

## How to be a Better Friend to Yourself

Most of us know how to be a good friend. Friends are trustworthy and loyal, give encouragement and empathy, lend a helping hand when things get rough, laugh, have fun, and celebrate life's joys and accomplishments together. If we know how to do this for our friends, why is it so hard to do the same for ourselves?

Being a friend to yourself is really no different than being a friend to others and yet it feels so much harder. Almost daily, I hear from people who want to be kinder to themselves; they want to learn how to give themselves the unconditional love, support, and acceptance that they give to their friends and family.

### **Why you should be your own best friend**

The most important relationship you'll ever have is the relationship with yourself. Other people will come and go from your life, but you can always be there for yourself.

There will be times when your friends are unavailable, perhaps you've moved to a new city and have yet to create a new "tribe" or support system, or when you've had a falling out or grown apart from your friends. At these times, it's essential that you can count on yourself and meet your own emotional needs. Even your best friend since kindergarten, who knows you better than anyone, can't meet all of your needs. It's simply impossible for someone else to always be available and tuned into your needs (even if you're great at communicating them).

Expecting others to meet all our needs can leave us disappointed, frustrated, or feeling rejected. But if we learn to pay attention to our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, we'll be able to trust ourselves, give ourselves compassion and comfort, and rely on ourselves when life is tough.

### **How to be a better friend to yourself**

- 1. Stop comparing yourself to others.** "When you compare your personality, how you look, or your achievements to others, you lose sight of your unique gifts, talents, and presence," says Connie Habash, LMFT, a spiritual teacher and psychotherapist. "A good friend lets you know how much they appreciate you for exactly who you are. Practice affirming your best qualities and stop looking for what is missing. You are uniquely you, and there's no comparison!"

What are 5 things you like about yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Get to know yourself.** How well do you really know yourself? In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, it's easy to lose track of what matters to you and what you like to do. If you pride yourself on taking care of other people, and only attend to your own needs if there's time leftover, you're not aware of and valuing your own needs and feelings. Self-understanding and awareness are important parts of being a good friend to yourself. Try spending a few minutes regularly [writing down](#) your interests, likes and dislikes, goals, and values. Getting to know yourself is a bit like an experiment; try some new things and see what feels right.

What do you like to do for fun? \_\_\_\_\_

What's something you believe strongly in? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of music do you like? \_\_\_\_\_

What's one of your goals? \_\_\_\_\_

What's something worth doing, even if you fail? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you comfort yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Remember that taking care of yourself isn't selfish.** Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Geetha Narayanan told me that "There are different ways to take care of ourselves - journaling, exercising, meditation, prayer, massage or even going to a therapy session, if needed." We all have physical, emotional, and spiritual needs; meeting them are necessities, not luxuries. Narayanan also reminds us that we have to put our own oxygen masks on first: "...unless we accept and take care of ourselves, we won't be able to provide care for others."

How do you take care of your body, mind, and spirit (be specific)? \_\_\_\_\_

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What will happen if you don't take care of yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

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Write an affirmation to help you remember that self-care isn't selfish: \_\_\_\_\_

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**4. Set boundaries.** [Boundaries](#) are also a form of self-care. Without boundaries, we run the risk of overextending ourselves, getting burnt out, feeling resentful, and letting people treat us poorly. A good friend will help you protect your boundaries and encourage you to stand up for yourself, speak your truth, and ask for respect. You can do this for yourself when you practice setting healthy boundaries.

Identify a boundary that would be beneficial for you to set? \_\_\_\_\_

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Practice writing how you might communicate this boundary in a way that's clear, direct, and kind:

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**5. Develop a regular meditation practice.** Jim Arjani, LMFT, the Clinical Director of Mountain View Therapy, recommends using meditation to be kinder to yourself. "Imagine that no matter what is happening in your life, there is always a way for you to be kind to yourself. Meditation can help you to develop self-acceptance so that you can step outside of your comfort zone and continue to pursue your goals even when it becomes very challenging." Meditation helps you stay present-focused so that you're spending less time dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. It promotes a sense of calm that allows you to tune into your inner voice and learn to trust yourself.

Try meditating for 5-10 minutes per day for the next week and record your experience. You can use an app such as Calm, Insight Timer, or Head Space to get started.

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**6. Speak kindly to yourself.** According to Nate Terrell, LCSW, author of Achieving Self-Compassion, “A great way to be a better friend to yourself is to talk to yourself (out loud, if possible) in a caring and helpful manner, just like you are your own best friend. For instance, when you are going through a hard time, you can say to yourself, ‘Hang in there, I am behind you all the way.’” With practice, it becomes easier and feels more natural to talk to yourself with compassion.

Identify a current struggle. It can be something big like I’m worried about my Mom’s health or as small as I feel guilty that I didn’t contribute anything to the bake sale.

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What would you say to a friend who had this same struggle? \_\_\_\_\_

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Practice giving yourself the same compassionate response: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Isn’t being your own friend lonely?**

Being your own friend isn’t a substitute for having other friendships and relationships. We all still crave connection with others, but when we love ourselves, we attract healthy relationships with people who are also secure and confident; we don’t need as much reassurance from others because we know within ourselves that we’re lovable, worthy, and wanted.

Loneliness isn’t really about whether you’re around people. You can be lonely in a room full of people just as easily as you can feel lonely when you’re alone. The only cure for loneliness is to find comfort in yourself, to enjoy being with yourself, and to treat yourself with kindness.

Building a friendship with yourself is a process just like building any other friendship. It requires an investment of time and energy and a commitment to be open and honest. Being a better friend to yourself starts with small steps to get to know, listen to, care for, and be with yourself. Loving and trusting yourself will develop over time. Keep showing up for yourself and your friendship will bloom.