

Self-Love Examined

Self-love, what is it? How do we get it? Where do we find it? And how do we put it into practice?

So let's start off by answering the first question. What is self-love? The dictionary defines self-love as "regard for one's own well-being and happiness." But what does this mean to us besides just the dictionary's definition of it? Self-love to me has quite a bit to do with self-acceptance. I think once you can practice one the other becomes that much easier to practice.

I also personally think that we need to start with simple things like grooming and self-care, eat a healthy diet, and always be looking out for your mental well-being. Many of us as we start to slip or are on the verge of a relapse have a tendency to stop caring for ourselves properly.

Our next question is how do we get it? Some of us naturally have this and don't have to put as much effort into this as compared to us who are lacking in this department. Many of us will have to find alternative ways to help develop a healthy amount of self-love and then maintain it. One way of also taking care of yourself is to take a look at your mental health and decide if you need some help. You can reach out to a therapist, psychologist or psychiatrist for help. This would absolutely fall into the category of self-love.

So what should this mean to us? And one of the most important questions is why is this important to us addicts.

I think what this means for most of us is just keeping up with a basic level of physical and mental upkeep. I think self-love is something the entire world needs to practice a little bit more of, not just us addicts. But for us addicts, this can be especially important. Self-love and self-care can also be an indicator of a pending binge or relapse. Many people that have stress in their lives tend to neglect themselves and when we neglect ourselves we are way more likely to seek out things that are no good for us. So for many of us keeping track of these things can be a major factor in our recovery.

Another question asked at the beginning is where to we find it? Well, that's a simple yet complicated answer. What I mean by that is that if you were to ask me this question I would answer it you find it deep inside yourself. So it might seem so easy to find it but it's not. It's going to take a lot of hard work to find it, for some it might be more difficult than others. I would suggest a lot of meditation and self-reflection. These things are not easy to accomplish but once you can the fruits of the labor you put into this are immense.

Self-affirmation can also be an invaluable tool in the process of recovery. Many of us in active addiction had extremely low self-esteem which lead to depression and then that depression led to more abusing your addiction of choice. It is the opposite of practicing self-love. Being able to look in the mirror and face yourself can be something scary in early sobriety. Now you're expected to look into your own eyes with kind words about yourself. This takes a lot of strength coming from deep inside.

But we must address what to do if we are having low self-esteem issues. I think practicing self-affirmation can be a vital tool for our recovery. It's been shown that people battling with self-esteem issues may have trouble overcoming negative thoughts or feelings and therefore turn to outside substances or compulsive activities to change the way they feel. Some people with low self-esteem also typically will have issues with depression and anxiety. This leads to our addictive behavior returning. In many studies, it has been shown that many of us addicts are simply self-medicating with the substances and compulsive behaviors.

And the next question is how do we put this into practice? As stated earlier it starts with simple things such as simple self-care and grooming. Many people may not understand how hard these simple tasks could be when you're in the throes of addiction or maybe going through a period of depression.

I think an absolutely great way to practice self-love is through prayer and meditation. I myself am not a religious man so to speak so I do not pray but that does not mean it does help countless others around the world that are religious and do pray. I myself meditate and use that to reflect on myself and get in touch with my inner self. Both of these tools are vital for self-reflection and I think self-reflection is vital to self-love so it all relates in the end. I focus on the things that need changing in my life. And through my meditations, I see many outcomes to the problems I'm facing and go about finding the best way to tackle my issues.

Also, the way we go about our daily lives has to change if we want to start living a more self-loving life. We must look at all aspects of our life and the way we were treating ourselves and see if that life was conducive to a life filled with self-love. If you look over the things in you're daily life that you are currently doing and see that they are not helping you then you need to cut out the habits from your life.

All in all, self-love is an extremely important part of our recovery. Without this, in essence, there isn't much of a reason to get better. We need to care enough about ourselves to want to get better. It is essential. And once we learn to care for ourselves is when we can then care for others.

I don't see self-love just as something to practice. I see this as a lifestyle change. So many things in your life are affected by self-love and the more you work on this the more you will be affecting your life for the better.

I think self-love also demonstrates that we all have strength and courage deep inside each of us that we can tap into in times of need.

There are also a number of factors that come into play when you truly sit there and examine your life and see the things truly going on inside of yourself. For example, you might have had low self-love which turned into low self-esteem, and that then led you to drugs or alcohol. Some, on the other hand, might have had self-love and self-esteem but through their substance abuse, they destroyed what they had. The great thing is no matter which category you fall into this is something we can work on and heal some of the damage that has been done. This is a wound that can be mended.

I think something that also needs to be looked at is your self-image. How do you see yourself? This is a very important question when it comes to self-esteem with eventually leads to self-love. A lot of us are very critical of ourselves and have a lot of negative self-talk. One way of approaching this is to say to yourself "would I talk this way to someone else?" If the answer is no it's a safe bet to say you wouldn't talk to other people the way you talk to yourself. So if you wouldn't say any of these nasty things to other people out of kindness and respect why would you say these things to yourself? You need to learn to also build up your self-respect. This is how I see a path down this road of taking better care of yourself.

Another area that ties into all of this and is just as important as anything else is self-compassion. Most people try to have some compassion for others especially when they need it most.

So how do we go about building up our self-image, self-respect, and self-love? What can be done to start us on this journey of self-discovery? Something of great importance is that we treat ourselves with the compassion, self-love, and respect that we would show others. Practicing these things can actually help relieve feelings of depression and anxiety. These feelings can be some of the very reasons we feel negatively about ourselves. With depression and anxiety comes a lot of terrible things we feel about ourselves. This might even be the starting point in which all our negative feeling build upon. It can also be the point in which you turn yourself around and start building the new life you deserve.

So what are some of the actual practices we can do to start building up our self-esteem, compassion, and love?

A starting point is building self-compassion. Something that I continually say to people I'm working with is just imagining that you yourself were a stranger to yourself. If somebody can to you looking for help how would you help them? For most of us we tend to have more patience and compassion towards others but not for ourselves. We treat friends and even strangers better than we treat ourselves. When you sit there and truly think about it, it doesn't make much sense now does it? We need to start treating ourselves as we are important friends to ourselves. Because we are.

I think the first step on this journey should be forgiving yourself. I know this can be an extremely hard task. And don't confuse forgiveness with compassion. Even though you need compassion to forgive yourself that is a whole other area in which we need to work on and build upon. Now the second thing here that we need to work on is compassion. We need to look at the way we have been living our lives and feel not like we need to forgive ourselves but rather feel bad for ourselves. Another thing I think can help you along in your path is to set goals for yourself. These don't have to be huge things or things that can be done quickly. Take some of these you would like to accomplish in your life and finally start making the effort to accomplish these things. Many of us while in addiction had nothing set in our future except more of our addiction. To set goals for the future seemed like a daunting task. At least it did for me. Another thing that is important and actually mentioned in traditional twelve-step programs and even the Addicts Anonymous Ten Steps is taking a look at yourself through self-reflection. Another thing that should be noted is this is not a quick and easy task to accomplish. It will take a lot of courage as well as a lot of hard work to get this done. One day you're going to have to come to terms with the things you used to do and also how far you've come in your journey.

At the end of the day, self-love is not an easy thing. There is no simple answer that will instantly teach you about self-love and then you know everything about it and you're cured of your negative feelings towards yourself. It just doesn't work that way. This is something where first you need to recognize you're having an issue. Then you need to start working and taking the steps needed to build up a healthy amount of self-love. This will be an ongoing process for the rest of your life. This is something that must be practiced day in and day out for the rest of your life.

I believe the last thing that is absolutely vital to our journey in learning to love ourselves is building a supportive community. You need to have a community of like-minded individuals that will support you in your journey to find self-love. You need to try to stay away from people that are having any negativity that they are adding to your life. Community isn't just about finding good people to add to your community you need to also remove those who are negative from your life and this

can be hard. Some of these negative people might be friends or family. But while you're trying to recover you need to get away from these people. You need to provide yourself with a safe place to recover. And you need to protect that safe space at all costs.