SELF-LOVE WORKBOOK FOR WOMEN

Release Self-Doubt, Build Self-Compassion, and Embrace Who You Are

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“Practicing self-love means learning how to trust ourselves, to treat ourselves with respect, and to be kind and affectionate to ourselves.”

—BRENÉ BROWN
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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME! As you embark on your journey toward self-love, I am excited to help you navigate by introducing you to a road map that will lead you toward a better relationship with yourself. I want to praise you for taking this big step forward. As women, we often struggle to set aside time for ourselves. This workbook is designed not just to talk about self-love and why it is important, but to show you how to find it.

Experts often talk about how important it is to have self-worth. Yet, how do we simply love ourselves? Wouldn’t it be nice if it were as easy as just knowing the definition of self-love? I have found that the pathway to self-love must include intentional practice, with mindful focus and energy devoted toward developing those skills. If self-love is the destination, the activities in this book are the fueling stations along the way. Your willingness to complete and practice the exercises is the fuel that will get you there.

Sometimes this process may feel like it takes too much effort or just doesn’t ring true. You may hit speed bumps or take a detour. It’s okay, since just as with true self-love, we are not focused on outcomes but on the process itself. Keep practicing! You are worth it, and purchasing this workbook is a wonderful first step toward making yourself a priority. Eventually your hard work will pay off and you will be on your way to loving yourself.

Through my personal experience, and in my 20 years as a licensed clinical social worker specializing in women’s issues, I have witnessed firsthand the importance of self-love. As a working mother in a helping profession, I have found myself running out of gas at the end of the day, my battery drained. Depleted, I wanted to zone out with Netflix and chocolate. Avoiding social connections because they felt too draining
caused some problems in my life, leading to isolation and feeling burned out. It was in these moments that I realized how important it was to put myself first. Today, I work to help my clients do the same—to turn within and learn how to prioritize self-care and love.

Something amazing happens when women learn to find and nurture their gifts and strengths and begin to heal their lives. Whether you’re recovering from a distorted body image, leaving an unhealthy relationship, or simply deciding to put yourself first, this book provides helpful tools and exercises for creating a life filled with meaning and purpose. Through the use of affirmations and mantras, step-by-step practices, exercises, and thought-provoking prompts, this workbook encourages movement toward greater self-love. Having said that, please understand that this book is not meant to replace therapy, medication, or mental health treatment, and there is no shame in reaching out to a health-care provider for any help you may need. Rather, this workbook can serve as a wonderful adjunct for healing and growth. I like to think of it as a starting place and a map to show you the way.

This book is broken into two parts. In part 1, you’ll gain an understanding of self-love while recognizing why it’s so important to make it a priority. Part 2 breaks the concept of self-love into separate components, including chapters on releasing self-doubt, practicing self-compassion, building your self-worth, and creating healthier relationships, as well as activities throughout to practice and encourage self-reflection and inspiration.

It is perfectly fine to move at your own pace; in fact, I encourage you to not rush the process. Remember that this is a journey, and it will lead to many destinations, including a place of wisdom from which you are able to practice kindness and compassion toward yourself.

I am hopeful that as you go through this workbook, the lessons will be paved with your courage and willingness to be vulnerable. Some of these introspective prompts and activities may feel scary or overwhelming at times. Please try to make space and allow these feelings to be present as you move forward and practice the skills. Don’t worry if that sounds impossible—I will help support and encourage you along the way.

I am so excited to ride along as your copilot as you grow, learn, heal, and ultimately know what a gift you are in this world. Thank you for trusting me and allowing me to share in your experience.
“Women need real moments of solitude and self-reflection to balance out how much of ourselves we give away.”

—BARBARA DE ANGELIS
PART ONE

Let’s Talk about Self-Love

Before beginning any journey, you must have an idea of where to begin and your final destination. The first leg of this journey involves laying a foundation for understanding self-love. This part of the workbook will allow you to take time to reflect and consider what self-love means to you and identify areas that you are already strong in and other areas that need growth. Part 1 provides the purpose for learning self-love. It also serves as the “why” for taking the time and making space to complete the exercises in part 2.
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THE LOWDOWN ON SELF-LOVE

“And I would find myself again. Not the same version of me that I was looking for, but a stronger version. A wiser version. A woman who knew that she was enough, just as she was. A woman who had been tried in the fire but instead of being burned by it, came out gold. A woman who finally, after doubting and questioning and striving and hustling for her worth for years . . . finally, finally came to the realization that she was and is and has always been . . . enough.”

—MANDY HALE

To start, we must first drill down into the idea of self-love in order to fuel up with motivation and energy. This chapter will help inspire and prepare you to do the work in part 2. Here, we’ll come to better understand and conceptualize the nebulous idea of self-love by defining what it is, what it isn’t, and what it might look like on a daily basis. There’s an assessment exercise at the end of this chapter to help you get a quick snapshot of where you stand in the self-love arena.
WHAT IS SELF-LOVE?

Self-love is the fuel that allows an individual to reach their full potential, and is filled with compassion, grace, and gentleness. Making space and prioritizing ourselves allows us to embrace our lives completely and wholeheartedly. Self-love is learning to extend kindness toward ourselves, even when we struggle and suffer. It is extending forgiveness to ourselves when we make mistakes. Self-love means prioritizing ourselves and giving ourselves permission to find and believe in our strengths and gifts. Sometimes it means putting ourselves first. Sometimes it means making space to identify our needs and wants. It involves setting boundaries, and setting boundaries involves self-love. These two concepts work together.

The clients I work with often struggle to know how to love themselves. Often, in the first therapy session, women can quickly and easily identify some internalized shame-based beliefs and the need for self-love, but then they get stuck, not knowing what steps to take next in order to change. They become lost, unfamiliar with how to navigate the path forward.

WHAT IT ISN’T

To better understand what self-love involves, sometimes it helps to think about what self-love doesn’t involve. Self-love is not perfection, nor is it always being happy. It is not based on your achievements and external measurements of success. It is not rooted in shame-based criticism or fear. It does not shame, lie, minimize, or criticize. Often, women think that they can love themselves through fault-finding and beating themselves up, as if this will help them become a better version of themselves. If you can relate, I can promise you that in the effort to make yourself better through self-shaming and self-criticism, you will become worse and broken-down, waiting for someone or something to rescue you. True self-love must come from within, even when we screw up or take a wrong turn in life.
WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO LOVE OURSELVES?

Self-love seems like a simple enough concept. But why does it prove so elusive? All humans are hardwired for connection and belonging. For women, nurturing has its roots in survival. In early hunting and gathering societies, women’s activities centered around bearing and rearing children, gathering food and drink, and creating a safe home space. Today, as women, we often find ourselves taking care of our children, our parents, our friends, our lovers. We extend grace and compassion toward others so easily, yet we often struggle to make space and time to put ourselves first. Perhaps this stems from a faulty belief that we are selfish or undeserving. Maybe it comes from internalized societal messages, early childhood wounds, or deeply rooted trauma. Or perhaps we just don’t take the time to prioritize ourselves.

Internalized beliefs of unworthiness are rooted in shame, and where there is shame, self-love struggles to grow. I have found that most women struggling to love themselves have a strong, critical internal voice. Rarely would they speak to their friends, family, or even an enemy the way they talk to themselves. Over time, this internalized, critical narrative creates an automatic narrative; a well-worn pathway like an eight-lane superhighway. While learning to practice self-love can sometimes feel like using a butter knife to chop down weeds and make a path through the thick jungle, just know that creating a new narrative and doing the exercises in this workbook will soon make way for a clearer and healthier pathway to emerge.

Likewise, if you had a difficult childhood that was rooted in dysfunctional patterns, self-love may never have had a chance to take root and blossom. It is never too late to start that process. We can learn how to love ourselves even as adults and create new, solid foundations for growth and healing.

WHERE DOES A LACK OF SELF-LOVE SHOW UP FOR YOU?