

real self-acceptance

BY ALISON MILLER, PH.D.

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Accept yourself. Love yourself. Great ideas in theory, but how do you actually put them into practice? Often people expect that if they truly loved and accepted themselves, critical thoughts would just magically disappear. Real self-acceptance is more of an approach to living than a destination, however.

three strategies

1. Remember that you are a work in progress. All human beings are imperfect. We make mistakes, get angry, overeat, pick fights, procrastinate, ignore our own needs and so on. Welcome to being a human being! I am not suggesting that you condone or resign yourself to behavior you want to change. Instead, ask yourself what you can learn from your mistakes (instead of beating yourself up), and commit to realistic action. You, like all human beings, are a work in progress. And the more you can give yourself permission to be human, the more likely you'll become who you want to be.

2. Recognize that all human beings have self-doubt. You have probably noticed that some of the thoughts floating around in your head are rather critical. They may critique your personality, physical appearance, intelligence or personal history. The presence of self-doubting thoughts is not evidence that you are inadequate, however, but that you are human. We are often unaware of this universal truth because we tend to compare our insides to other people's outsides. But no matter how confident or competent other people

seem, you can be sure they are struggling with some version of your inner critic. Don't believe critical thoughts just because they pop into your head. Instead, practice saying to yourself, "I am having the thought that..." or "My mind is telling me..." See the thoughts for what they are ...

thoughts, nothing more, nothing less. They do not define who you are.

3. Stop competing and comparing yourself to others. You size up your neighbors, your co-workers, even your friends and complete strangers. You ask, "Am I better or worse?" Competition reinforces the message that you are not acceptable as you are. See if you can catch yourself in the act and let go of the comparison game. Focusing on what you value and appreciate about yourself and your life is a far better use of your energy.

Finally, as you go forward, remember to give yourself permission to be human over and over again. ✕

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