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 is also common for many of us to be our own worst critic and focus on the negative rather than our positive and admirable qualities. While having good self-esteem means that you find yourself worthy or valuable in some way, being able to accept yourself as you are means recognizing and embracing your successes, failures, and everything in-between.

Most of us find it hard not to judge ourselves for our flaws. However, self-acceptance is all about seeing and acknowledging our flaws (and accomplishments) without being defined 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.

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 am a bad person.? Here’s how you might reframe that thought: ?I forgot to meet my friend, but that does
not make me a bad person. I am not perfect and sometimes I make mistakes. I have a lot of good qualities that make me a good friend.

- **Remember that self-acceptance is unconditional.** While you can always try to improve and better yourself, self-acceptance needn’t be dependent upon ‘fixing’ certain aspects of yourself. It may be helpful to think about your actions and qualities as separate from yourself. Try to think about them objectively.

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. 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 therapist, friend, or family member might also be helpful. Ask your primary care provider for a referral, or you can read [How to find a therapist](https://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/EmotionalHealth/SelfAcceptance) in the *Go Ask Alice!* Emotional Health archives.

Here’s to you: flaws, fabulousness and all the rest of it!

Alice!

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**Resources**

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
- Mental Health Service (CUMC)

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