

Self-Acceptance, Entry #1 of 3

We learn to live with our frailties and imperfections (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, "A Vision of Hope").

Many of us have ideas in our heads of what we think we should be. These ideas may come from our families, friends, society, our religious backgrounds, and countless other influences. It's a little uncomfortable when our images of who we think we are and who we think we should be don't match. Getting to a place of self-acceptance when these pictures don't align can be challenging.

The Serenity Prayer is a big help here. There are some things about ourselves we may never be able to change. If we're a lot shorter or taller than most of the people we know, wishing or praying to be an average height isn't likely to do much. By talking through our discomfort with our sponsor or others we trust, we can begin to make peace with our height.

Then, of course, there are the qualities we are okay with, but others around us aren't! "I had a sense of humor that usually involved making someone the butt of the joke," one member wrote. "I kept hurting people, but I thought that if they would just get thicker skin, things would be fine. My sponsor suggested that I find ways to joke without hurting people. I was mad at first, but I worked on my sense of humor, and people don't look at me like I'm such an ass all the time now."

Part of accepting our frailties and imperfections comes in finding the wisdom to know the difference between what we must accept and what we can change. "That's just who I am" is an excuse we no longer need for harmful behavior. Talking with other addicts and connecting with our higher power can help us continue to grow into the people we need to be.

Some parts of who I am are here to stay, while other aspects may need a little work. I will use the Serenity Prayer to aid in my self-acceptance.

Self-Acceptance, Entry #2 of 3

We no longer have to look for the approval of others because we are satisfied with being ourselves (IP#19 *Self-Acceptance*, “The Twelve Steps are the Solution”).

For many of us, needing others’ approval—or seeking validation—is perched near the top of our character defects lists. We have lived in constant fear of making the wrong choices and others knowing our faults, weaknesses, and mistakes. We did everything we could to avoid being judged and actively, sometimes obsessively, sought others to tell us we were worthy, loveable, desirable, or cool. After a lifetime of self-deprecation, self-pity, and self-harm, how do we gain self-acceptance?

Self-awareness is key to self-acceptance. Working our Steps sparks that awareness. By sharing our inventories, assessing our defects, and struggling not to act on them, we gain a new perspective: We have been our own most vigorous judges and harshest punishers, not others. We harmed ourselves with the delusion that others’ approval would make us satisfied with being ourselves. The emptiness we feel cannot be filled by validation from others. We have to find it within ourselves.

Understanding what *doesn’t* work is a good place to start. And soon we see that self-acceptance is an inside job that doesn’t happen with a flip of a switch. We work hard to accept ourselves as we are now, so we can make the changes we want to see. We can lovingly reintegrate parts of ourselves we used to disown, because they were of no use to us in active addiction. Recovery helps us revamp mistakes into learning experiences rather than excuses to rag on ourselves and quit trying. As we continue to take personal inventory, we discover how we want to live our lives, who we want to spend it with, and what makes our hearts sing.

Self-acceptance allows us to value someone’s insight without living for their approval or, for that matter, accepting their condemnation.

I know my strengths and my liabilities today, and I’m trying to accept both. Others have a role in my life, but it’s not to determine my worth.

Self-Acceptance, Entry #3 of 3

A spiritual understanding of self-acceptance is knowing that it is all right to find ourselves in pain, to have made mistakes, and to know that we are not perfect (IP#19 *Self-Acceptance*, “The Twelve Steps are the Solution”).

“Change is a process, not an event,” NA members often say—because we find it to be true! The same can be said about how we begin to experience self-acceptance in our first days, weeks, or months clean. That intuitive sense that we are, in fact, okay can feel like coming in from the cold. We enjoy a bit of self-acceptance even before we’ve worked all Twelve Steps. As we work the NA program, those feelings deepen, settle, and evolve just as we do.

It’s a mistake to assume that self-acceptance awaits us once we change some external conditions. We may hope—without evidence—that a new year, a new flame, a new town, or a new diet will bring us contentment. When we reach outside of ourselves to fix what’s within, our plan is to emerge as better people, more worthy of acceptance. To our disappointment and pain, we also have found accuracy in this familiar saying: “Wherever you go, there you are.” Sure enough.

NA’s literature, meetings, and online spaces help us find a better perspective on ourselves and our lives. Instead of focusing solely on our esteemable qualities, we learn to embrace all facets of ourselves—our assets and our liabilities. We take responsibility for our recovery and, in working the Twelve Steps, come to accept the world around and within us. We divulge our secrets and find that we’re not alone. “Even amid my struggles and sometimes bad behavior,” one member wrote, “I’m alright with this perfectly imperfect me. I know my wounds and my weapons. I’m a work in progress, and I am okay.” We embrace our values, our process, and our growth.

I’ll try to accept all of me today. I’m neither my strengths nor weaknesses—I am both: broken in places but just enough to let the light shine in.