



Self-love instead of self-harm

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Your guide to
transforming negative behaviors
into healthy habits

Self-love instead of self-harm

You can change one choice at a time.

The most important relationship in your life is the one you have with yourself. Starting right now, you can begin developing healthier coping mechanisms that feed your need for self-love and stop the cycle of self-harm.

What does it mean to practice self-love?

Practicing self-love means acknowledging your physical, psychological, and spiritual needs and responding to them in healthy, fulfilling ways.

Isn't practicing self-love selfish?

No. Practicing self-love is actually anything but selfish. Beyond being a basic necessity and essential tool to your personal wellness, self-love has a beautiful way of rippling outward and positively impacting the world around you.

What does it mean to self-harm?

Self-harming means answering your internal call of emotional needing with a harmful behavior that serves as an emotional release or distraction from emotional distress.

What does self-harming look like?

Self-harming manifests in many different ways that are influenced by a range of factors including, but not limited to, increased stress, financial worries, bullying, low-self esteem, bereavement (grief), emotional/physical/sexual abuse, job loss, relationship breakdown, and an illness or health problem.

Self-harm examples include:

- Binge-drinking or other substance abuse
- Skin cutting, burning, or scratching
- Hair pulling
- Biting or hitting
- Restricting food intake
- Binge eating
- Holding/squeezing freezing objects
- Excessively exercising



Is self-harming a mental illness?

No, self-harming is not a mental illness. Self-harming is a behavior. Like any other behavior, it is learned and can be changed.

Self-harming is, however, a sign of mental distress. Stopping the cycle requires learning new, healthier coping mechanisms and choosing them over the learned urge to self-harm. You can begin changing your behavior today, but remember, as with any other major life change, seeking professional help from a doctor or mental health professional is advised.

Why do we self-harm?

We self-harm because somewhere in our story we learned the behavior can help us release overwhelming emotions like anger, frustration, stress, and feelings of numbness or despair. Sometimes self-harming's purpose is to distract us from feeling, and other times its purpose is to prove to ourselves we *can* feel. Even if we feel shame associated with the behavior, we continue to self-harm from habit and from a lack of knowing and establishing healthier ways of coping.

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Make a list of ways you have been self-harming. There is no right or wrong way to do this activity. Add anything to the list you'd consider an act of self-harm rather than self-love. This can include things that take place on a smaller scale over the course of your day rather than any one *thing*. For example, if you skin pick to ease feelings of anxiety, add that. This is a personal list and can be as detailed as you like.

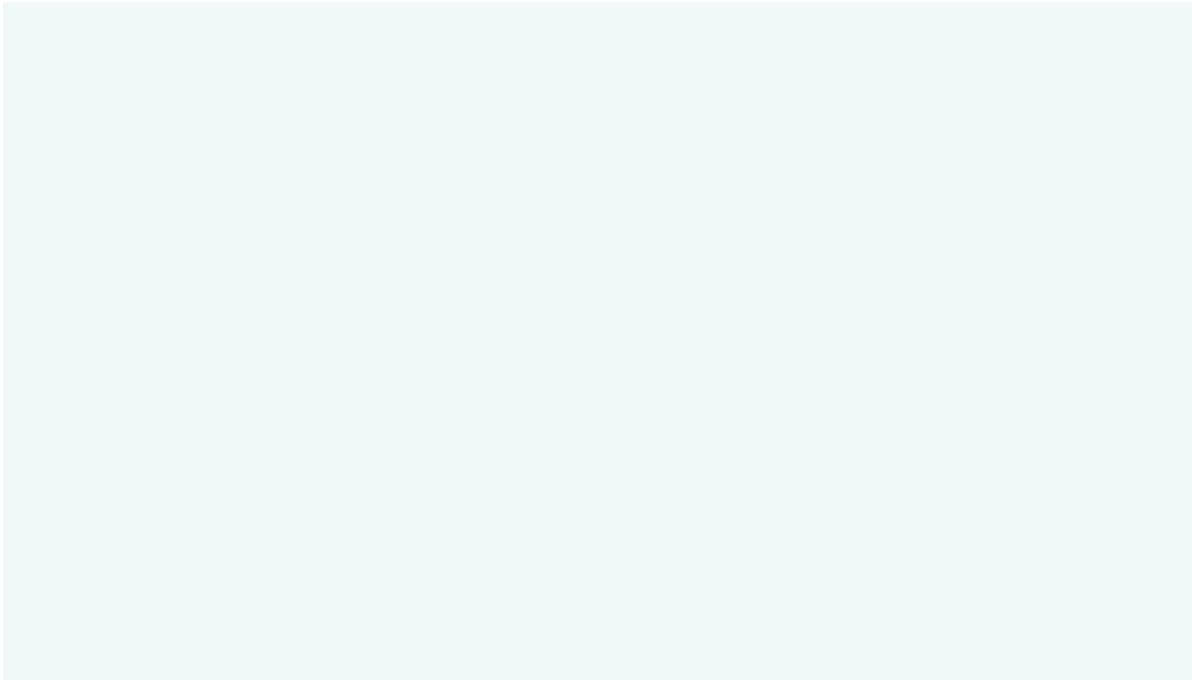


Self-love instead of self-harm

Self-love changes everything. Practicing self-love on a daily basis helps us in developing a healthier relationship with ourselves, increasing emotional resilience and decreasing the urge to self-harm.

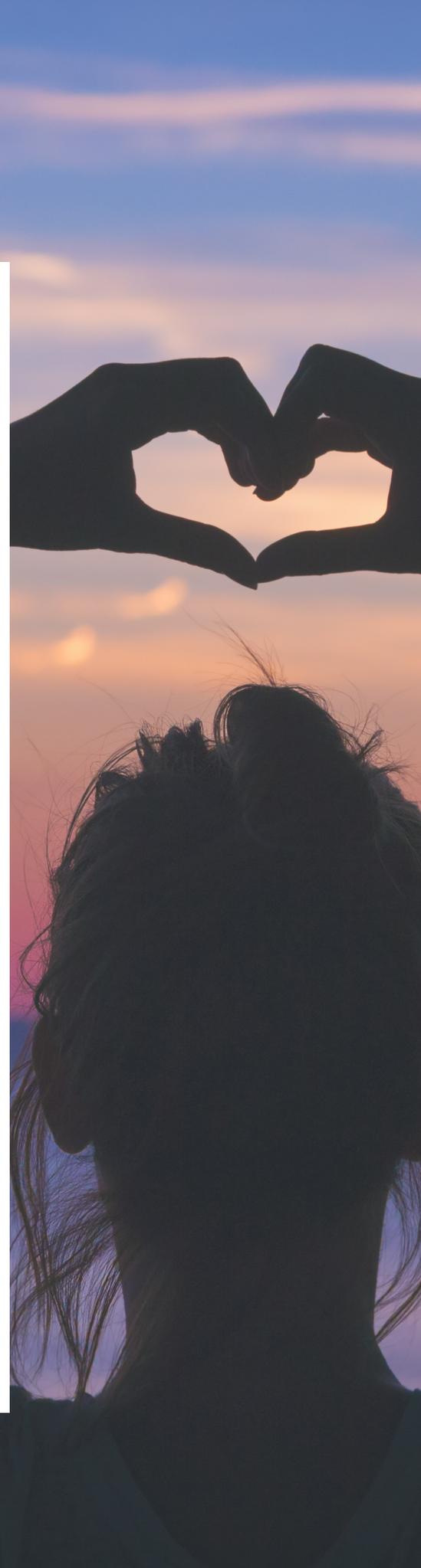
Self-love is more than loving yourself. If loving yourself seems too big of a goal right now, just set it aside. Focus on self-love as an action rather than a state of being or some achievement to be attained.

What does practicing self-love mean or look like to you? Take a few moments and scribble down the first things that come to mind. There are no right or wrong answers.



It is time to begin answering your internal calls for caring, kindness, and understanding. The more you feed your basic human needs and respond to big emotions with love, the easier it becomes. The more self-love you add to your daily routine, the less room there is for harm. It all begins with you.

***This is a process.** First comes the undoing: undoing of learned behaviors you've been relying on for comfort or security. Deep down you know these behaviors do not serve you well and are not in your best interest. You know your body, mind, and spirit deserves so much more simply because you are. You are here. You exist. You are worthy of the love and care you give to others so freely. At first, this will seem unnatural because it is not familiar. Give yourself time to adjust to new ways of responding to big emotions. Give yourself patience and grace and gratitude. You're already doing something amazing simply by trying. You are ready to change one choice at a time.*



Self-love instead of self-harm

Self-love checklist

Taking the first step is always the most challenging because you are walking into unfamiliar territory. Let this list be your guide giving you ideas on how to begin practicing self-love. Not everything on this list will appeal to you, and that's okay! We're all different and what works for one may not work for another. Your goal is to try as many ideas and checkmark the ones that serve your needs.

- Go somewhere private. Yell or scream as loudly as you can. If you begin to feel like crying, allow yourself to cry.
- Play a favorite loudly and scream-sing the lyrics while moving your body to the beat.
- Rub or massage cream into your hands, feet, legs, arms. Take your time. Use a favourite scented cream if you can.
- Drink a glass of water and focus on how it feels entering your mouth and going down into your stomach.
- Take a few minutes away from whatever you are doing and engage your body in some gentle stretches. Reach upwards to the sky and bend downwards to the earth.
- Take a shower or bath and brush your teeth.
- Give yourself a 'butterfly hug.' Cross your arms across your chest and gently pat your hands on your upper arms.

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Write down 3 things you are grateful for. Example: coffee, my cat, books.

Think of the last person who smiled at you, hugged you, or made you feel loved. If you can, call this person or message them to chat.

Find a recipe online for a favourite comfort food. Make your ingredients list. Go to the store. Get your ingredients. Make the dish or dessert and enjoy eating it, focusing on each bite and how it makes you feel.

Read scripture, pray, or meditate for 15 minutes.

Take a walk outdoors or walk/run the stairs in your building.

Wash your face or engage in a skin care routine including cleansing, toning, and moisturizing.

Go to a plant store or garden shop. Even if you can't afford a houseplant or garden item, spend time taking in all the colors, textures, and aromas. Walk through the aisles without rushing.

Watch your favorite movie or TV series.

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■ Spend 15 minutes free-writing or free-sketching how you feel. Do not edit or erase anything, just let it flow.

■ Create a binder, vision board, or digital folder that includes nice things people have said about you, cards you've received, accomplishments you've achieved, love letters, or work praises, etc. and refer to it when you're feeling low.

■ Follow through with health maintenance appointments such as going to the dentist, seeing a doctor, talking to a therapist, etc.

■ Commit to making your bed every single day.

■ Use the 'good' towels, silverware, dinner plates, candles, etc. for no other reason than you deserve the nice things you save for others.

■ Make a memory box of sentimental items and things that bring you joy. Look through it whenever you're feeling low.

■ Call a friend or family member and tell them how you're really doing. Remember asking for support is a sign of strength.

■ Spend time with animals. They're pretty great for giving unconditional love and never judging.

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Self-love checklist



Write little notes throughout each week about things that brought you a moment of happiness or things you appreciate. Fold them up and put them in a jar. At the end of each week, go through these notes.

Make a daily pledge to go to bed and wake up at roughly the same time. Routine is key to wellness.

Journal or draw/paint about something you did this week that you're proud of. This can be as big as passing a test or getting a promotion or as simple as eating breakfast or making a phone call you've been delaying.

Practice saying 'no' when you want to say 'no' and saying 'yes' when you want to say 'yes.'

Go through your wardrobe and remove any items you haven't worn in a year. Decluttering your environment can help declutter your mind.

Clean any or all of the following: your bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, vehicle, wallet, purse, backpack, etc. Simplify whatever you can.

Cuddle a loved one, pet, stuffed animal/toy, pillow, or blanket. Focus on how it feels.

Look yourself in the mirror and say, "I love you just as you are." You do not need to mean it, just say it as often as you can or even write it on a note and hang on your mirror. Read it aloud daily.

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Thank yourself!

You have begun a transformative process! It takes courage, strength, and wisdom to get to this moment in your life and you deserve recognition for your efforts.

Remember that self-love is a journey, not a destination. Each day it can and will look different than the day before because each day we are faced with incoming waves of emotion, challenges, and triumphs.

Be gentle with yourself and if you need additional support, reach out and grab it. You're not alone in this thing called life. Talk to your loved ones and visit a doctor or counselor if your emotions are feeling unmanageable. There is zero shame in seeking help.

If you are in immediate crisis, call 911 or your local emergency phone number.

CRISIS HELPLINE

Free, confidential mental health texting services are available 24 hours a day, every day, throughout the US, Canada, UK, and Ireland.

US & Canada text 741741

UK text 85258

Ireland text 50808