

SELF LOVE

Life is filled with things that we love. But, often, we get so caught up in all the excitement around us that we neglect the one thing we'll always have: ourselves

By **LAUREN ENDRODY**

‘SELF-LOVE’ HAS become an important buzzword in today’s individualistic society. Phrases such as ‘Be the

best version of yourself’, ‘Live your best life’ and ‘Be your own best friend’ are constantly thrown around. It seems as if it’s such an obvious thing to do. But in reality, we’re mostly seeking validation from others (everyone else but ourselves), so our sense of worth is determined by our external experiences. We then make the demands of others a top priority. So where does this leave us in the whole scheme of things –

dragging ourselves down and putting our own needs last on the list. Not any longer! Self-love is a lifelong, dynamic process – and make no mistake, it takes a lot of work. As circumstances change and we face new challenges in life, we learn more about ourselves, and during this process, it is essential to nurture self-love in order to perform optimally. We’re talking about promoting and supporting our mental, physical and spiritual strength, so that we can be a strong base for ourselves from which to navigate life, and avoid being tossed around by the world. So what are some of the actions that we can take?

1 SPEND TIME ALONE

Loneliness is one of the most common fears in life. But if we can’t be alone, we can’t get to know ourselves. ‘Consistently being in the company of others lets us run away from our thoughts, or worse, silence them,’ says wellness coach Phemelo Segoe. ‘By spending time alone, we build community with ourselves. We rediscover our peace.’

2 Make Self-Care Non-Negotiable

Self-care and self-love go hand-in-hand. If you love yourself, you know how to take care of yourself. And if you take good care of yourself, your love for yourself will grow. ‘We care for what we love and the same goes for the self,’ Phemelo argues. ‘We can’t claim to love ourselves without intentional acts of care for ourselves – activities such as taking a shower every night to relax your body or taking a walk

outside to get some sunlight. Self-care isn’t reserved for the elite and it isn’t a luxury, it’s your card to building your self-love’. Dr Glynnis Martin, the director of the Psychological Services Centre at the University of Fort Hare, adds that this starts with taking care of your physical health. ‘Physical health boosts and preserves your emotional and mental health. Our emotional and mental state influences how we feel about ourselves and how we take care of ourselves.’

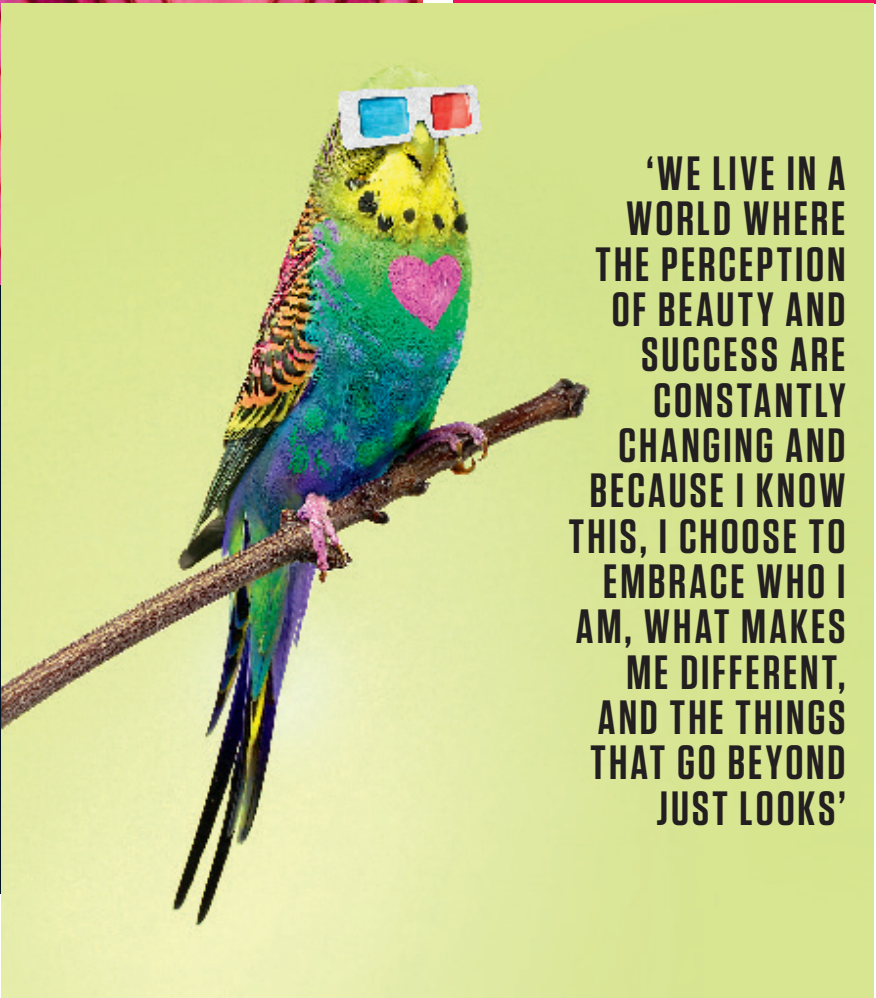
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FORGIVE YOURSELF

We put so much pressure on ourselves to perform and meet society’s often unrealistic expectations. We can’t be perfectionists in an imperfect world. As Dr Martin says: ‘Realise that perfectionism is bad for you. It leads to higher levels of self-critique that can lower your sense of self-worth.’ Phemelo also advises that we go easy on ourselves. ‘Everyone makes good decisions in retrospect. Everyone knows better once they’ve experienced something, but when you’re faced with a situation you have never been in, you can only do the best you can with what you have, and no one deliberately makes the wrong decision. Forgive yourself for not knowing what you didn’t know. Forgive yourself for being unreasonable and unkind to yourself. Forgive yourself so you can do better.’

4. Be Mindful Of How You Judge Yourself

Keep checking in with yourself about what is influencing your self-image. ‘We place a value judgement of our self-worth based on our perceptions of who we are, what we do, what we have, our appearance or reputation, and who we are attached to. Be mindful of these judgements of yourself and the value they have for you,’ says Dr Martin. Otherwise, you can quickly find yourself trying to be someone you’re not. Self-love advocate, influencer and writer Palesa Kgasane shares her personal experience: ‘Self-love is an ongoing journey that requires conscious effort and thought, especially on social media. Many of us seem as if we have it figured out – it takes a lot of “faking it to make it”. I don’t mean that in a negative sense, but you should be able to accept when you don’t feel good about yourself, and not let those feelings stay. We live in a world where the perception of beauty and success are constantly changing and because I know this, I choose to embrace who I am, what makes me different, and the things that go beyond just looks.’



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5 Set Boundaries

Boundaries are an absolute necessity in life to protect ourselves from being taken advantage of. 'We need to have boundaries with people in order to create safe spaces for ourselves, as well as to show ourselves that our well-being is important. By setting boundaries, we unconsciously say to ourselves, "you are worth protecting", and that builds self-love,' says Phemelo.

6. Actively Seek Out People Who Treat You In A Loving Way

'Take time to allow yourself to enjoy the experience of being valued by others,' Dr Martin advises. Spending time with people who appreciate and accept you for who you are can be very uplifting when you're not feeling at your best. We are allowed to admit that sometimes we need emotional support.

7 Take Time For Things That Bring You Pleasure

It's okay to curl up on the couch and watch your favourite TV shows, spend the night in bed with a book, sleep in, or order in. 'Spending time experiencing pleasure is not a waste of time or being lazy,' Dr Martin reassures us – it's a necessity!

8

LEARN TO LISTEN TO YOUR INNER VOICE

Not only do we need to develop our own inner voice, but we should be aware of its tone. The way we talk to ourselves can affect how we feel about ourselves. This is where being your own best friend and therapist comes in. 'Pay attention to how you talk to yourself about yourself. Replace harsh self-critique with more compassion and kindness, which includes talking to yourself in an understanding and loving way,' says Dr Martin.

9. Embrace Your Uniqueness

Palesa puts it best: 'Having confidence in myself is something I am still learning, but I love myself for who I am and who I am striving towards being, not because I am perfect but because I am unique. There is no one else like me, or you, and that's something super special. In the entire universe, there is only one of you. That isn't always easy to remember or feel but you fake it anyhow – you put on your best pair of jeans, some lipstick and mascara, and go out there; show up for yourself either way.'

10 REWARD YOURSELF

'Reward yourself with self-praise or gifts when you make progress towards your goals. You don't have to wait until you have reached your ultimate goal to feel proud of yourself for engaging in a process of achieving something positive for yourself,' says Dr Martin. If we're entirely dependent on the world or others for reward or praise, we're bound to be disappointed.

3 Extra Steps To Self-Love... AKA STOP JUDGING OTHER WOMEN

We know that judgement is gender-neutral, but let's be real: Women are more likely to be far more judgemental towards other women (their bodies, outfits, appearance...) than men are. This could throw a serious spanner in your self-love progress. Rising above it could be your secret ticket to living peacefully and accepting yourself. Why? Every time you find something 'wrong' with a woman's body, face or clothes, for example, you solidify the idea that there is a 'right' and 'wrong' way to exist. Eventually, these thoughts leave you trapped in a negative, insecure and anxious space. So, stop judging in one, two, three...

1. AWARENESS

Start paying careful attention to your daily judgmental habits: How often do you judge someone? What are you judging them on? How mean are you really?

2. FIND THE BEST IN EVERYONE

Teach yourself how to search for the best in people, and open yourself up to believing

that everyone has a unique, individual gift to offer the world. Try this the next time you're killing time in a bank queue or waiting for a friend: Find something incredible about each woman, or something you can relate to, and you'll notice how quickly your internal narrative will transform into something that is more positive and uplifting. Once you are able to appreciate other people's uniqueness,

you'll be more open to appreciating your own.

3. FIND YOUR PEOPLE

Surround yourself with strong, non-judgmental women – the more women who join forces and are on the same journey for self-love, the more likely you are to succeed. Like minds, as they say. **FL**