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Tips on How To Love Yourself

By Cheryl Rainfield

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Loving ourselves — being as compassionate, gentle, and loving with ourselves as we would with a best friend — can be pretty hard to do. This is especially true for women and survivors of abuse (including neglect).

As women and survivors, we've been trained to deny our own feelings and needs, and to take care of others. And we're also frequently given messages that tell us not to accept or love ourselves. This is especially true for survivors; it's so easy for us to take in the hating messages our abusers gave us, and to turn that inwards on ourselves.

But it is possible to love ourselves — or at least to increase our self-love in increments, until we can know, deep to our cores, that we love ourselves, and that we're beautiful. Here are some of the things that have worked for me. I hope you'll find they work for you, too.

* Ask for a list of things people like about you.

Sometimes it can be hard to find things we like or love about ourselves. So — ask other people to tell you all the things they like about you. Ask a friend, a lover, a therapist. This isn't a replacement for your own love; it's a first step in learning to love yourself. You may need to hear the things other people like about you before you can value them in yourself.

If hearing what people like about you is hard, ask your friends to write it down for you, or leave it on your voice mail, so you can read/listen to it over and over. Go back to it as many times as you can. Even if you don't believe that someone can like a particular thing about you, or you don't believe it exists, trust that your friend does see it and value it.

When you start to hear critical voices inside your head, go back to those things your friend said/wrote about you, and remember that you are loved.

* Make a list of the things you like about yourself.

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Make a list of all the things you like about yourself. Be as honest as you can. Modesty doesn't help you here; neither do old critical messages. If you're having trouble finding things you value about yourself, think about the things you value and love in your friends, then see if those things exist inside you, too. Most often, they do.

Fill a special notebook with your list, or create a set of cards. Make the notebook as beautiful as you can — make it something that makes you feel good when you look at it. Then open it up and look at it any time you're feeling down or critical about yourself, or any time anyone says anything that triggers your criticalness of yourself.

Look at this good-things-about-yourself book as frequently as you can. It may seem silly, but repetition

really does make a difference. (Just think of the impact one critical phrase said by a parent over and over to a child can have. It really does have an effect! Now try to give that child inside you at least one truly loving phrase about yourself that s/he can hold on to.)

* Make it part of your daily routine to praise something in yourself or think about something you like about yourself.

In this society, we're taught that praising ourselves is selfish and wrong. But praising ourselves for things that are good about ourselves only helps us. It is a healing thing to do, something that nourishes our self-worth. When we love ourselves, we're happier and more true to our own selves...and that happiness and ability to be free spreads to others.

So...try to think of something that you like about yourself, or something that you did today that made you or someone else feel good — no matter how small it may seem. Give yourself the kind of warm praise that you would a friend.

* Love yourself like a friend

Close your eyes and think of a person you deeply love and trust, and who you know loves you— a friend, a lover. Think about all the things you love and appreciate about them. Notice how that love feels inside you, how it makes you feel good.

Now turn it around the other way — be your friend, feeling that same deep love for you. Trust in their love for you, and just feel it. Let yourself see your self through gentle eyes, with compassion and love the way your friend does, even if you can only do it for a moment. Now let yourself receive that love, the love you have as a friend to yourself. Feel the warmth move through you. Remember how it feels, and come back to that love another time.

* Make a note every time someone says something nice about you.

Every time someone tells you something about yourself that makes you feel good, write it down or make a mental note and jot it down later. When you get home, put that note in a container of "good things about me." Decorate the container however you like. Keep on adding notes, and read them over

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every time you need a little boost — and even when you don't feel like you do.

* Have compassion for yourself.

If you're feeling really judgemental about something you've done or said, try to understand where the judgement is coming from. Not the immediate, surface answer, but an answer deep down inside you. Are you afraid of something, or are you feeling insecure? Do you think you did something "wrong," or are you hearing the judgement of a voice from your past? Try to connect to that little kid inside of you who's feeling that way, and really listen to how s/he's feeling. Hug and reassure that kid, and let her/him know that s/he didn't do anything wrong, and that you love her/him.

You can also think of a friend having acted as you did. Imagine how you'd feel towards them — how you'd still love them and readily forgive them if there was anything to forgive. You probably wouldn't even find it bothersome! Try to feel that same love and compassion for yourself.

* Recognize that the love has to come from you.

If you're a survivor of child abuse or come from a dysfunctional family, you may still be waiting for a parent to give you the love and acceptance you never got as a child. But the kind of love you need (or needed as a child) probably isn't going to come from a parent who abused you or who looked the other way while you were being abused. But it can come from yourself.

It can be hard to give it to yourself at first — after all, if you didn't receive love as a child, or if some of that love was torn away from you by violence, self-hate may have built up inside you. But you have the courage and strength to love yourself, if you've survived this long. And you do deserve it!

So try to connect to that little child inside, that child who deserves all of your love and acceptance.

* Use Affirmations

I know this might sound corny – but if you hear good things about yourself over and over, you can't help but have some of it sink in.

Write out strong, loving things to say to yourself, even if you don't fully believe them. Some examples are:

- o "I utterly and completely deserve love and kindness,"
- o "I am a very loveable person,"
- o "I am kind, compassionate, intelligent, and wise." (or substitute the words for loving words that you feel best suit you.

Now put up those affirmations in places you'll see them every day — on the fridge, on the bathroom mirror, on your bedside table, next to your favourite chair, on the kitchen wall next to where you cook your food or eat a meal. Don't forget to read them.

If you're not comfortable having them up in such public places, then write out a bunch of them (or

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copies of a few) and put them in places you'll find them — in your jacket or jeans pocket, in a book you're reading or a favourite book, in your desk drawer, in with your clothes. They're little love notes to yourself. In fact, you may want to do both things — have them up and also hidden in places where you'll find them.

When you read an affirmation, read it slowly, and really let yourself feel it. Don't just say it by rote. Try to let yourself be there as fully as you can.

You might want to look at some of my online affirmation cards for examples.

* Recognize Self–Critical Messages — and Talk to Them

It's easy to let old, critical voices and messages that we heard as a child play over and over in our minds, without stopping them. Often we may barely recognize that they are there, or we don't really listen to them, we've heard them so often — but they continue to impact how we feel and think about ourselves.

Try noticing next time you hear a small (or very loud) voice inside your head criticize you. Be aware of what it is saying to you, and try to talk to it. Ask it why it feels it needs to say those things. Is that part of you trying to protect you, in some child–like logic? Or perhaps that part of you felt it had to take on the messages you heard as a kid. Remind that part of you that you no longer need to do that to survive.

You are free to make up your own mind about yourself.

* Counteract Negative or Critical Thoughts About Yourself

Write down all the negative or critical thoughts and messages you hear inside your head. See if you can figure out who first said them to you (or said something of that nature). Then write out a response that counteracts each of those messages, one by one. Make the counter messages as strong and loving as you can.

If you're having trouble writing out counter messages, see if you can connect to a deep, wise part inside of you. Or write out what you would say to a friend if a friend said those things about her/himself.

* Do Comforting and Nurturing Things For Yourself

Allow yourself to do comforting and nurturing things for yourself. Let yourself feel how good you feel when you do those things — and tell yourself that you deserve to feel that way, to feel good. Gradually you'll find that the more nurturing and comforting times you have, the more you'll seek them out — and they will help build a good feeling inside you.

* Ask Yourself What You Need to Do

Some of these things will work really well for you, while others may not quite fit you. So try taking a moment to get quiet, and ask yourself, "What can I do to help myself feel more compassion and love

toward myself?" Don't force an answer — just let the answer bubble up from inside you. If you find it hard to hear the answer that way, try writing out your question, and then your answer. See what you come up with. You know best what works for you — and you have great wisdom inside you.

Above all — have compassion for yourself and for where you're at. Remember that you are a truly loveable person — and that you deserve only kind treatment, especially from yourself. :)

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Cheryl Rainfield is an artist and writer. She has an inspirational website that offers free loving e-cards, a screensaver, articles, and virtual affirmation cards online. <http://www.CherylRainfield.com>

Tips are Perennially Tempting

By Marcia Yudkin

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Techies love them. Young and old technology haters love them. Most importantly, editors love them. Tips — neatly packaged, numbered nuggets of advice — are always appealing to those whose job it is to fill up publications with entertaining and illuminating information. They can therefore represent a lucrative route to publicity for you or your organization.

The content of tips that earn you media coverage doesn't have to be original, exclusive or startling. You can offer up things most people in your position know. Their charm is mainly in the writing and packaging.

Start with an irresistible title, usually including a number, such as "Seven Steps to a Summer Without Bug Bites," "Four Secrets Real Estate Agents Don't Want Homebuyers to Know" or "11 Ways Not to Ingratiate Yourself to The Boss." Then brainstorm ideas and choose the best and second best and so on, until you have the number you'd chosen.

Rewrite each item so that it begins with a brief phrase summarizing the idea, which might appear in boldface in a magazine or on the Web. For example, here's a crisp, properly formatted item #1 for the first-mentioned set of tips:

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1. Inform yourself. Ask about buggy seasons and areas before finalizing your vacation plans. For instance, some beaches are more mosquito-infested than others. Your first-choice time slot for a holiday might be black-fly season up at the lakes.

A good way to set up a tips press release is to sandwich the tips between a lead paragraph introducing the topic in a timely way and a final paragraph about your organization. Include the URL of your Web site, where people can go for more information. If you have a longish set of tips, use the press release as a tease, presenting only a few of your items and specifying how readers can get the whole set, such

as by calling, faxing on their office letterhead, sending an email request or visiting a certain Web address.

Tips can help you generate product orders or client leads or targeted Web traffic when you associate the tips with a new product, an ongoing service you provide or features at your Web site. By mentioning a specific URL only in your press releases, your traffic logs will reveal which traffic arrived because of media publicity.

You can increase the timeliness and odds of getting tips published when you tie them to holidays, particularly minor ones. If you run a dieting program, why not gear some tips to recovering from Fourth of July picnic binges rather than Christmas dinners? Editors love tips the year round, but they love them most when they need a holiday tie-in and yours shows up.

Don't forget to post your tips at your Web site. Make sure your text includes the phrases someone looking for advice on that topic would type into a search engine. Easy-to-read practical tips are some of the most popular pages on the Internet. The catchy title you slaved over will help attract search engine traffic, too!



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