

The process of self-love

The process of self-love can help you with challenges in your relationships with others and teach you to use those challenges to your benefit. Based on the four steps of the process you will get to know yourself better and, gradually be able to have more self-acceptance and self-love. The more time you invest in this process the more successful you will be.

Bear in mind that you have come a long way to where you are today. Many people have influenced and formed you as you went through life. They did it mostly with good intentions and to the best of their knowledge. However, promoting your self-love may not always have been the main focus of their efforts. As a result, you had to adjust and may have been hurt. Now that you have grown up, it is up to you to promote your self-esteem and self-love.

Any event or experience that troubles you, annoys you, frightens you, embarrasses you or makes you angry is well suited for use in the process of self-love. Who or what caused these unpleasant feelings is of no importance.

The perception of an unpleasant feeling needs more attention at the beginning, because many of us have the habit of immediately putting these feelings away, i.e. suppressing them. But you should look closely at what is there before concluding that something is "not so bad" or "has its benefits" or "just had to be like that". When unpleasant feelings emerge, it is an opportunity to access an emotion from the "layer of vulnerability"*. By addressing these unpleasant feelings, you will get closer to your original being. The closer you are to your original being, the less you will be at the mercy of your emotions when other people annoy or hurt you. You are able to decide for yourself whether you want to set limits for such people or to endure the frustration suffered.

Step 1: What should he/she not do? What should be different?

Start by articulating what causes the pain.

This first step is to make room for your anger, pain, shame or rage. It is very easy to blame somebody else for these feelings. Assigning blame, a behaviour rooted in the "protective layer"*, allows us to be more passionate about unpleasant feelings and also to show them. Often it is not possible or feasible to let the person in question know how they have hurt us. (What we do not know at this point in time is that the person or situation acts as a trigger for an injury we may have received from our childhood). Letting the injury show means to admit unpleasant feelings and endure them.

(Example: *“My spouse should stop criticising me”*)

- * *An illustration showing the three layers (“protective layer”, “layer of vulnerability” and “layer of your original true self”) can be found in the paper “Learning to love together instead of expecting love from each other” available for download on www.ryhnauerhof.ch. (German only)*

Step 2: What should he/she do (instead)? What should the situation be (instead)?

Get in touch with the “layer of vulnerability”.

Make a conscious effort to leave the “protective layer” and start by reflecting what you want most from the person who hurt you. Often, the first answers are still rooted in the “protective layer”. But do not restrict yourself. The closer you get to what you truly wish for, the more effective the process will be. And as a result, you will have a true wish coming from the bottom of your heart.

(Example: 1st wish from the “protective layer”: *“He/she should praise me”*.
2nd wish from the “layer of vulnerability”: *“He/she should support me”*.)

Step 3: What should I do?

People we interact with can trigger injuries that we have received earlier. We may not realize this ourselves and it is only through interaction with others that we can see these injuries. We can use this mirror principle to our advantage by replacing the question *“What should he/she do?”* with *“What should I do”*. When you can achieve this, things that you were able to see only through others are now much clearer when you look within yourself.

Listen to your own feelings. Articulate what you can do in a single sentence and pay attention to the feelings that this sentence triggers. Take your time to let all thoughts, feelings and images come to the surface, and you will find that feelings that were locked-in as emotions in the “layer of vulnerability” can now show themselves to you. Accept them as a part of you. Feel your fear, anger, shame or grief to their full extent and free yourself from their influence on your life.

(Example: *“I should support myself”*)

Step 4: What do I do?

First, bring the essence of the sentence *“I support myself”* into your whole being. You can support this by directing your awareness to your breathing: with each inhalation you bring the essence of *“I support myself”* to the centre of the heart and with each exhalation you distribute the essence

throughout your body. Pay attention to your feelings, thoughts and images that appear. Receive everything and use the information your body gives you for the next steps in your life. The more you succeed in letting go of old habits this way, the more you will be rewarded with a growing confidence in yourself. More and more, the “layer of vulnerability” will be saturated with your true original self and increasingly, you will turn into the being that you were meant to be. Now you are in a position to let go of demands and expectations from other people. Whatever you need, you are now able to give to yourself. You will become less and less dependent on what others are thinking expecting or demanding from you. The courage to be your true original self will be rewarded with more joy in life and closeness to others that makes you happy.

(Example: *“I support myself!”*)

General pointers:

- Don't think about the final outcome when doing the process of self-love. Simply do the process with complete dedication.
- You can do the process of self-love alone or with the support of someone. If you are doing it alone, write down your specific sentences – because when you are writing, head, heart and hand are fully involved.
- People supporting the process should refrain from giving advice. At most, they can make suggestions. It is up to the person who is doing the process whether to accept these suggestions or not.
- The process of self-love is not about finding a solution in the protective layer. Any support provided for the process should aim to go as deep as possible in the layer of vulnerability, i.e. away from the outside to the inside. Answers found there will increase the self-love and hence the love for other people.

For everyone wishing for more love in their lives. Rosa Mueller-Stocker