

# Self-love Foundations

**28 Ways  
to Nourish  
Your Relationship  
With Yourself**



DONNA HIGTON

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Relationship With Yourself

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## Introduction

*This is the original self-love section, where I go into each aspect of self-love. I had to ditch it because as you can see, it got waaaay too long! I hope you enjoy it.*

Let's go a little deeper into each aspect of self-love; just as self-love is a term that encompasses so much, so are each of the aspects. It is no wonder people struggle with this – it's a whole myriad of ideas and actions we've tried to shoehorn into a trite phrase "love yourself".

Notice as you go through how you feel about each aspect. Are you more comfortable with self-love as a woolly, vague concept or a set of clearer concepts? Does one element feel particularly awkward or stressful? Does your resistance rise up in protest about a specific aspect?

If your resistance is strong, notice that. Be curious about why that might be. Perhaps revisit the resistance section in 'Feel Good Foundations' and remind yourself of the antidote to your resistance. Also, feel free to skip that particular aspect for now - the idea here is to increase your self-love, so if you find yourself having conniptions over seeing your magnificence, just swerve that one for the moment.

And if you find yourself resisting lots of the aspects, do not worry about it - if your self-love is low, many of the concepts will feel alien at first. They did for me too. Find the ones that don't feel so icky and work on them, or go back to self-care and build that first. I found that once my self-care was regularly over a 7, my self-love had risen enough that I could consider ideas I'd previously found impossible to contemplate.

Let's dive into the aspects in detail.

## Self-love is caring how you are

I'm sure you do care how you are, but how do you demonstrate that to yourself? Do you check in with yourself? Do you take time to say, 'how are you?' regularly? Most of us don't. We just go through every day a bit oblivious to how we're doing, unless we're feeling great or terrible.

The other 80% of the time, we tend to ignore how we are in favour of just getting through each day. Think about how you feel when your friends and loved ones don't ask how you are, don't take the time to check in with you. Not because they're mean, just because life is busy and they are on the hamster wheel. But don't you feel a bit neglected at times?

It's the same when you are disregarding yourself. It's a low level of neglect, but neglect nonetheless. And I didn't know it until I started checking in with myself regularly. There is something very nurturing about taking a moment to ask how you're doing, giving an honest answer, and listening to the answer.

In the same way as when a good friend asks you how you are and listens as you tell

them the truth – it feels so good just to be heard. No flippant answers, no deflections, no pretending to be fine when you're not. Just truth, honesty, and authenticity.

This is the first aspect I wanted to explore because this is my favourite self-love exercise – it's easy, can be done in a couple of minutes, and is surprisingly impactful.

You simply ask yourself 'how are you?' and listen to the answer. You might look at yourself in the mirror while you ask, you might write out your answer, you might ask yourself while you're in the car driving. Just ask yourself how you are.

And don't give the stock 'yeah, good thanks' or 'I'm fine, you?' answers. Give the real answer. Give the answer you'd give if the person who cares about you most in the world and you trust implicitly with your deepest truth asked. Give the truth. And then listen.

You don't have to act on anything, unless you want to – this is just about being interested in yourself, listening to yourself, allowing yourself to say, "I feel sad/tired/frustrated/good today". It doesn't have to take long – a 2-5 minute 'how are you?' conversation with yourself will do.

When I first came across this exercise, I thought it was a bit pointless. I mean, I'm in my own head ALL the time, I know how I am. And my self-love was pretty good at that stage. But I tried it, and I was astonished at how much more loved I felt just by taking the time to ask myself how I was instead of just ignoring myself and getting on with my day.

Try it, let me know how it feels.

## **Self-love is being kind and gentle with yourself**

Are you kind and gentle with yourself? Are you a good friend to yourself? Are you willing to believe the best of yourself and be nice to you? People often believe that kindness and gentleness equate to being soft with yourself to the extent that you will become some kind of self-indulgent sloth.

It's an interesting theory, but it doesn't actually happen in practice. It is true that you might rest more if that's what you need, but that will give you more energy to live your life instead of living on anxiety, stress, and adrenaline, and being on the edge of a breakdown.

When I ask clients to be kind and gentle with themselves, they find it creates space to make mistakes, it creates space to rest, it creates space to not be perfect. Which leads to them learning from each life experiment, feeling better physically, mentally, and emotionally, and feeling good about their imperfect selves. Try it. Try being kind and gentle with yourself.

Most of us have a highly developed inner critic, who does the very opposite of kindness and gentleness. Start with some kindness and gentleness towards her. Your

inner critic wants the best for you. She usually either wants to keep you safe or wants you to be your very best. Imagine she is an employee who's been hired for a position, then given zero training, zero guidance on how to do the job.

So, she works on what she's seen around her - criticism as a means of getting people to do what you want. All those times you've been told off by parents and teachers for not doing what you were supposed to. This is the template our inner critic has to work with. I'm not having a go at teachers and parents here - they do the best they can to get kids to do things they don't want to, and generally they don't spend all day long berating and criticising.

But we take on this way of getting ourselves to do things that we don't want to, and before we know it, our inner critic takes over our entire inner dialogue and we are constantly and consistently mean to ourselves. This incessant barrage of fault-finding and reproof is discouraging, demotivating and depressing.

So why not try something new? Be kind to yourself. Be gentle with yourself. Be a good friend to yourself. Be self-loving. Be kind to your inner critic, now you understand that she wants the best for you. In a kind and gentle way, retrain her to build you up, to be nice to you, to be an inner friend instead of a critic.

Talk to yourself like you love yourself instead of as if you are a terrible human who needs constant reminders of her faults in order to get better. You're not and you don't, and this approach just makes you anxious and stressed. Being kind and gentle however, will help you relax and enjoy your life, imperfect as it is.

## **Self-love is having compassion for yourself**

Most of us are far more compassionate with others than we are with ourselves. When a friend fails or messes up, we generally have sympathy for them and are generous in our assessment of their life and choices. Ourselves? Oh no, we suck, we're the worst, we didn't try hard enough, we're useless.

We have such high standards and expectations for ourselves. I think a lot of this comes from a misconception about happy and successful people being somehow perfect. They're not. They are flawed, just like you. We only see the highlights of other people's lives, not the messy, raw reality.

But because we are *living through* our own journey, we see how many times we fail and fall short, how often we make mistakes and mess up, how imperfect and defective we are. And how fleeting our triumphs and successes seem in comparison. Please realise that this is a skewed perspective, and that you are just as deserving of compassion as anyone else in your life.

You are doing your best. Always. No one wants to fail, to mess up, to be a shambles. But we are humans, not robots. Failure means nothing about you as a human, except that you tried, and if you're willing to, that you learned. Everyone messes up. Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone fails. So have compassion for yourself when you

find you have been human too.

Try this: imagine you are a small child. How would you speak to yourself then? Perhaps you would be more tolerant of mistakes. Perhaps you would be more loving. Perhaps you would say “you’ve done your best. You tried. And you can try again! Well done. I’m proud of you.”.

If you’re used to holding yourself to impossibly high expectations, this might feel like a lowering of standards, like letting yourself off the hook, like you will slide into indolence and laziness. But the opposite can happen. By being compassionate with yourself, you release a weight off your shoulders, you remove a huge amount of stress, and give yourself freedom to succeed.

For years I held myself to impossibly high standards that I could never match, which led to self-criticism, disappointment in myself, and meant I put more pressure on myself. Once I decided to be more compassionate with myself, I realised I had been asking the impossible of myself and started setting targets I could reach.

If I didn’t hit those new targets, because I had compassion for me, I could see why it wasn’t working, what I was doing that wasn’t helping, as well as seeing what I was doing well. Because I kept telling myself I was doing my best, my belief in myself grew stronger, and it became easier to do what I wanted to do.

I also didn’t have the stress of living with crazily high expectations, so my physical, mental, and emotional health improved. Self-compassion made me more productive, and more likely to succeed, not less.

## **Self-love is cherishing, adoring and treasuring yourself**

How do you feel when you think about cherishing, adoring and treasuring yourself? Do you think “well, of course”, or do you feel slightly icky and awkward about it? It’s a step up from kindness and self-compassion – and if you find that difficult, this may be a step too far at this moment. And if that’s the case, that’s OK. Self-love isn’t easy after a lifetime of self-flagellation.

If even the thought of this makes you shudder with horror, I invite you to show yourself some self-love and focus on other aspects for now. Come back to this idea when your self-love gets better. Keep it in mind as you improve your self-love, and by all means, gently question why this feels so yukky.

Whenever I ask clients why this concept makes them cringe, they say “it’s too much” or “it feels narcissistic” or, even more often “I don’t know”. It feels like too much because we are so used to treating ourselves badly. Your level of comfort with it will rise as you practice. I have a friend who cherishes herself deeply.

She treats herself; she talks to herself like she’s a goddess, she adores herself. And she is the kindest, funniest, most humble human I know. She is not even vaguely narcissistic, she’s just really good to herself. She’s not arrogant in any way, she’s adorable. And she knows it.



But isn't it interesting that we've been taught that to treat ourselves well is a bad thing? We've been trained by life to be somewhere on the scale between mild dissatisfaction with ourselves and self-hatred. Why? Who benefits from this? Does it make a nation of happy people? Or a nation of unhappy people who can only see their faults and flaws?

When you start pondering such things, you realise that self-love is a revolutionary act. I'm not going to go too far down the rabbit hole here, but I will say that a lot of marketing depends on us feeling bad about ourselves. To the point that teenagers think they need botox, fillers, plastic surgery. I find this horrifying.

And the more of us who reject this premise that we are all flawed and defective in so many ways and the perfect pile cream (or whatever) will sort us out, the better. We need to be teaching the teenagers (and ourselves) that self-love is the first thing to try, not surgery.

If cherishing, adoring and treasuring yourself doesn't feel too icky to you, give it a try. Treat yourself. Be wonderful to yourself. Behave as if you were the best thing that ever lived. And as always, you can ease into this. You don't have to jump into full-on treating yourself like a goddess to begin with.

You can start with treating yourself like you are someone you love. Then progress up to princess, Queen, Goddess. As you go through the ranks of this, you will hit some discomfort. Cherishing, adoring and treasuring yourself will bring up all those old patterns of deservingness, of behaving appropriately, of worthiness.

Self-love in general will do this, but taking it to this level of cherishing, adoring and treasuring yourself is really going to rake up any muck lurking in your subconscious mind. This is a good thing. You want to clear out any old patterns, beliefs, or programming that leave you feeling less than worthy, and not able to love your wonderful self.

Try this: Finish this sentence "If I loved myself..."

For example:

"If I loved myself, I would not be so hard on myself."

"If I loved myself, I would allow myself to rest when I needed it"

"If I loved myself, I would eat less junk"

"If I loved myself, I would tell myself every day how great I am at what I do"

"If I loved myself, I would say no more often."

"If I loved myself, I would book more massages"

"If I loved myself, I would give myself time."

"If I loved myself, I would believe in myself at least as much I believe in others. If not more"

"If I loved myself, I would be kinder to myself in my self-talk."

"If I loved myself, I would tell myself I love myself as much as I could."

As always, let this be easy. Finish the sentence at least 10 times, then pick the easiest thing to do, and do that. You can also deepen it by asking "If I really cherished, adored, and treasured myself, I would..." and see where that takes you.

You may have spent a lifetime doing the opposite: depriving, hating and berating yourself. But you do not deserve that, most magnificent soul. You deserve all the love you can give yourself. Give it a try.

## **Self-love is knowing your worth**

This is another one a lot of us (especially women) struggle with. And that is largely because we've been sold a bit of a lie. How do you define your worth? By what you achieve? By what you accumulate? By what you earn? By the roles in society you fill? By the boxes you tick in your culture? By how well you fit the dominant norms? By how productive you are?

This is how we've been subconsciously taught to measure our worth as a human. And it is all nonsense. Sure, if you want to make all the money, accumulate all the things, tick four thousand things off your to do list every day, be a wife/husband, mother/father, have a career and all that jazz, that's awesome.

But it doesn't define your worth. A baby does not have to do anything to be worthy. It just is. At what point did you lose that sense of being worthy just by existing? And what did you learn you had to do to be worthy? Pass exams? Be quiet? Be loud? Be funny? Do all your homework and all the chores? What is your self-worth now tied to?

I don't want to lay blame at the feet of family and teachers - this nonsense starts in childhood, but it's not like people deliberately and maliciously set out to erode your self-worth. (Well, most of them didn't.) They were just trying to bring you up and teach you the best way they knew how. The unfortunate side effect is that as children we learned that our worthiness depended on us behaving a certain way, being useful or productive, doing everything right.

It's time to shed those imaginary shackles and remember you are worthy just because you exist. This may be a hard idea to swallow, so think of it this way - have you ever had a loved one who was diagnosed with a terminal illness? Have you ever lost a loved one?

Did you think as soon as they got sick that they were worthless and no use anymore? Of course not - it is usually at that point that we realise the preciousness of the human life, how much we value someone not for what they can do for us, or what role they fill in society, but for who they are.

All the other stuff - the accumulation, the endless doing and striving, it's all fool's gold where self-worth is concerned. As I say, fun if that's what you want to do, but empty calories if that's where you're looking for your self-worth. It can be so difficult to untangle from this perspective when everyone around you is part of the same

mad rat-race. We all get sucked in by social conditioning we're often barely aware of.

When I had a Multiple Sclerosis relapse in 2019, I found my worth was deeply enmeshed in what I do, and when I couldn't do much of anything, I felt my self-worth fall off a cliff. It was a deeply dispiriting experience, and in the midst of having barely any energy, I had to rebuild my self-worth and remind myself I do not have to do anything to be worthy. I am worthy because I exist.

This is often easier if you see the people you love in this light first, then turn it back around on yourself. You can also think of a younger version of you - especially when you felt like you were wrong, or you didn't fit in - can you see how worthy younger you was then? And how worthy you still are now?

Try this exercise: write down "I am worthy of..." and finish the sentence 10 times. EG "I am worthy of a great relationship, I am worthy of financial serenity, I am worthy of work that gives me joy, I am worthy of great self-care, I am worthy of rest when I need it, I am worthy of joy, I am worthy of self-love". Even if you don't quite believe it yet, write it down.

Do this exercise regularly to help you start to build up your self-worth. Over time, you'll find you start to believe all the things you write more and more. Once upon a time I wrote the sentences above and I didn't believe them. Today, I do. Because I've spent time working on my self-worth.

Like so many of the self-love concepts, if you've spent the past 20+ years believing you are unworthy or believing your worth only lies in what you can do for others, this idea may be hard to embrace. So be gentle with yourself as you ponder how you measure your self-worth, be curious about why everyone else might be worthy for just existing, but not you, be open to the idea that you are worthy just because you are a unique and fabulous person.

And if it is just too ick for words, focus on self-care. The better your self-care is, the more your self-worth will rise. Because you are treating yourself well and showing yourself that you *are* worthy of great self-care.

## **Self-love is seeing your magnificence**

If I could wish anything for you, it would be to see how brilliant you are. How amazing. How unique, wonderful and special. How magnificent you are. Every human being is a spark of divine light. A miraculous manifestation of life. Truly wondrous. We can see it in a new-born. Whether babies or puppies or baby elephants, we can see how marvellous they are.

And then, life happens. That tiny baby becomes a human being with opinions, ideas, faults, foibles. And over time life dulls their shine. But if they're your children, you can still see it. If they're your family or best friend, you can still see it. You can still see how wonderful they are. You can still see how special they are.

But can you still see it in yourself? Can you still see your own light? Your own brilliance? Or is it now hidden under layers of *not good enough* and *not getting above yourself* and being able to see your mistakes more clearly than your talents, your foibles more clearly than your brilliance?

I'm sure you have looked at a friend, a child, or a family member and thought "if only you could see what I see in you". Someone has most likely thought the same of you. I have certainly thought it of every one of my clients. I wish we humans could see our potential. Not necessarily our potential for ruling the world or making all the money (although if those are things that appeal to you, why not?).

I'm talking about your potential to be you. Your potential to live the life you dream of. Your potential for joy. I wish you could see what I see in you. You may say "but you've never met me". I don't need to. I can see from here that you are better than you think you are. I can see from here the brightly shining diamond that is your inner light.

That light, that diamond is always there inside - even if you cannot see it. Imagine an everlasting light bulb that has had dirt and crap thrown at it for 40 years. You might not be able to see that light anymore, but it's still there, just covered up. Maybe it's dusty and dirty from life's blows. Perhaps it's time to clear away some of that muck and let yourself shine a little more?

The easiest way to connect with this is to connect with your higher self, your soul, your divine team, your God. Whatever you believe in. When you truly connect with your inner and higher guidance, you connect with a part of life that knows your true wondrousness. Try it – try connecting with your higher or divine guidance.

If that's too woo-woo for you, try remembering that it is miraculous that you even exist, and you are the only you there ever was, and connecting to the wonder of that. Try it – try thinking about how miraculous it is that you even exist. Try imagining that diamond shining inside. Try thinking maybe you are magnificence in human form.

This is not about any kind of self-aggrandisement - just as you are unique and special, so are all the other humans. You don't need to stand on the heads of others to recognise your magnificence. In fact, you realising that you are one-of-a-kind helps others to see how fabulous they are too. If your resistance hackles are rising, remember that you can know you are a wonderful being *and* still be a good person - no arrogance, hubris, or vanity are required for this.

As with many of these self-love aspects, there is an opposite concept that most of us are much better at - seeing *everything* that is wrong with us, every place where we are a substandard human. This is absolute nonsense of course - we are just human – real people living real lives. Even though we have faults and foibles and sometimes questionable judgement, we are still magnificent.

Once you really get this idea, you will see that your faults and foibles are just part of

the rich tapestry of you-ness, not proof that you suck as a human. But if you've spent a lifetime focusing on how much you suck, to stop feels like an impossible task. Allow yourself to be a real human being. See the beauty in your imperfections. See your magnificence even though you're not perfect (spoiler alert: no one is).

## **Self-love is accepting who you are**

What do you resist about yourself? What do you dislike about yourself? What do you think is wrong with you? Do you have a large list of things that are imperfect about you? What would it be like if you could accept all of you, not just the bits that you think pass some arbitrary Perfect Human test?

Just imagine if you didn't resist your flaws and dislike your weaknesses and think there was something wrong with you. I can hear you thinking "Wait. Wouldn't that mean I just descend into sloth-hood, stop caring about myself, and never try to be a better human?" Nope. Ironically, it's the opposite. Not accepting yourself is more likely to send you down that path.

Accepting who you are means you can relax, you can stop beating yourself up, you can understand yourself better. You can still make changes if you want to. But you're not starting every day with the premise that you suck, which means you're *more* likely to reach your potential as a human, not less.

There is an ease that comes with self-acceptance, a relaxation, a peace. It makes sense. If you are not accepted by others, it puts you on edge. If you are not accepting yourself, you are going to feel on edge, even if you don't consciously realise it.

If you have a lot of things you don't like about you, self-acceptance might feel hard, but you don't have to start by accepting the things you hate most about yourself. Start with something that's easier to accept. Try this exercise: Take something you don't like about yourself and add to the end of the sentence "and that is OK". Here are a few examples:

I need more time to rest than other people, and that is OK.

I feel things deeply, and that is OK.

I am not as competent as X in this thing (usually when comparing yourself to someone who's done that thing for a lot longer), and that is OK.

I am getting older, and that is OK.

I am carrying a few extra pounds, and that is OK.

I am peri-menopausal, and that is OK.

I'm not climbing the career ladder anymore, and that is ok.

Whatever you think is making you imperfect – it's OK. Because it's you. Most of us judge ourselves far too harshly – those things we don't like about ourselves aren't always so bad, and self-acceptance can free you from so much self-criticism and self-judgement.

If you find this exercise hard, start with "I find this exercise hard, and that's OK". After decades of self-abuse and self-criticism, this type of exercise can feel uncomfortable, and that's OK. Everything new feels hard at first. It'll get easier. Keep going with it. I promise it'll be worth it.

When I had my last MS relapse, I really struggled with it. I didn't want to accept the relapse; I didn't want to accept that I had even less energy and could do even less with my life. It took me months to accept both the circumstances and my new limitations. But once I had, life got easier.

I was able to take the rest I needed without resisting. I was able to say no to things that physically drained me. I was able to explain to others why I couldn't do what I used to. I could stop fighting it, fighting myself, being down on myself, forcing myself to do more than I had the energy for, being disappointed in myself – all of which were exhausting in their own right.

Accepting the parts of you that you don't like will not mean that you are stuck being angry, or overweight, or having no energy. It will allow you to make peace with where you are, and from there, from a place of self-love, you can make changes in a way that doesn't involve berating yourself and making yourself feel bad.

Making yourself feel bad is never a good basis for change. I know, we've all done it for years in relation to our bodies – and look at how many of us hate our precious, amazing, wonderful bodies. (We'll talk about that more later.) It's time we stopped using self-criticism and self-hatred as a basis for transformation. Self-love is a much more fun and joyful way to evolve.

## **Self-love is accepting who you were**

Some of the most powerful self-acceptance work I've done has been in accepting my younger self. Can you love and accept the younger you? The self that was painfully, desperately shy. Love and accept her. The self that felt that she didn't fit in at all. Love and accept her. The self that went off the rails a bit. Love and accept her. The self that made some poor life choices. Love and accept her.

I know when I first thought about this, I found it hard. I didn't want to accept my shy, awkward, foolish younger self. But then I imagined meeting her now. That 5-year-old shy girl. That embarrassed (by everything), uncertain, worried 12-year-old. That hopeful, optimistic, devil-may-care 18-year-old. That world-weary, cynical, pessimistic 26-year-old. And I had so much compassion for those parts of me.

I might not feel the same now as I did then, I might not make the same choices now. But that's because of what my younger self taught me, what she went through, without the perspective I now have. A perspective I only have because of her. She did the best she knew how, and now I know better. I am who I am because of who she was – good and (so-called) bad.

Try this exercise: imagine you could talk to yourself as a child. Imagine you could reassure that child who hated school that it isn't the best time of her life (I was worried about this because I hated school so when adults told me it was the best time of my life, I was horrified). Imagine you could tell her that shy is beautiful. Imagine you could encourage her and soothe the fears she had then.

If it feels good, have a conversation with her. When I did this, my teenage self apologised for being so awkward. My heart broke for her (me). I vowed then never to reject my younger self again. (As a young adult I was horribly embarrassed by my teenage self). This can be a deeply powerful exercise.

Of course, if you have a lot of trauma in your younger life, you may want to get help from a therapist or counsellor to go to those places. Or you may not want to go there at all. Trust yourself in this. Don't do anything that would be harmful to you now. If you need to skip this exercise for your own health, do so.

But if you can learn to accept your younger self, you will find there is no value in rejecting yourself for your past behaviour when you were young, foolish, and learning. It is all part of you, like it or not. You were doing the best you knew how when you made your choices and your mistakes. Can you start to accept some of it? Can you start to see you have been excessively harsh on yourself (would you judge someone else's life so harshly? I think not.)?

Can you start to relax the chains of perfection you've wrapped around yourself and just start to accept yourself a little more? It's a process, a journey, and you don't have to do it perfectly. Start where you are...you haven't accepted yourself before, and that's OK. You're going to try now.

Start with accepting that this isn't easy. Start with accepting the younger you's that you have an easy compassion for, like the younger you who was bullied, scared, or shy. Don't go directly to the points in your life you feel most shame or embarrassment over. You can move onto the younger you's that messed up royally when self-acceptance has become a little easier.

With more self-acceptance, you will start to see that you're not so bad after all, and that those choices and mistakes you made were you trying to protect yourself, keep yourself safe, or make yourself feel good (even if it was in a destructive way). You are such a wonderful, lovely, unique and powerful being. And you always were.

## **Self-love is understanding yourself**

Do you spend a lot of time asking yourself "why do I do that?" If so, do you ask it as a rhetorical question, with the underlying meaning that you suck, or do you ask it with genuine curiosity? Have you ever taken the time to try and understand what makes you tick? Do you spend time exploring your needs and desires, your fears and foibles?

Many of us don't. We will take the time to understand what makes other people in our life tick, but not ourselves. But understanding yourself is deeply important to help you live life with ease and joy. As you age, you get to know and understand yourself better naturally, just by virtue of living with yourself for years and years, but taking the time to deliberately understand yourself fully will help you love yourself and your life even more.

When you understand that you are multi-passionate, you don't try to shoehorn yourself onto a single path. When you understand that you don't work well under pressure, you get rid of deadlines. When you understand that you are motivated by praise and encouragement, you stop giving yourself such a hard time.

Try this exercise: Take something you do that annoys you. Maybe it's procrastination, maybe it's eating junk food or sweets, maybe it's bingeing Netflix. Now ask yourself why you do that thing - from a place of curious exploration and love, rather than from a place of 'reasons I suck'.

Seek to understand, seek to find the root cause of this behaviour. Start with the perspective that you're doing your best, and you have good reasons for what you do. Get curious about what you think and what you do. What do you find?

If the question 'why do I do this?' takes you to a place of judgement and criticism, try asking "if I had a good reason for doing this thing, what could that be?"

You may find that you're procrastinating to keep yourself safe from doing something new and scary, or because you're on the verge of exhaustion. You may find that you are eating to soothe yourself or to give you energy. You may find you're bingeing Netflix for comfort, for escapism, or because you're bored.

When we don't understand ourselves, we spend a lot of time thinking we're a bad person, that we're not good enough, that we're defective in some way. That's almost never true. We have good reasons for doing the things we do. We are always doing our best – even if it looks like we are messing up royally.

When you find the reasons you behave the way you do, you'll become less self-critical. And when you understand why you do things, it is easier to make changes. For example, if you eat for comfort, trying to stop that by depriving yourself with a restrictive diet probably isn't going to work. But finding ways other than food to comfort and be kind to yourself will help you stop overeating.

Understanding yourself will give you more confidence in yourself, help you be compassionate with yourself, accept yourself, back yourself, set yourself up for success. It's a great shortcut to get you easily doing a lot of self-love aspects all at once.

You are a unique human. You are 1 in 7 billion. Look to understand your one-of-a-kind and wonderful self. You may find that you're not as bad at humaning as you think you are.



## **Self-love is knowing every part of you has a positive intention**

You may have heard the ideas that the ego is bad, that we have an inner saboteur, critic and perfectionist, that there is a gremlin sitting on our shoulder whispering lies and nonsense into our ears. Most of the time, we are told to not listen to those parts, to effectively ignore them or cut them out.

I never found that worked for me. It seemed wrong to cut out or ignore a part of me. Yes, it was an irritating, negative, critical part, but it was still part of me. It didn't feel very self-loving to just ignore it. Also, it never silenced those voices. If anything, they got louder.

If we take the time to listen to those aspects of ourselves, we usually find that there's a positive intention behind the negativity. Perhaps the ego is just how we've learned to survive in a weird world. Perhaps the inner saboteur just wants to keep you safe.

Perhaps the inner critic and inner perfectionist are trying to help you be your best. Perhaps that gremlin in your head is your fears given voice. When we look at it this way, those aspects start to lose their power over us. We understand that those aspects of ourselves just want to protect us.

Once you know the positive intention of those 'bad' parts, you can train yourself to do the same thing in a less critical way, soothe the fears that lead to this behaviour, or send love to that part of you and go your merry way anyway. Here's how that looks in practice:

Training yourself to do the same thing in a different way: You notice you are being critical of yourself to try and get the best from you. You also realise that criticism isn't the best way to do that. You choose to be more encouraging and loving, and when you notice that self-criticism come up again, you stop and change the narrative to be kind and supportive. The inner critic becomes a warning signal that you need to be nicer to yourself.

Soothing your fears: Your 'gremlin' is whispering that you can't do something you want to do. You realise that you are not taking action on your Big Dreams because of your fear of failure. You are kind and compassionate with yourself, and you do the work to feel better and less scared. For example by taking baby steps, getting support, or soothing your fears (while also getting on with doing the thing you want to do).

Sending love to yourself and carrying on regardless: You notice you are worrying about things that may never happen or being concerned about what *they* might say (which looks a lot like self-sabotage). You are kind and compassionate with yourself, and you go ahead and do whatever you want to anyway, because you trust yourself.

Which part of you is the loudest right now? Ego, critic, perfectionist, saboteur,

gremlin? Or perhaps another part you're aware of. Have a conversation with them. What is it they want for you? What is their positive intention? Even if they are not achieving that intention, be open to hearing their perspective. And decide on a different way to achieve that positive intention.

When I first spoke to my inner critic, she was so hurt and injured. She just wanted the best for me, and I was shushing her and ignoring her and telling her to f off! We talked about how to get the best from me – criticism isn't it, praise and encouragement is.

Now, my inner critic does still criticise sometimes – it's so easy to fall back into old patterns of behaviour – but we both know better. And hearing my inner critic piping up with criticism reminds me to focus on praise and encouragement instead of picking myself apart.

This is often a long process, but it is so worth doing. Not only can you retrain parts of yourself to support and love you which feels so much better, but you also learn to support and love them. So much self-love comes from learning the positive intention of the parts of you that give you a hard time. They want the best for you, and they can learn to change.

## **Self-love is trusting yourself**

How much do you trust yourself? For many of us, the answer is 'not a lot', and when we think about how we grew up and the society we live in, it's no surprise. From a young age we are told what to do and how to do it. From the time we are children, we are influenced by the people around us – friends as well as family, and shaped by the society we grew up in.

Small wonder that as adults we often don't know how to trust ourselves, how to listen to our own wisdom, how to follow our own path. It helps to understand this backdrop for the lack of self-trust, so that you can choose as an adult to make your own choices, to listen to your own heart and soul, and to follow your own path, even if it leads off into the wilderness.

Even then there is at least one more obstacle to overcome. How can you trust a person who is imperfect, who has made mistakes, who has sabotaged you, who has lied to you, who is critical of you? You've lived with you your whole life, you know how untrustworthy you are. You know how irresponsible, fickle and unreliable you've been. You know how many bad choices you've made.

The excellent news is that this is the same for everyone. Because we are all human. We are all imperfect; we've all made mistakes and poor choices. But we are always doing our best. We always have our own best interests at heart. It's just that sometimes we go about life in a way that looks like self-sabotage, self-criticism, and occasionally idiocy.

When you don't trust yourself, you are forever second-guessing yourself and outsourcing your choices. This leads to even less trust, because when a choice you

outsourced doesn't work out, you blame yourself for outsourcing it and not trusting your own judgement. It's a beautifully circular argument that there appears to be no way out of. No matter what you do, you're untrustworthy. Ugh.

Once you start to understand yourself, to be kind to yourself, to support and back yourself, self-trust gets a lot easier. As all these aspects of self-love are, it's a process. You don't go from complete lack of trust to total trust in yourself overnight. But the more you trust yourself, the more you can believe in yourself, have confidence in yourself, support and back yourself.

You are also much more likely to be living the life you want to live, because instead of making decisions based on other people's thoughts, you'll be trusting your own wisdom. This gets rid of so much angst and stress, because you trust that you know best what to do in your own life and can go ahead and do it.

Exercise: go to your inner wisdom. Do whatever you do to tune into your intuition. If you don't have a practice, try the exercise for tuning into body, mind, heart, soul, and energetic self I talked about in the self-care section of Feel Good Foundations (P42 in the paperback, or search for "body, mind, heart, soul, energetic self" in the ebook). Ask your inner wisdom what it wants you to know today.

Trust the answers you get. Start to trust yourself to do your best every day (remembering that every day your best will be different). Trust yourself to have your best interests at heart. Trust yourself to figure it out whatever happens. Trust yourself to back your choices. Trust yourself to make the best decisions you can with what you know at that moment.

As soon as you start to trust yourself, life becomes easier. You don't second-guess yourself as much. You don't go round in circles as much on decisions. You don't abdicate responsibility for your life anymore. Will you still make poor choices, iffy decisions, and questionable judgements? Absolutely. Nobody's perfect. But you'll trust that you were doing the best you could with what you knew.

## **Self-love is believing in yourself**

What is brilliant about all self-love is that you don't have to go from zero to one hundred in an instant. Once upon a time I believed you had to believe in yourself 100% before you could succeed in anything. Then I wrote a book. And I had maybe 25% belief in my ability to write a book when I started. If that.

Once I'd written it, my self-belief was higher, but it wasn't 100%. It still isn't, come to think of it. In all honesty, you only need a kernel of belief, a seed of possibility to get started on anything. You don't need as much self-belief as you think to do the things you most want to do.

The more you believe in yourself, the more you can achieve, the higher you can fly. But start where you are. Start with a tiny bit of belief in you - just 1% - and double it to 2%. What difference would that make if you just believed in yourself a little more? Go from "I can't do X" to "what if I could" and "maybe I could" and "why

don't I try".

Feel free to get help to believe in you - rope in your friends, get a coach, ask a mentor for help. Sometimes we need other people to be our Tinkerbell while we give ourselves the gift of shoring up our self-belief. Look at what you've done in your life. Look at how much you've achieved and been through and survived.

You may not have celebrity, riches, fame, or people queuing up to pat you on the back, but even living the most ordinary of lives is to go through all sorts of ups and downs and experiences of all stripes. Sometimes just getting out of bed and getting through the day is a herculean effort. You did that. You've done amazingly. And you're brilliant. Start believing that for your own self.

When you have no self-belief, it feels like something you either have or don't have, but it can be cultivated, it can be strengthened, it can be worked on. And that is self-love - to work on these aspects. To build your self-belief. Just a smidge of belief is enough to start. Then, as you go through life, you can build on that.

Even if, and this is crucial, you have failed 1000 times in the past. Build your self-belief anyway. Of course, if you have failed 1000 times, it can erode your self-belief. That is natural and normal. As it is natural and normal to fail – so keep building yourself up despite your (normal) failures.

How do you do that? One way is changing how you're talking to yourself. How do you talk to a friend that you believe in? You tell them they can do it, you remind them of what they've done in the past, you point out their strengths.

Tell yourself you can do it, remind yourself that you have got through every challenge thrown your way so far. Ok, you may have got through it by the skin of your teeth, broken and looking as if you got dragged through a hedge backwards, but you're still here. You have done life to this point. Remember your strengths. And if you don't know what they are, find them. You have them, I know you do.

When you don't believe in yourself, it holds you back from so much in life. It holds you back from even trying things. It is an insidious enemy, stopping you from being the wonderful human you are. If lack of self-belief has been an issue in your life, please know that it is not uncommon, and it doesn't mean you can't do anything.

It just means you've had self-belief issues in the past. And in the future, you can change that. Notice how your lack of self-belief shows up. Do you hold yourself back? How do you talk to yourself when you don't believe in yourself? There is no need (ever) for judgement, blame and shame. Just notice.

And then consider how you can change the lack of self-belief. Can you try something new anyway, even without high self-belief? Knowing that you don't need it as much as you think you do? Can you try saying to yourself "Maybe I can" or "what if I can" or "why don't I try". I know that when your self-belief is in your boots, this can feel impossible, so hold the idea lightly.

Show self-compassion and kindness and if you feel yourself seizing up at the very idea, focus on another element of self-love. They all build on one another, and as you work on, say, encouraging and backing yourself, your self-belief will start to build too.

## **Self-love is encouraging yourself**

How much do you encourage yourself? How much do you say to yourself “you can do it” and “give it a try” and “you’ve got this”? How much are you feeling proud of yourself, reminding yourself of past achievements? How much are you rewarding yourself for what you do? It’s probably not as much as you could.

Most of us have impossibly high expectations of ourselves, expecting perfection and then being disappointed when we inevitably fall short. We are generally encouraging to our friends and family, but we don’t always extend that same kindness to ourselves, believing we should *just do it* with zero encouragement.

Well, how’s that been working for you? Why not try something different? Try being more encouraging to yourself. Often, clients tell me ‘That’s just how I am’ when we talk about motivating, encouraging, and backing themselves. That’s a cop out. People can and do change.

If you’ve been driving for more than 2 years, look at how your attitude to driving has changed. If you’ve been a fan of music since you were a teenager, look how that has changed - there’s probably a band you loved as a teen that you now realise are awful. We can change how we behave, how we think, how we treat ourselves.

Encourage yourself. Tell yourself you can do it. Notice every small step you take along the way. Celebrate your small wins. Give yourself kudos for progress made. When things go wrong or look bleak, remind yourself you’ve come out of hard situations before, emphasise your strengths and gifts.

If that feels a step too far - don’t forget, this is all a continuum, it’s all a journey, and you don’t have to be perfect the first time - try saying “what if I could do it?” or “I wonder if I could do it” or “well, that person did it, so maybe I can too?” or even just “let’s try (again)”. Also, if you are just not feeling able to encourage yourself, reach out to someone who can shore you up until you can.

It is not good self-love to take everything on your own shoulders. In this self-love ebook, I am absolutely asking you to be your own best friend, your own best cheerleader, your own biggest hype-person. Also, know when to ask for help and lean into the support that is offered to you. You can’t and don’t need to do it all alone.

Trying to be fiercely independent can sometimes be an insidious way of discouraging yourself - setting yourself up to fail, then taking failure as proof that you can’t be trusted. Ugh. Just notice if that’s what you’ve been doing. No judgement, no blame,

no shame. Just be aware. How else do you discourage yourself?

As with other elements of self-love, it may be easier to see how you do the opposite and turn that around. Do you constantly tell yourself you can't do it, that you're useless and too thick/fat/old/hairy? Do you compare yourself to other people (unfavourably)? Do you focus on how far there is to go without any context or appreciation of how far you've come?

Whatever you do to discourage yourself, try doing the opposite. Instead of having impossibly high expectations, reward yourself for every baby step. Instead of beating yourself up for falling short, give yourself credit for trying. Instead of focusing on what you haven't done, look at what you did do.

Instead of telling yourself you can't, tell yourself you can at least try. Instead of giving yourself all the reasons you'll fail, give yourself a pep talk. We tend to discourage ourselves out of habit, partly unconsciously. Try a new habit, consciously think about what it would mean to encourage yourself and go do that. You can do it!

## **Self-love is acknowledging, honouring and praising yourself**

At what point do you give yourself a bit of praise? For every single step forward you take? When small milestones are checked off? When a major milestone is hit? When the huge project is done? Never? Many of us veer towards the 'never' end of this scale. I used to be the same. I would be far more likely to berate myself for the 6 million things undone than the 2 things I did do.

When I worked in the corporate world, I had some awful bosses (and some good ones), but the worst boss I ever had in my life was me. I was demanding, hard on myself, gave zero praise or acknowledgement. If you've ever worked for a boss like that, you'll know how demoralising and discouraging it can be.

And I wonder, did you do your best work for that boss? I did not. I worked best for the boss who saw how hard I was working, who rewarded me, who praised me, who raised me up. That was the boss I would work until 3am on a weekend for. That was the boss I would have done almost anything for.

This is not (only) a lesson in management of staff. It's a lesson in managing yourself. If you praise yourself, celebrate yourself, acknowledge yourself, you'll get the best from yourself. Praise, celebration, and acknowledgement build confidence, they make you feel good, they give you a strong sense of self-belief.

All of which make you stronger, make you feel better about yourself, and over time, make you feel that you can do whatever you want to do. And it doesn't just affect your work life. This will impact you in all walks of life that you care to use it.

Try this exercise: Choose something you have done today and praise, acknowledge

or celebrate yourself for it. State why you're pleased you've done it or why you can be proud of yourself because of it. Give yourself a high five, a pat on the back (or on the head), raise your glass to yourself, cheer yourself, raise your arms in celebration, do a happy dance, give yourself a gold star.

For example: I have taken my vitamins this morning. I am proud that I am taking care of my health with this regimen. Well done me. (High fives self, pats self on back and head, laughs, raises triumphant arms like I've won a gold medal.)

This may sound like a silly example, and an over-the-top celebration, but do you know how many times I have forgotten to take my vitamins? For weeks and months on end? And how much that has impacted my health? It's a big deal. Also, I wanted to show that you can celebrate ANY small and seemingly insignificant step.

Even those of us who do acknowledge, celebrate and praise ourselves don't often do it for every small and insignificant step. But when you do, it feels so good, it's fun and you start to get good at acknowledging, praising and celebrating yourself. Which helps build your self-confidence and self-belief, and helps you get the best from yourself.

It's win/win/win/win. You may think it sounds like a lot of effort, but it takes 8 seconds. I timed it on acknowledging myself for stopping to massage my sore head and patting myself on the back for doing so. 8 seconds. Also, you may already do this in reverse all day long.

You give yourself a hard time for every little thing you didn't do right. You criticise yourself for all your perceived flaws and foibles. You berate yourself for all the ways you're not the perfect human. Enough of that shit. It hasn't worked for the past however many years you've been alive to make you feel good and make you feel like a better person.

Try acknowledging, praising and celebrating yourself instead. Even if it takes 15 or 20 seconds, isn't it worth taking that time a few times a day to feel good, to give yourself some credit, to acknowledge how fabulous you are and how well you've done? Even if all you've done is wash up, cook a meal, or get yourself out of bed this morning. It's all worthy of acknowledgement, honouring, and praise.

## **Self-love is protecting yourself**

Can you set boundaries? Can you say no? Can you protect yourself from the world around you? We're brought up to believe that a *good* person says yes to everything, is obliging and helpful, is there for others. While there is some truth to this, it is also true that you can be a good person while saying no, being discerning, and taking care of yourself first.

This is partly the idea of putting your own oxygen mask on first (because what use are you when you're passed out from lack of oxygen?), but it's also remembering that you are important too. Just as you would not want your loved ones to harm

themselves to help you, your loved ones want the same for you.

Your health, your wellbeing is important too. In many cases, you will find that your wellbeing is *more* important to the people who love you than what you can do for them. Also, you can't help others when you are depleted, exhausted, and ill. Other people will need you throughout your life, but you can only help them if you take care of yourself.

I know way too many people who took themselves to the edge of death and madness trying to please everyone else while depleting themselves. When you love someone, you notice when they are exhausted and struggling, and you try, where you can, to ease their burden. Do you do the same for yourself?

Or do you demand impossibly high standards of *good person*-ness from yourself, while letting everyone else rest? You cannot do it all, especially if you are running on empty. And the deepest irony in this is that when you fill yourself up first, you usually have *more* to give, not less. And what you give can be given with generosity of spirit, joy, and lightness, instead of obligation, guilt, and sufferance.

Clients will often tell me that they have trouble saying no and setting boundaries, but when I ask if they want me to hit them over the head with a poker, they say no with ease. If you feel you have trouble saying no and setting boundaries, it is simply because you need some practice. And now that you are working on protecting yourself, protecting your health and sanity, you can get practice.

It'll be fun. You'll feel better. Try this: say no to something, anything at all this week. You don't have to make it a 'hell, no' or a nasty no. It can be a "sorry I can't, no". No can be a complete sentence. You don't have to justify it or explain it (you may want to, but it's not necessary). Notice how you feel about saying no, and love yourself through whatever reactions you have.

Like so many of us, I used to say yes to pretty much anything. I had few boundaries, and I kept burning myself out. When I started to say no, I felt guilt, shame (for not being superhuman), fear (that people would fall out with me), fomo. Lots of feelings can come up - it's totally normal when you change how you're being.

Keep setting boundaries anyway. Keep looking out for yourself. Imagine you are one of the people you love most in the world and you're watching yourself burn out (you probably don't have to imagine it, I'm sure you know someone who does this) - what boundaries do you want them to set? Start setting them for yourself.

When your self-care is excellent, these boundaries will be easier to set up because you can see that it is great self-care as well as self-love to have good, strong, healthy boundaries, to protect yourself and your health. What would it look like for you to protect yourself? What would you need to do to set boundaries? And how do you feel about this idea?

For many people, it feels uncomfortable, like it will be difficult, there is guilt and



shame and fear. Love yourself whatever your reaction. And take a step anyway. You don't have to go from zero boundaries and letting the whole world have a piece of you to a hard-ass ice queen in one step.

One baby step at a time, put your boundaries in place. Put your phone on silent when you're ready to rest, take 5 minutes for yourself, say no to things you don't want to do, ask for what you want and need, refuse to participate in drama and conflict. Whatever you know will help you protect yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and energetically.

Just as you would protect those you love, learn to protect yourself. You deserve the protection as much as they do. You deserve to be safe and healthy as much as they do. When we have lived our lives without any thought to our own wellbeing, this can feel like a herculean task.

I never used to be able to say no. Now it is my default answer, because I need to protect my health and my energy. No one has fallen out with me, no one (as far as I know) hates me for taking care of my one and only precious self, no one has ever called me selfish for it.

Even if they did, that would be their business, not mine. My business is to take care of and protect myself. My health, my body, my energy, my mind, my heart, my soul, my energetic self. What other people think of that is up to them. They are entitled to their opinion. I am entitled to ignore that opinion and protect myself. So are you.

## **Self-love is supporting yourself**

I talk to a lot of clients about what they want to create in life, and what's been holding them back. They mostly blame themselves - for making poor choices, for not having willpower, for getting it wrong, for (gasp) failing. But it's usually none of those things. It's usually at least in part to do with them not fully supporting themselves in their life.

Think about it - do you support yourself? Do you think about what you can do to make life easier for yourself? Do you think about what you need, both in general and to do the things you want to do? Do you set yourself up for success? Most of us don't. We just decide we want to do a thing, go off half-cocked with little planning and preparation, then beat ourselves up when we inevitably fail.

Hey, I am all for spontaneity in a goal. I am all for blind, naive optimism. Sometimes it works out. But when it doesn't, then what? Then you need to support yourself. You need to set yourself up for success. You need to allow yourself to fail. Oh, I know, horrifying right? But failure is the inevitable consequence of trying and stretching and getting out of your comfort zone.

It is also a great way to learn to succeed. *If* you support yourself in the failure. If you just berate yourself to within an inch of your life, it's no help at all, it just makes you feel worse about yourself. And as that doesn't work well for getting you to

create the life you want, for helping you to do all the things you want to do, let's drop berating ourselves as a habit, eh?

Supporting yourself means being supportive when things aren't going well. We all have that fair-weather friend who's all supportive and encouraging when things are going well, but as soon as things get tough, they ghost. Don't be that person for yourself. Support yourself when things suck.

Support yourself when you mess up. Support yourself when it all seems to be going to pot. Support yourself when you have failed dismally. Support yourself when you're experimenting with something new. Support yourself when you're grinding it out. Support yourself when it's easy. Support yourself when it's really hard.

How do you support yourself? Well, this is pretty individual. What makes me feel supported might not feel good to you. But here's a few ideas: One: let yourself feel how you feel. Don't stick a happy face sticker on and pretend all is well. Give yourself the freedom to say, "I feel bad" and be sad or angry or frustrated.

Two: Ask for help. Yes, supporting yourself can look like getting your support team in. They're not psychic, so ask them to help when you need them. And then let them help you. You don't need to do it all yourself.

Three: Give yourself what you need. Think about what you need right now physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, energetically. Get that for yourself. Yes, self-care is excellent self-support.

Four: support yourself by understanding yourself, by being kind to yourself, by trusting yourself. Yep, all the other self-love aspects can be self-support. Which one do you think will support you most right now? Go work on that one.

Try this: think about something you'd like to do in life. How can you best support yourself in that endeavour? What would make *you* feel supported?

Sometimes it's easier to see the negative side of an aspect of self-love. Try asking yourself how you are unsupportive to yourself. And then do the opposite. Are you telling yourself you can't do it? Tell yourself you can. Are you rolling your eyes at yourself when you fail *again*? (Totally normal to fail a lot by the way.) Try giving yourself a hug instead.

Are you expecting perfection from yourself? Stop that, allow yourself to be human instead. Are you telling yourself to give up, it's pointless? Try telling yourself to keep trying. Are you being mean and critical? Try being kind and uplifting. Are you undermining yourself? Try talking yourself up instead.

You get to decide exactly what being supportive to yourself means to you, and you get to choose to do that for yourself.

## Self-love is backing yourself

You know you best. You know your life best. *You* are the best person to make choices about *your* life. Other people will have their opinions, of course (and they are welcome to them). But ultimately it is *your* life. You live in your body, you think with your mind, you feel with your heart, you are your soul, you exist in your energy.

So where (and why) are you giving away that power? Where (and why) are you thinking other people know better than you about your own life? Where (and why) are you outsourcing your decisions to other people? Look, I get it - if you are not fully confident, it feels like everyone else knows better. But they don't. Especially not about *your* life.

Some decisions about your life will need to be made with the input of others. Your partner or spouse won't be impressed if you decide to move to the other side of the world without mentioning it to them. But joint decisions are different. Are you making the choices that are yours to make in life? And are you backing yourself to do what's right for you?

Are you backing yourself to make good choices? Are you backing yourself for the choices you've made up to now? I know, you've made some poor choices. Who hasn't? But if I were to put you back there, with what you knew then, with the same circumstances, would you choose differently? Without the benefit of hindsight?

The worst choice I ever made was over a man. I knew it was a bad choice as I was making it. I knew it would end in tears. I was right. And for years, I beat myself up over that dumb choice. Until one day I realised that I had reasons for making that choice, and I chose to quit beating myself up for choosing hope, friendship, and optimism.

The choices we make don't always work out. Back yourself anyway. You are always doing the best you can in life. We make the best choices we can in each moment. Even those choices that you *know* are a mistake as you're making them. Trust that you are always doing the best you can, and you always have been.

And start backing yourself. When I get clients to start looking at past *poor* choices through a different lens, they always had good reasons for doing what they did. Whether that was because they didn't know better, or they were optimistic, or they wanted connection, or they believed what they were told – there are always reasons we do what we do.

They may not be great reasons; they may turn out with hindsight to be terrible choices. But at the time we make our choices, we have to believe we were doing the best we could in those circumstances, with what we knew at the time. Now we know better, we can do better. But do not torture yourself with 20/20 hindsight.

Try this: Take a decision you made that didn't work out well and defend that decision to yourself. Behave as if you totally backed that choice. If you like, you can take it to

the utterly absurd lengths that some public figures do when they defend themselves. Just for fun.

Remind yourself that you were doing the best you could with the circumstances you had. You can do this for as many old decisions as you like. Until you realise that you were doing your best, that you've always tried to do your best by yourself. And sometimes you will get it wrong. But that's OK. You're allowed to be human. Even when the consequences of your choices are not pleasant.

Everything you have been through, everything you have experienced has brought you to now. And now, you do know better than you did 5, 10, 20 years ago. Now, you can start to back yourself for making the choices and decisions you make today. Because you've been making choices and decisions your whole life.

Some of them work out, some don't. But you've always done the best you could. It's time to start backing yourself. It's time to start realising that this is your life. Only yours. And you are always the best person to know what to do with your life. By all means, gather advice if that feels good. And then make your choice (even if that's to ignore all the advice and follow your own star).

Do you do the opposite of backing yourself? Undermining and second guessing yourself. Listen, we all do this sometimes. It is impossible to live life without wondering if we're doing the right thing. Some decisions are difficult, and being uncertain about a path is part of the human condition. But if you find yourself second guessing yourself all the time, over even the most miniscule of decisions, then it's time to stop that.

Start telling yourself "That's the choice I made, let's see how it pans out..." or "on the basis I know what I'm doing..." or "I trust myself to make good choices" or "f\*\*\* it, let's see what happens". Refuse to keep undermining and second guessing yourself all day long. Decide to back yourself even though you are an imperfect human who makes mistakes (just like every other human).

## **Self-love is motivating yourself**

When I talk about motivating yourself, what do you think of? Do you think of a cheerleader on the side-lines cheering you on? Do you think about a kind of Tony Robbins figure yelling 'GO DO IT'? Do you think about a scolding figure pestering you to get on with it? And whatever the concept makes you think of, is that motivating to you?

For years, I rejected the "rah-rah" style of motivation. Being British, that loud, brash "go, go, go" was off-putting to me. And I was very aware that that style of motivation was very short-lived. I preferred to think about being inspired to take the action I needed to take to create the life I wanted to live.

Knowing why I want to do something is a big motivator for me. And over the years, I've also refined my self-motivation plan. Breaking tasks down into manageable

chunks, setting timers, just sitting my butt in the chair and getting on with it, making each task as fun and easy as I possibly can, and making sure I feel as good as possible all help to motivate me.

What motivates you? You may not have given this any thought in the past, so your first answer may be "I don't know". If you don't know *yet*, really consider it. When you've done difficult things in the past, what motivated you? Was it fun, family, hitting rock bottom, wanting to push yourself, being inspired by a dream?

By the way, if hitting rock bottom has previously been your main motivator, that doesn't mean you'll always have to have a horrible time to make changes in your life. This question simply helps you understand what has worked in the past - you then get to decide whether to keep that method of motivation. For example you might want to keep being motivated by proving everyone wrong who thought you couldn't do it, or you might want to change it to wanting to love your life as much as you can.

Being in charge of your life means you get to choose. If you don't yet have a method of motivation that works for you, you also get to experiment, try new things, find what works for you. When I work with clients on motivation, I always start with self-care, joy, and energy - because if you're feeling uncared for, joyless, and shattered, motivation will be hard to find.

Then we look at why they want to do what they want to do - if the dream is compelling, this is a great motivating factor. Then we look at breaking things down into baby steps and making it as easy and fun as possible. And finally, we look at the practicalities of the task in hand, at anything that might be getting in the way.

Although sometimes it's worth checking the practicalities first - I had a client once who couldn't seem to motivate themselves to do a piece of work. When we checked in on the practicalities, their laptop needed fixing. Without the laptop, they couldn't do the task. Sometimes it's not so much about motivating yourself as making sure you have the tools for the job.

But if all the stars are aligned, sometimes you just need to sit your butt in the chair and do the thing without the motivation. I often find myself not motivated to write, but then I just sit and start, and 99 times out of 100, that will be enough to get me writing. Knowing myself well though, I say to myself "let's just do 5 minutes and see how I get on - if it's not working, I'll stop".

Harsh, mean, critical self-talk doesn't motivate me in the slightest, so I try not to do it. What do you think will motivate you? Kindness or firmness? Positive self-talk or negative? Being inspired by the dream? Easy, fun baby steps? Try everything that appeals to you. Experiment, play and find your way to motivate yourself.

The opposite end of the spectrum for this one is demotivating yourself. Let's ask the same question: how do you demotivate yourself? You may find this one easier to answer, because you may have been doing this in a much more consistent fashion

than you have self-motivation.

Remember not to beat yourself up over it, it's no help, and it's not self-loving. Just notice. Sometimes it can be so useful to chart how you de-motivate yourself, because you can do the opposite to start motivating you. One of my instant demotivators is to tell myself I *have to* do something. Being a contrary soul, immediately, I don't want to. So I try very hard not to do that to myself.

If you've been really good at demotivating yourself in the past, that's great - you can flip those skills round to motivating yourself instead. Often, all it takes is practice to do things a little differently.

## **Self-love is having confidence in yourself**

Ah, self-confidence. That elusive quality we all think everyone else has and we don't. And there is the first secret to self-confidence - other people don't have as much as you think they do. Many people are under-confident, but most of us mask it pretty well, feeling jelly-legged inside while outwardly going about our business.

The first thing to do with self-confidence is to stop comparing your insides to everyone else's outsides. Yes, there may be people out there with towering self-confidence, but most people will have just as many doubts about themselves, just as many fears, just as much worry about whether they're up to the task.

Which leads me to the second secret of self-confidence: it is not lack of doubt or fear or worry. It is having those thoughts (because we are human, and humans have thoughts. Lots of them. Many of them deeply unhelpful) and going ahead anyway. That's confidence - thinking the thoughts, feeling the feelings, and doing the things you want to regardless.

This is also, ironically, what builds confidence. Doing the things you don't feel too confident about. Years ago, I was terrified of public speaking, so I joined Toastmasters. I had zero confidence for my first speech. I mumbled, I stuttered, I was bright red the whole time, I stared at my notes, I spoke so fast my 7 minute speech took about 4 and a half minutes.

Luckily Toasties was a super supportive environment where they cheer you on for having the courage to get up and speak. 20 or 30 speeches later, I was a very confident public speaker. Because I practiced. Because I learned. Because I got up even when my legs were shaking, my mouth was dry, and I had no confidence.

There's the third secret about confidence: you don't need as much of it as you think you do. What you need is a tiny bit of courage. Only a tiny bit - enough to take the next small step (I love a small step - it bypasses a lot of the fears and worries, and before you know it, you've done the thing you were terrified of).

The more steps you take, the more confidence you will build. The more evidence you see that you can do lots of things in life, the more confidence you will build. The

more you love yourself, the more confidence you will build.

As with all these aspects of self-love, it is not a binary issue - it's a scale. From "I am hopeless at humaning" to "I can do anything I want to do". And sometimes you can go from one end of that spectrum to the other in about 24 hours. While having confidence in you is an aspect of self-love, so is being kind to yourself when you have the collywobblers.

If your confidence is really low, be compassionate with yourself. And perhaps don't worry about trying to make yourself confident right now. Maybe start with other self-love aspects (many of which will build strong foundations for self-confidence, like believing in yourself, seeing your magnificence, knowing your worth, backing yourself, trusting yourself).

And if you're ready to work on your self-confidence, my favourite way is to go do something you don't feel confident about. In baby steps. Pick an easy baby step. For example, in the public speaking example above, my first step was to get in touch with someone I knew went to Toastmasters and ask about it. Easy. If I thought about "learning to speak in public" I'd have been terrified and frozen, but sending an e-mail? That I could do.

That led to the baby step of going to a meeting as a guest (scary but not as terrifying as "standing up in front of a group of people and talking"), and the baby steps of joining, and doing my first speech (and by then I knew I would get lots of support, encouragement, and kindness from the others). Ok, there does come a point when the next baby step is pretty scary, but by then you're in motion, you've already taken a few steps, and you can build on your momentum.

Go do the things you want to do and build your confidence.

For each aspect of self-love, there is an opposite that you also may need to think about. In this case, it is *undermining* yourself. Something lots of us are quite brilliant at. Doing something fabulous, then diminishing our achievement; or spending all day long telling ourselves how crap we are at everything. If you're undermining your confidence, you will find it harder to build self-confidence (obviously), so you also need to stop doing that.

Again, it's a scale, not a switch, so first do it a little less, then even less, right up until you don't do it (very often) anymore. It may be that you never fully stop, but as you undermine yourself less and build your confidence more, you'll feel more loved. You can also use those well-honed skills you have for noticing your faults and belittling yourself to notice what you did well and build yourself up.

## **Self-love is setting yourself up for success**

How do you set yourself up for success? How do you make sure that when you do something, you have the very best chance of making it work? Do you take the time to really make life easier for yourself? Do you take the time to consider all angles of an issue and make sure that you have every angle covered?

I'm going to guess not. Most of us do the exact opposite - we set ourselves up for failure. Like when we say "I'm going to do XYZ AND ABCDEFGHIJKL" on days we'd be doing well to just do X. Like when we decide we're giving up junk food NOW and FOREVER, even though the cupboards are full to bursting of yummy stuff we know we really shouldn't eat, and we've spent months (if not years) cultivating terrible eating habits.

And then, to add insult to injury, after setting ourselves up for failure, we beat ourselves up, criticise ourselves, give ourselves a hard time for being such a hopeless human (who couldn't do the impossible). I'm sure you don't need to think too long to find examples of where you do this in your life, where you have impossibly high expectations of yourself, where you decide you'll do something with just willpower and 30 seconds of thought behind it.

There's a better way. A self-loving way. Where you set yourself up for success. Many moons ago, I worked in an IT department, and our ethos was to under-promise and over-deliver. (Although we still often underestimated how long a job would take thanks to technology being wildly unreliable.)

For years when I became self-employed, I did the opposite. I over-promised myself and under-delivered every single time. My boss (me) lost faith in me. My employee (me) was discouraged. Everything seemed to take 500 times longer than I thought it should, was never as simple as I thought it would be, and I spent a whole lot of time disappointed with myself and indulging in some lovely self-criticism.

My boss (me) was an arsehole. And I felt like I couldn't do anything right. Until I realised I was setting myself up for failure. Like: I'm going to redo my website in a week. Nope. Like: I'm going to create this course in a month. Nope. Like: I'm going to write, edit, publish and market a book with zero experience in 6 months. Nope.

In all these things (and many more) I wildly underestimated how long it would take, and in most of them, I made it impossible for myself to do a good job, because I was giving myself a hard time, telling myself to hurry the hell up, this should have been finished 80 moons ago. Ugh. Eventually, I realised this wasn't working for me, and I decided to set myself up for success instead.

First, I got rid of deadlines. They don't work for me, they stress me out, and they don't take into account real life where things go wrong, things get in the way, and everything takes at least twice as long as you think it will. Second, I started to ask myself how I could make this project or goal easier and more fun to accomplish.



I experimented to find what worked for me. We can't know what will work until we try. I tried lots of different things until I found a writing process that works for me. I also got help, and now I have a network of wonderful people who can help me with all aspects of self-publishing.

I've set myself up for success. I get more done this way, and it's a kinder, happier place to be. So how do you set yourself up for success? If you've never thought about it, you may not know yet. That's fine. You get to experiment, play, and learn. You know yourself better than anyone else in the world ever will (because you live inside yourself). What do you think will help set you up for success?

Here's where I always get clients to start: how can you make life, tasks, projects, goals more fun and easier? The more fun you're having, the more likely you are to do whatever it is you want to do. The easier it is, the more likely you'll show up and do it, because it's only 5 minutes, or it's only one action.

You may need challenge and difficulty to set yourself up for success. But if you've tried challenge and difficulty before and it's not working brilliantly, try a little ease and fun, just to see what happens. Try backing yourself, encouraging yourself, being kind to yourself. Try working with your personality and characteristics instead of trying to squeeze your star shape into a square hole.

Try thinking about what might get in your way and have a plan for how you'll deal with that. Try getting help and support from your people. Try allowing yourself to have doubts and fears *and keeping on going anyway*. Try noticing when things aren't working and tweaking what you're doing. Try asking how you can make it better instead of blaming yourself for not having enough willpower or not being good enough or some such guff.

As you try things, evaluate - did this help you set yourself up for success with this task, plan or goal? What could you do next time that will make success more likely? There is zero need for self-flagellation if you notice you were hard on yourself, set impossible expectations, and actively set yourself up for failure. It won't help, and it feels bad.

Simply make a new choice. Like if you tried a new flavour of ice cream and thought 'yuk'. You just won't try that flavour again. No self-criticism required. Give your precious, wonderful self the best chance possible to succeed at whatever you want to do in life by setting yourself up for success.

Many of us have more experience of setting ourselves up for failure. By having impossible expectations, by trying to achieve a goal with zero preparation or support, by going gung-ho at something and burning out within weeks, by telling ourselves we can't do it, by being self-critical and mean to ourselves, by making life more difficult than it needs to be.

A great example of this is New Year's Resolutions. So often, they're about deprivation, giving things up, trying to be perfect with no flexibility or understanding

of who we are and what works for us. My New Year's Resolution not to make any more New Year's Resolutions is the only one I've ever kept.

If you have set yourself up for failure in the past, look back at what you did to make life harder for yourself, and consider what you could do that is the opposite and will set you up for success.

## **Self-love is wanting the best for and from yourself**

Often, people think that loving yourself means letting yourself slide into slothfulness. All those soft things of being kind and compassionate and encouraging. Bah. Better to make yourself utterly miserable with criticism and discouragement and viciousness. Which when you stop and think about it is a peculiar way to look at life.

This element of self-love is where gentleness meets strength, power, and action. This is the element that informs the others. Because if you want the best from yourself, do you get it with self-compassion or self-criticism? Do you get it with encouragement or discouragement? Do you get it with kindness or nastiness?

I know which side of these gets the best from me...and from every client I have ever worked with. Being horrible to yourself simply undermines your confidence, makes you fearful of making mistakes, and makes it less likely you'll succeed. Wanting the best for and from yourself means self-love.

But it *also* means getting yourself out of your comfort zone, it *also* means growing as a human, it *also* means taking action, it *also* means putting down the biscuits and getting off the sofa (damn!). It means doing whatever you need to so that you can live up to your potential as a wonderful human. So that you can become who you want to be and do what you want to do in your one and only precious life.

Wanting the best for and from yourself will mean having strong boundaries, getting out of your comfort zone, learning, trying, failing - and going again. It will mean doing the work (and it is work) to drop the old harmful, discouraging habits you've had up until now. It will mean choosing again and again to be self-loving.

Wanting the best for and from yourself is something you've most likely had all your life. But you may have tried to kick yourself up the backside, push yourself, motivate yourself with criticism, been harsh with yourself. Has that been getting the best from you? It didn't get the best from me, and I don't believe it's a good way to get the best from anyone.

This can be a tough one to implement, simply because we are so used to trying to get the best from ourselves by being hard on ourselves. Give it some thought - what would get the best from you? And how can you do that while incorporating some of the other elements we've talked about?

Getting the best from myself for me began with trusting myself, then understanding myself, then learning how to motivate and encourage myself. More self-love for me

has never meant I get less done (I accomplish more now than I ever have), it's never meant letting myself slide into slothfulness.

It's meant I've figured out what gets the best from me and done that as much as possible. It's meant I have rested more, because burnout is not fun (or productive). It's meant I have been kinder to myself along the way to getting what I want. It's meant I've dared to dream bigger dreams.

By the way, wanting the best for and from yourself is not about spending all the money on luxury - unless that feels good to you. It is about how you treat yourself and what you expect for and from yourself. It doesn't need to cost a penny to look for the best for and from yourself. And as always, you don't need to be perfect with this.

Simply asking the questions "how do I get the best from myself?"; "what does the best of me look like?"; "have I been looking for the best for myself?" can be enough to start making you feel as if you want better for and from yourself. Self-love doesn't mean doing all the self-love aspects to perfection, it means doing just a little more, and a little more until you don't have to think about it anymore.

Try this exercise:

If you were an item of clothing, or a plant, what would your care instructions say? EG for me they would say "Rest well, play music, be nice. Does not like criticism. Is prone to overdoing it, so pause between tasks to allow time to notice rest is needed." Actually my care instructions would be way longer than this, but I'll stick with those key points for now. What would your care instructions say?

If you have ever felt like there is more to you, and more to life, than you are currently experiencing, this is the self-love place to begin to find that more to you. To explore your potential (which is vast, and far more than you've allowed yourself to dream).

We are used to the motivational posters telling us to be the best we can be. But for most of us that has looked like being hard on ourselves, putting our noses firmly to the grindstone, becoming world-champion self-critics. No more. Wanting the best for and from yourself means treating yourself well, seeing how fabulous you already are, setting yourself up for success, understanding yourself, being the best you can be *to* yourself.

As with each and every one of these aspects of self-love, it is a process, not an on/off switch. If you can have 1% less self-criticism this week, that's a step forward. If you can think about (maybe for the first time ever) wanting the best for yourself, that's progress. If you can ask yourself what will get the best from you, that's improvement. And that's all you need.

## **Self-love is allowing yourself to receive love from yourself and others**

How easy do you find it to receive love? If you look in the mirror and say, "I love you", how awkward is that? By the way, no shade, no shame if it does feel awkward – the world we live in has set us up to be comfortable with self-criticism (and isn't that awful?!). Just notice.

Can you say "I am pure magnificence in human form" without wanting to heave? Again, no shame, no shade – we're going against the conditioning of society, probably our family, endless marketing that is designed to make us feel bad about ourselves so we'll buy some doohickie or other.

When someone shows you love, how easy is it to receive it? Do you think "of course they'd treat me like a Queen, I am" or "what do they want?" or worse "if only they knew me, they wouldn't love me". Again, just notice where you are with this.

Here in the UK, we are not good at emotional openness. Or any kind of emotions, frankly, although younger generations are changing this, thank goodness. So for Brits, an easy way to make them squirm and feel awkward is to express love for them.

And as I mentioned, receiving love can be going against societal conditioning, familial patterns, and marketing campaigns for everything from soap to suitcases. You may remember from the self-love section of Feel Good Foundations my explanation of why self-love is so hard.

The same issues make receiving love hard. Also, by the time we're adults, we've probably had experiences of love that weren't fun. Conditional love, possessiveness disguised as love, control masquerading as love. Ugh. So if you have a history with love that's not all roses and sweetness, this will understandably make you a bit wary and defensive.

Having a sense of self-protection isn't a bad thing. But when that turns into impenetrable barriers to love, that can become problematic. Again, this isn't all or nothing, it's a scale. Can you let a little more love in? Can you feel a little more expansion in your heart when someone in your life says "I love you" or does something loving for you?

I like the "I receive..." exercise for this – simply say aloud "I receive..." and finish the sentence with whatever you've received. Whether that is love from your partner, a cuddle from your kids, a waggy tail from your dog, a gift from a friend, or a compliment from someone. Complete the sentence a few times, and each time, take time to really feel that love or joy or generosity or praise.

It may be easier to start with receiving love from yourself – it is for me. The more love I can receive from myself, the more comfortable I am with receiving love from others. Although I am still aloof and suspicious in general with new people, I am less

British about receiving love from my friends and family.

So experiment with letting a little more love into your life – you can start with yourself, your pets, your kids, the people you trust most in life. Until one day someone will show love for you, and you will receive it with grace and gratitude. In the meantime, allow yourself to receive just a smidge more love.

## **Self-love is listening to yourself**

Do you listen to you? Do you take time to hear what's going on with you? Do you give yourself the space to be heard? For most of us, we're just too busy and there is so much external stimulation from the outside world that we have no room to hear our own voice.

This aspect is an extension of caring how you are and understanding yourself, and is a way to do both of those things. Think about it, when someone is listening to you, and really hearing you, isn't it just the best thing? Those friends are precious and priceless.

Do you do that for yourself? It's hard to do when everyone else's voice is drowning yours out, so the first thing to do if you want to listen to yourself is to switch off, stop scrolling, give yourself some time to be heard. You know what it's like, when you're with someone who is constantly checking their phone as you're talking – you just know they're not hearing you clearly.

They may have a better ability than me to multitask, but when we're trying to hear our own voice, outside noise is going to override it. Sometimes we are deliberately choosing to hear outside voices over our own – if your inner critic or inner worrier are particularly active, you might not want to hear those thoughts.

But drowning out those inner parts of ours doesn't make them go away, they are still there, still talking, still feeling how they feel, just now without being heard. Which is likely to make any criticisms and worries worse. I understand if you don't want to hear your inner critic, but remember that your inner critic just wants the best for you.

Listening to her can help you understand where she's coming from, and then you can look to retrain her to be an inner coach instead of an inner harridan. Listening to your worries can help you to soothe yourself if you realise you're catastrophising, or get prepared if your worries are reasonable.

Take 5-15 minutes and put your phone on silent, switch everything off if you can and check in with you: Check in with your body, mind, heart, soul, and energetic self. What are they saying? Notice what thoughts you are having about your days and your life.

If switching off and taking time feels impossible, try it while you're walking to the shop or driving to work – turn the radio off, take your earbuds out, and allow yourself a little time to hear your own truth.

## **Self-love is self-love (wink!)**

I used to have a huge problem with the term self-love, because to me it evoked a certain type of self-love (wink!). Then I realised two things – one, there is way more to self-love than pleasuring yourself, and two, nothing wrong with that kind of self-love, amiright?!

Ok, this topic might be making you feel wildly uncomfortable right now, but don't worry, I'm not going to get explicit, and I'm not going to ask you to get down to your closest Ann Summers and pick out some battery operated toys (although if you want to, go for it my friend!!).

But please stick with me even if this subject makes you feel a little icky. Because I want to tell you why it's good for you. Female pleasure has been neglected over the years, the need for it has been minimised, the whole subject is taboo and embarrassing and squirmy for many people.

(Who benefits from that by the way? Cos it ain't women. Just saying.) Also, if you're a male of the species, I apologise for focusing on the female perspective. But I'm guessing that if you are male, you are already well aware of the health benefits (physical, mental, and emotional) of taking care of your sensual needs.

Yes, I said sensual, not sexual. Sex is part of this, for sure. But it's not even the main part. It's about giving your body the sense stimulation you need. Even a hug can release oxytocin (the cuddle hormone) – yes, even hugging yourself can do this. Touch can reduce cortisol (the stress hormone).

Stroking can help regulate your nervous system. Touching your body in ways that feel good ...well, feels good! And can make you feel loved and cherished. It is also good for your health – physically, mentally, and emotionally. Not only the act of connecting with your body, but also the release that come from a good connection.

Yup, orgasms are good for you! But wait, stay with me if the O word sends you into a fluster. There's so much shame and embarrassment around our wonderful bodies that sometimes going there is a step too far. If it's not, you know your homework, right?

But if you are feeling uncomfortable with this whole conversation right now, you can stay out of x rated areas and still love your body. Touch your head, your hands, your knees, your feet. Not to find erogenous zones (although you can if you want), but just to show your body some love through touch.

Touch the parts of you that crave loving touch. If you've had a professional massage in your life, you'll know that there is nothing sexual about it, but is so damn pleasurable. I mean, who knew that hot rocks on your back could feel so good? So explore your body wherever you feel comfortable exploring and give yourself some self-love through touch.

## **Self-love is being nice to and appreciating your body**

The diet, beauty, and social media industries have led us to believe our bodies are ugly, disgusting, saggy, flabby, something to be ashamed of. How many people do you know who hate their body, and have tried every diet going, or been on a diet forever?

It makes me so angry that so many people have such a bad relationship with their precious, beautiful, miraculous body. And why? Because someone somewhere decided what beauty looked like. Who was it that decided your body wasn't beautiful, miraculous, and amazing? And do you trust them?

Do you trust fashion designers whose designs hang well on tall and willowy women, but not on curvy women? Do you trust them to judge? Or was it their own self-interest because their designs worked for slim and long-limbed people? What about the magazine editors? What was their angle to go for heroin chic as a beauty standard?

Did you know that once upon a time, Rubenesque was considered beautiful. Yep, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was considered a compliment to be plump, curvaceous, full-figured. I've been waiting for this to come back into fashion my whole life. And look, none of these body shapes is better than another.

If you are tall and willowy, embrace that. If you are more Rubenesque and curvy, embrace that. Don't let societal standards make you feel inadequate because your body doesn't look like all the models. Don't forget those standards are made up by gatekeepers we don't know and whose credentials (and motives) we can't examine.

It's also worth remembering that many of the models' bodies in the magazines don't really look like that. Many models and celebrities have called out magazines for photoshopping their bodies in unrealistic ways. So if you're looking at magazines, or at social media, for pictures of beauty, bear in mind that many of them are digitally altered and not actually real.

Keep all this nonsense in mind when you choose to judge the body that has been your soul vessel for this life. The body that has kept you alive, that has walked and talked and had adventures with you. The body that has taken you places, has helped you experience life. The body that is yours and deserves to be adored and cherished.

If you don't love your body, try this exercise: think of 10 things you are grateful to your body for. For example, be grateful for arms and hands that allow you to do everything you need to do throughout the day. Be grateful for eyes that see, ears that hear, lungs that breathe, a heart that beats without you having to do anything!

Our bodies are miraculous and wonderful, and we need to remember that, instead of worrying about how aesthetically pleasing they are to the outside world. This gratitude is deepened when we have something go wrong with our precious bodies –

if you have an injured shoulder, boy do you appreciate how much your arm does each day.

If you have IBS or other intestinal disturbances, boy do you appreciate the work your digestive system normally does with no fuss and no help from you. If you have a cold, boy do you appreciate breathing through your nose, or just getting through the day without coughing.

If appreciating your physical appearance is hard for you, don't worry. Just focus on appreciating what your amazing body does for you every day. And remember that the fashion, beauty, and health industries all benefit from you feeling bad about your body, and actively 'help' you to dislike it – so fight back and learn to love your beautiful body.

## **Self-love is loving yourself no matter what**

We all have things about ourselves that we don't like. Maybe we are a bit grouchy (ahem), or we doomscroll too much (ahem), or we procrastinate too much (ahem), or we eat too much chocolate (ahem). Ok, I do all of those, and I don't necessarily like that about myself.

But I love myself no matter what. Because I am human, and all humans are imperfect. I do not know one single, solitary human who is perfect in every way. All of us are flawed and imperfect and do things we wish we didn't. And most of the time, these things are not terrible. They're just normal, human mistakes and flaws.

There's no need for the level of self-flagellation we give ourselves. So to practice loving yourself no matter what, take something you are not happy with in yourself and add: "...and I love and accept myself".

For example: "I have grey hairs and I love and accept myself.", "I didn't do everything I wanted to today and I love and accept myself."; "I just snapped at my family and I love and accept myself." (This is not about excusing yourself for bad behaviour, but about accepting that you are human and sometimes humans make mistakes.)

You may have seen a similar affirmation in EFT where they use "even though <bad thing>, I love and accept myself anyway". I've come to realise that adding the "even though" and "anyway" reinforces the idea that you're a bad person doing bad things...but you love and accept yourself anyway.

And I don't like that. Yes, I'm grouchy, I doomscroll more than I'd like to, I eat my body weight in chocolate regularly, AND I love and accept myself. Can you feel the difference? It's not "even though I suck, I love and accept myself anyway", it's "I do this AND I love and accept myself".

You can take the exercise further by changing the narrative to something you love about yourself within that thing you have not been loving yourself for.



For example

"I have grey hairs and I love and accept myself." could become "I love my silver highlights."

"I didn't do everything I wanted to today and I love and accept myself." could become "I love that I know how to prioritise self-care, so I stop when I need to rest."

"I just snapped at my family and I love and accept myself." could become "I love that I have a way to let myself and others know that I need self-care and rest". Sometimes it can be difficult to find something you love within bad behaviour, but it's so worth persevering to find something you love about yourself within a perceived fault or flaw.

This is something we do for others all the time by the way. They behave like humans, and we love and accept them. In all honesty, we sometimes take this to excess and let people get away with all sorts of bad behaviour. But we don't afford ourselves anywhere near the same latitude.

Instead, we berate, criticise, and reproach ourselves for every single perceived imperfection, from our grey hairs to our saggy bottoms to our personalities and behaviours. Frankly, if anyone else treated us the way we tend to treat ourselves, they would soon be sent packing. But, as you can't send yourself packing, try some self-love instead.

You can love your flaws just as they are, and try loving and accepting yourself exactly as you are. If this feels like a 'hell, no' to you right now, that's fine. Let's just plant the seed that you could love yourself FOR your flaws, not despite them. Because they're a part of the complex, unique and brilliant make up of you.

I apologised once to a new friend for being so shy (we'd been work colleagues for years, but we'd only spoken over the phone, and when we met in person, I was cripplingly shy). My friend replied, "I love shy". It rocked my world. It's over 15 years ago and I've never forgotten it. So love your grey hairs, love your procrastination, love your grumpiness. Because it's you. And you are wonderful, just as you are.

## **Self-love is appreciating what you do and who you are**

"I didn't do enough today", "I am not good enough". Do those sentences sound familiar? Do you use them daily? I get it, me too. Mostly the first – because I have a to do list it would take me 83 years to complete, and an energy level that can do a mere fraction of the to do's.

But guess what this litany of self-criticism does? Makes you feel bad about yourself, stressed, not good enough, not successful enough, not achieving enough. Ugh. The antidote to this is to notice what's good about you, and how much you have done. For many years, I have done a 'what I did' list to counter the "not done enough" thought.

A list of everything I've done in a day – sorting out the washing, clearing 10% of my e-mail backlog, resting, putting out the bins, making progress on a project, making a call, meditating, popping to the shops, talking to a neighbour, reading my book for 10 minutes, exercising.

Anything I've done goes on there. Including the good stuff, like resting and reading. Because reading is one of my favourite things, so yay me for getting to do a chapter or two. And resting is something I need to have to be able to do the other stuff, so yay me for resting.

Every time I do this, I go from "I haven't done enough today" to "wow, look at all the things I did do today (and mainly forgot about)" or "I was so exhausted today that I desperately needed to rest" or "well, I didn't do x, but I did do y, z, a, b and c". We can never do enough to satisfy our inner perfectionist or inner critic, but if you notice what you *have* done, you can counter the idea that you haven't done much.

As for the "not good enough" thought, this is a red flag thought to me to start appreciating who I am. Ok, I might not be the greatest cook in the world (I'm not), but I am kind, compassionate, and friendly. Ok, I might be sarcastic and grumpy, and I am also witty, sharp, and funny (to the right audience, both are part of my charm).

Nobody is perfect. Nobody can live up to the expectations of absolute perfection in looks, in personality, in thought, word, and deed. Many of us have that feeling of 'not being good enough' because we are trying to live up to an utterly impossible ideal. But if we can appreciate who we are, and what we do, we can quiet the voices of perfectionism and criticism.

This works for other people too – if you find yourself constantly criticising your partner, your kids, your friends, your colleagues (even if it's only in your head), start looking for things you appreciate about them and what they do. Not to let them off the hook for their failings, or to excuse bad behaviour, but to provide a balanced view.

Start with yourself though - you deserve grace, compassion, and gratitude for what you do and who you are. Take the time to turn your self-criticism around to self-appreciation, and you'll start to realise that you're doing more than enough (even on days when you sit on the couch bingeing box sets and snacking) and you are always enough just because you're you.

## **Self-love is loving yourself**

What would make you feel loved? How do you love others? What's your love language? And would that work if you turned it on yourself? Try it and see. It might not work – how you like to show love might not be how you like to receive love. (Humans be weird!)

Because basically self-love is whatever makes you feel loved. I hope this ebook has opened your mind to some of the many aspects of self-love, but I hope more that you start to figure out for yourself what self-love looks like for you. And that will change over time.

Kind of like a relationship with another human – it starts out all exciting and physical, there's lots of butterflies and pda's. But then over time it becomes deeper, more comfortable, more about emotional connection than physical. As you get to know each other, and how you both like to be shown love, you can do more of that.

So today self-love might look a lot like self-compassion and self-acceptance. Next year when those aspects are easier, it might look like setting yourself up for success and protecting yourself. Once those things become second nature, perhaps it'll become more about self-trust and being nice to your body.

And of course, this is not linear, and learning one aspect does not mean you'll do that to perfection for the rest of your life. Old bad habits of self-criticism and ignoring yourself will creep back in. You'll forget to encourage and back yourself. Old conditioning, aided and abetted by shame marketing will make you forget how awesome you are.

So self-love will be whatever you need right now. And self-love is noticing what you need, and not giving yourself a hard time if it's something you thought you were quite good at. Life is so busy and full of distraction that it is really easy to let your self-love slide.

Which is why, as you know from the Feel Good Foundations book, I like to take a regular measurement of self-love. Because if you know it's dropped from a 5 to a 3, you can work on it before it drops to a zero. If you know you'd got it up to the dizzy heights of 9's and 10's and you slip to a 7, you can figure out why you're not feeling as loved anymore and do whatever you need to do to feel loved by yourself.

So, let's check in. How loved do you feel right now (by yourself) on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is 'I don't' and 10 is 'I love, cherish, adore, and treasure myself'? (no judgement, just notice the number).

My self-love today is: \_\_\_\_\_

And what aspect of self-love do you want to focus on now?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> caring how you are                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> protecting yourself  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being kind and gentle with yourself                | <input type="checkbox"/> supporting yourself  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> having compassion for yourself                     | <input type="checkbox"/> backing yourself   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cherishing, adoring and treasuring yourself        | <input type="checkbox"/> motivating yourself  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> knowing your worth                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> having confidence in yourself                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> seeing your magnificence                           | <input type="checkbox"/> setting yourself up for success                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accepting who you are                              | <input type="checkbox"/> wanting the best for and from yourself                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accepting who you were                             | <input type="checkbox"/> allowing yourself to receive love from yourself and others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> understanding yourself                             | <input type="checkbox"/> listening to yourself                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> trusting yourself                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> self-love (wink!)  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> knowing every part of you has a positive intention | <input type="checkbox"/> being nice to and appreciating your body                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> believing in yourself.                             | <input type="checkbox"/> loving yourself no matter what                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> encouraging yourself                               | <input type="checkbox"/> appreciating what you do and who you are                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> acknowledging, honouring and praising yourself     | <input type="checkbox"/> loving yourself  |

You may want to pick 28 out of the 28 aspects but do the self-loving thing and set yourself up for success by focusing on one or two at a time. And it may not be one of these aspects I've talked about here, something else may come to mind. These 28 are the ones that mean self-love to me – you may have different ideas for yourself.

To improve my self-love, I am going to focus on \_\_\_\_\_ today.

May you love yourself as much as you deserve, magnificent slice of the divine that you are.



## About the Author

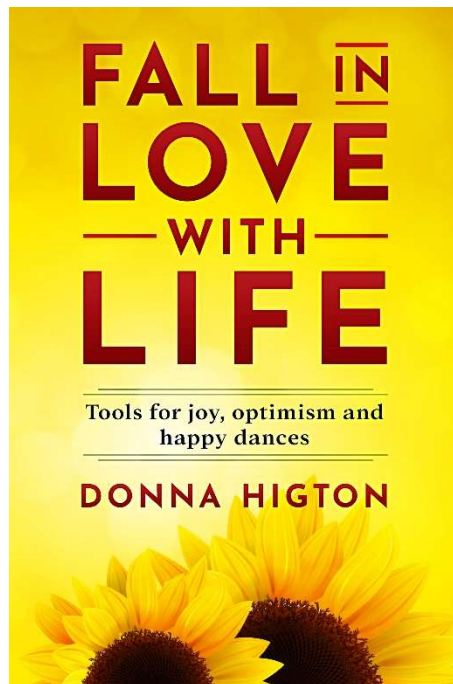


Donna has been coaching and writing since 2004. She loves helping others live more joyful, fun, connected, and inspired lives. As you've seen, she is passionate about what she calls the Feel Good Foundations – if you need help to get your foundations stronger, check out her coaching packages at [donnahigton.com](http://donnahigton.com).

She's the author of *Fall in Love With Life* and *Obstacle Busting*—the latter started as a short 20-page giveaway but grew into a full-blown 50,000-word book.

Donna lives in the centre of England and spends her days surrounded by books, ideas, and far too many empty chocolate wrappers. Despite being an introvert, she loves to connect with readers. You can find her at [donnahigton.com](http://donnahigton.com), [Substack](#) and [Facebook](#) (she has other socials too, though she often forgets they even exist!).

**Also by Donna Higon**



This is your one and only life - are you fully, deeply, completely head over heels in love with it, or are you wondering what happened to your dreams, your joy and your mojo? No matter what's happening in your life, you can start to fall in love with it right now, even if it's not perfect, even if you want to change everything about it, you can still dance joyfully through life.

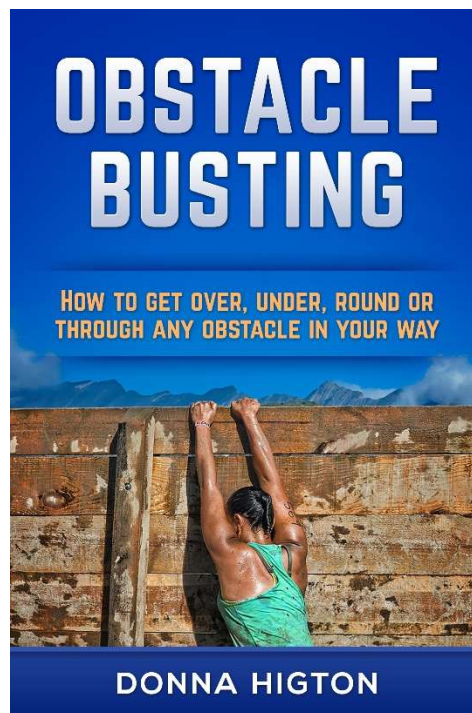
In this book, Donna shares her favourite techniques, tips and tools for helping you fall deeply, madly in love with your life right now. Drawn from her own experience of falling in love with life, and coaching clients all over the world since 2004, this book is a celebration of joy, laughter and happy dances.

### **Praise for "Fall in Love With Life"**

"I love this book for many reasons... but mostly because it doesn't feel in any way that you're being force fed a formula for happiness. It's genuine, funny and irreverent at the same time that it feels sacred. Donna's tongue in cheek way of guiding comes through on every page and honestly, reading this book alone is a brilliant way to fall in love with life..." - Stacy Nelson, Author of Writing the Damn Book

"It's the kind of book that puts me in a good mood, that's for sure. Some of the ideas I think I'll be trying first include 'taking excellent care of myself' along with embracing my inner geek (if you love it, who cares whether it's fashionable?) and taking dance breaks. With the curtains shut. I'm giving this delightful, cheerful and inspiring read a positively loved-up five bites." - Sarah Clark, Author of "Gorgeously Full Fat", blogger and bookeaters reviewer

Available now on [Amazon](#).



### **What is getting in the way of you living your best life?**

We all come up against so many obstacles in our lives – from self-doubt to impatience, from getting stuck to having no time, from negativity to fear. These obstacles can stop you in your tracks, making you feel that you're not cut out for making your dreams come true or achieving your life goals. BUT obstacles are not there to stop you, they're there for you to get over, under, round and through so you can change your life.

This book will teach you: • Why obstacles are a good thing • Donna's top 4 obstacle busting tools • How to get over, under, round and through 40+ common obstacles • That you are not alone, or defective, or on the wrong path if you hit an obstacle

Obstacle Busting covers common obstacles such as comparisonitis, resistance, low self-esteem, worrying, having no money, not knowing what to do, biting off more than you can chew, getting stuck in an ebb, failure. If you're feeling stuck this book will show you how you overcome all your obstacles so you can make your dreams come true and change your life.

Over a decade of coaching clients to follow their dreams, and more than 15 years of following her own dreams, Donna has met every one of these obstacles and overcome them all (some more than once). In this book, she shows you how to do the same so that nothing can get in the way of you living your most fabulous life.

Available now on [Amazon](#).