



A Gentle Guide to Developing Self-Compassion, Self-Acceptance, and Self-Love

Does it ever seem like some people are just so sure of themselves while you are dealing with anxiety, perfectionism, and self-doubt? The truth is that self-esteem is not a binary. It's not something that some people have and others don't. We all have moments when we don't like ourselves. That's just a part of being human. Cultivating self-esteem is a practice, and practicing anything takes work.

I believe that to begin the work of practicing self-esteem we must develop a deeper relationship and bond with ourselves. In my therapeutic work I emphasize three steps in order to practice self-esteem: the development of self-compassion, self-acceptance, and self-love. This gentle guide will outline these three concepts so that you can let go of the self-doubt and begin to practice self-esteem.

Developing Self-Compassion

- ❖ What does compassion even mean? Compassion is when we see the suffering in another and are moved to help them. To develop self-compassion is to *witness your own suffering*, realize and acknowledge that you're worthy of love, and feel compelled or moved to help yourself ease that suffering. Self-compassion requires self-awareness. You can't witness your own suffering if you don't take a moment to stop, breathe, and realize that you're hurting. *I can't even* with our society's fast-paced, productivity-obsessed, hustle and grind culture. It's time to take a break. Take a moment to yourself — to nap, to breathe, to move your body, to eat and drink water, to sit in silence. Only in that quiet awareness can we finally begin to see the tender parts of ourselves that are in pain. Witness that suffering and give it the love it needs to begin healing.

Developing Self-Acceptance

- ❖ We've sat, we've witnessed, we've acknowledged our suffering. Now what? Now we accept. We stop wishing we were different, or that our circumstances were different. We stop comparing ourselves to our friends, people on social media, basically everyone else. We stop looking in the mirror and hating our bodies. I say this like it's easy, but I know it's not. We have *years* of societal conditioning telling us that we are not enough. Unlearning those messages takes effort, time, energy, and practice. I cannot stress that enough. *Developing self-acceptance is a practice*. There is no end point where you 100% accept every aspect of your being. You simply strive every day to fight back against that bitch in your head who tells you that you are anything less than enough. *You are enough*.

Developing Self-Love

- ❖ For most of us, the concept of self-love seems so out of reach that it's barely worth striving for. Again, this is a *practice*, not a destination. Practicing self-love is a radical and political act. Practicing self-love means challenging our consumer culture's messages that you need to spend, buy, and change in order to be worthy of love. When we have acknowledged who we truly are—our suffering, our authenticity, what makes us, us—then we can accept ourselves and eventually grow to love ourselves. Most people have at least one person in their lives that they can say they love. Whether it be a family member, a friend, or a partner, there may be one person that you truly see for who they are, accept, and love unconditionally, even when they hurt you. That is the radical self-acceptance and self-love you need to cultivate for yourself. You aren't perfect. No one is. You're going to let yourself down sometimes, and that's ok. The point is to show yourself compassion in those moments. Witness your own suffering and treat yourself with tenderness. You, too, are worthy of being seen for who you truly are, accepted, and loved—by others, but also by yourself.

So you've read the guide, but are you feeling like self-esteem is still out of reach? That, too, is normal. Practicing self-compassion, self-acceptance, and self-love is a life-long journey. This guide is just the beginning. Reading it is not going to make your self-critical thoughts, self-judgement, or perfectionism go away. Part of the practice is to witness these thoughts when they arise, show yourself compassion, accept the reality that these thoughts are present in the moment but they, like everything, will eventually pass. Then show yourself love, so much love. Self-love may look like listening to what your body needs (e.g. food, water, sleep, movement), listening to what your mind needs (e.g. stillness, comfort from pets, time with loved ones, journaling), and listening to what your spirit needs (e.g. time outdoors, meditation, breathing exercises, or gratitude journaling).

By developing a deeper relationship and bond with ourselves and caring for our needs, we can do the work to practice greater self-esteem.

If you enjoyed this guide and would like to do more personalized work on these practices, I would love to work with you one-on-one, or with couples, in my therapy practice. To schedule an appointment, email liz@mossandmainkc.com or visit my website at www.lizdavistherapy.com.

Take Care and Stay Well,
Liz Davis, M.S., S-MFT

