What does "self-acceptance" feel like? \[^{[1]}\]

Dear Alice,

People keep telling me to "accept myself," but I have no idea what that is. What does "self-acceptance" feel like?

Answer

Dear Reader,

No one is perfect and almost everyone has aspects of themselves they wish they could improve upon or change. It’s also common for people to be their own worst critic and focus on the negative rather than their positive and admirable qualities. Self-acceptance is an acceptance of all these qualities and attributes, both positive and negative, without judging yourself for them. Sometimes self-acceptance is confused with self-esteem, which is how you value yourself based on those traits and attributes. Self-acceptance is all about seeing and acknowledging flaws and accomplishments without defining yourself by them. Learning to practice self-acceptance can inspire more happiness, peacefulness, and well-being in your life. It can also provide a solid foundation on which you can learn and grow as a person.

If you’re looking to build your self-acceptance, consider giving these strategies a try:

- **Write a letter to yourself.** Think about how self-accepting you are right now in terms of your triumphs, disappointments, and your other characteristics. Can you remember any situations when you haven’t accepted yourself? What happened, and how do you think you can be more accepting the next time something similar happens? Also, what did you do today that helped to increase your self-acceptance? How could you do this again in the future? Are there any quotes that speak to you, that have special meaning in your life, or that build you up? Try writing all of this down so you can read it now and then.

- **Reframe your personal judgments.** Think back on the previous day and identify a moment when you judged yourself and then imagine re-experiencing that moment non-judgmentally. For example, you might have thought to yourself: ?I forgot to meet my friend to help her study for an exam she’s been stressed about. I’m a bad person.? Here’s how you might reframe that thought: ?I forgot to meet my friend, but that doesn’t make me a bad person. I’m not perfect and sometimes I make mistakes. I have a lot of good qualities that make me a good friend.? 

- **Practice loving-kindness meditation \[^{[2]}\].** There’s some evidence to show that repetition of phrases that promote compassion towards yourself or others helps you
separate the overall person from their individual traits or actions, thus promoting self-acceptance.

While you can always try to improve and better yourself, self-acceptance isn’t dependent upon “fixing” certain aspects of yourself. It may be helpful to think about your actions and qualities as separate from self-worth. For instance, if you’re trying to eat more balanced meals, how you progress towards that goal doesn’t have to be tied to how much you value yourself.

Above all, keep in mind that self-acceptance is a *practice*, not something innate. By actively working towards this mindset, you can build your self-acceptance from the ground up. Working towards self-acceptance is a personal journey that will help you improve your resilience and confidence. While you can undertake this process alone, speaking with a mental health professional, a friend, or family member might also be helpful.

Here’s to you: flaws, fabulousness, and everything in between!

Alice!
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Resources

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [9]
- Mental Health Service (CUMC) [10]

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