

## **Self-love is not Narcissism!**

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Not only is self-love not narcissism; unfortunately, narcissists do not know how to begin to love themselves! Keep reading to discover the difference and to learn why self-love is vitally important today.

I have heard people describe narcissists as persons who love themselves – or love themselves too much! Because I was blessed to be taught self-love, I bristle every time I hear that description.

At MayoClinic.com, we find the following definition of narcissistic personality disorder: “Narcissistic personality disorder is a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance and a deep need for admiration. They believe that they are superior to others and have little regard for other people’s feelings. But behind this mask of ultra-confidence lies a fragile self-esteem, vulnerable to the slightest criticism.”

A true narcissist considers himself to be of greater value than others, believing he is entitled to the best of everything. Narcissistic personality disorder should not be confused with healthy self-esteem. Although truly confident people are in touch with their gifts and talents, they do not consider themselves superior.

If self-love is not narcissism, what is it? Self-love is the ability to extend kindness and compassion to your self. It is the ability to extend kindness and compassion that is sometimes nurturing and other times confrontational. It is your ability to be honest with you about motives, intentions, choices, behavior, and words. Further, it is your ability to be honest without hurting you over it! I like the way Joseph sums it up; self-love is the willingness to embrace all that we are. The way I sum it up is that self-love is when you give yourself the kind of love, affirmation, and boundaries that you wish your parents had been able to give you.

Many of us were taught as children to forget ourselves in deference to those around us. Some were encouraged to be selfless as a morally right way to be. Others were encouraged to put themselves last because the adults around them were emotionally needy. Surrounded by genuine need, some learned to set their own needs and desires aside.

Of course, selflessness is a good trait. There are problems in the world that would go unsolved without it. The problem for individuals arises when after an extended time of giving selflessly to others; our inner wells of love begin to run dry. When selflessness is part of a dysfunctional relationship, the insecurity driving it undermines other aspects of our outpouring love, causing self-hate to fill that inner well of love.

When we attempt to pour out love and caring without having nurtured love for ourselves, resentment invariably comes to the surface, sabotaging our efforts to love others. Those who have come to depend on our ability to fill them up with love, become frightened and

needy when our selflessness begins to dry up. We create a cycle where manipulation and resentment take the place of love and generosity even as we attempt to extend love and generosity.

The answer to this conundrum is simple but challenging! Practicing the discipline of self-love will turn it all around, slowly but surely. Not only will you get your love and generosity back. Practicing the discipline of self-love will teach you to set boundaries with those who pull on you inappropriately, which is a greater act of love toward others.

The practice of self-love brings us back to facing that old nemesis, Narcissus! Do you remember how Narcissus gazed at his own reflection in still water? Well, a good place to begin the practice of self-love is by looking at your own reflection in a mirror and saying to yourself, “I love you,” over and over. Repeating it the way you might soothe a child with the words.

The difference between this practice and the myth of Narcissus is when we say, “I love you” to our own reflection in the mirror, we put ourselves in a humble place where we will confront every thing we do not like about ourselves. From a wrinkle or hair out of place, to the way we spoke to our spouse last night, to the way we dismissed that irritating person at work, to the motives behind the excess food we ate, etc.; when we make the commitment to say, “I love you,” to ourselves, we invariably confront everything we dislike or hate about ourselves.

This is a good thing. It means we get to tame the dragon inside who is trying to consume us before we do more damage to others or ourselves.

Rilke said, “Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are but princesses that are waiting to see us act just once with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything terrible is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that needs our love.”

You need your own love. You deserve your own love. Take a risk today. Risk your inner voice calling you a narcissist and tell you that you love you, unconditionally and unequivocally! Your heart, your inner child, you will be glad you did.