy choices most of the time
- Living in accordance with your values
- Pursuing your interests and goals
- Challenging yourself
- Holding yourself accountable
- Giving yourself healthy treats
- Accepting your imperfections
- Setting realistic expectations
- Noticing your progress and effort

Well, without self-love, you're likely to be highly self-critical and fall into people-pleasing and perfectionism. You're more likely to tolerate abuse or mistreatment from others. You may neglect your own needs and feelings

because you don't value yourself. And you may self-sabotage or make decisions that aren't in your own best interest.

Self-love is the foundation that allows us to be assertive, set boundaries and create healthy relationships with others, practice self-care, pursue our interests and goals, and feel proud of who we are.

Learn to 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 must 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.

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 steps to self-love. It is true that you can only love a person as much as you love yourself. If you exercise all 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.