

Self-Care and the ability to have Healthy Relationships

Self-care is a measure of how much you love and appreciate yourself. Focusing on self will make you stronger and more capable of living a fulfilling life with healthy relationships.

By Irene Hansen Savarese, M.S., L.M.H.C.

Problems in intimate relationships are often related to lack of self-care and inability to appreciate self. Intimacy and compassion towards others isn't possible before you are capable of treating yourself with compassion and love. Appreciation of self and your best effort is empowering you and making you a better partner. Taking care of self and taking responsibility for your own life will make you stronger and more capable of creating fulfilling intimate relationships with those you love.

Take this test to see if you have trouble taking care of self:

1. You have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
2. You don't take care of body (eat healthy food, exercise, yearly physicals etc.)
3. You can't relax and often feel anxious, depressed and/or bored
4. You worry about what others think of you rather than figuring out what you want
5. You rarely find time to do things just for you
6. You rarely go on vacation
7. You seek dangerous people or situations
8. You worry about mistakes
9. You stopped dreaming a long time ago, and you don't have goals for the future
10. You allow others to put you down repeatedly (Toxic relationships, codependency, domestic violence.)

If you checked most of the above statements you might benefit from taking a look at why you have trouble taking care of yourself. You might not believe that you are worth taking care of.

Tips to increase self-care and satisfaction in intimate relationships:

- 1) ***Have a life of your own.*** If you have problems in intimate relationships, take a good look at your own life. Do you have a dream you haven't pursued? Make sure you work on own dreams before you criticize your partner for not giving you the life that you want. Write down goals. Make a plan of action.
- 2) ***Appreciation of self by highlighting strengths and abilities that you have.*** Think about a situation where you - even though the situation was difficult - managed to turn it into a success. For example, you found a solution to a problem, and you solved the problem with satisfaction. The way you did that made the situation a success. Because of you and your ideas, decisions, interventions, talents etc. the event turned out to be a success. Focus on resources, strength, talents, gifts, abilities and what *you* did to make it a success.

- 3) ***Acceptance of best effort.*** Expect mistakes and setbacks, even failures. Look objectively at the situation. Don't blame yourself for doing your best at the time. Instead learn from the mis-take and take it again. Think of a mistake you made, which was a major setback for you. What was the situation? What was the mistake you made? What do you know now that would help you next time you are in a similar situation? *Do this exercise if you hate the idea of doing it!!!* Putting yourself down because of a mistake ruins your dreams. You simply stop dreaming, and give up doing what you love. If your mistake made you stop dreaming, please learn that it didn't work out to give up your dream. To give up creates negative feelings such as anger towards self and others, fear of trying and doing your best, boredom of not doing, and depression because of the lost dream. Instead, allow yourself to take baby steps if you need to. Baby steps are great. They keep you moving forward without creating too much fear. Small steps are definitely better than no steps.
- 4) ***Avoid putting yourself down*** with comments like: "I am so lazy" and "I can't seem to get anything done" etc. You are not lazy. You are probably afraid of success or failure, or you could be living someone else's dream. Have sympathy towards yourself, like you would have towards a good friend or family member.
- 5) ***Acknowledge when you experience strong feelings of fear, depression or anger.*** Investigate your beliefs, thoughts and feelings. Use journaling as a tool to deal with difficult emotions. Remind yourself that painful feelings don't last forever. Acknowledge what you can and can't change. Ask for help when you need it.
- 6) ***Compare to self over time.*** Don't compare yourself to other people's accomplishments and standards. Instead compare yourself to own accomplishments. "I used to hide my true feelings, now I ..." or "I used to try to live someone else's dream, now I ..."
- 7) ***Choose friends and partners that have goals of their own and show compassion towards you.*** These relationships are empowering. Choose a partner that takes care of him/herself. Have separate and common goals. Support each other in getting what you want. Focus on own reality. Don't play the blaming game. Remember to have more goals for yourself than for your partner. Share strengths and weaknesses. Make sure you listen and understand your partner's point of view. Make sure he/she understands yours.

Irene Hansen Savarese has a Master Degree in Psychology from Denmark. She is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in Private Practice in Fort Lauderdale. Please direct questions regarding this article to her office at 954-776-0406, Ext 3, or email her at irenesavarese@yahoo.com