

The 143 Challenge

Using Your Brain's Pattern Recognition System
to Build Self-Love

by Justin Ray

The Hook: Start With Experience, Not Explanation

Have you ever said "I hate you" to yourself?

In the mirror after a mistake. In your head when you stumbled over words. Lying in bed at 2 AM replaying every embarrassing thing you did that day.

Those words didn't just disappear. They became data points your brain collected and filed away. **Evidence that you weren't enough.**

What if you could rewrite that evidence? Not by pretending. Not by forcing positivity. But by using the same system your brain already has—just pointing it in a different direction.

**No app. No journal. No special time blocked off.
Just you, the clock, and three words.**

What It Is

The 143 Challenge is a micro-practice that hijacks your brain's pattern-recognition system (the Reticular Activating System) to build self-love throughout your day.

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Just you, the clock, and three words.**

How Your Brain Already Works

Your brain has a filter called the **Reticular Activating System** (RAS). Think of it as a bouncer at the door of your consciousness, deciding what gets in and what stays out.

Right now, as you read this, your RAS is filtering out the hum of your refrigerator, the pressure of your feet on the floor, the sensation of your clothes on your skin, and thousands of other pieces of information. It's showing you these words instead.

Here's what most people don't know: You've been programming this filter your whole life.

Every thought you repeat, every belief you reinforce, every pattern you practice—you're teaching your RAS what to look for.

Spend your days thinking "I'm not good enough"? Your RAS goes to work collecting evidence. Every mistake becomes proof. Every awkward moment gets filed under "See? I told you so."

But if you programmed it, you can reprogram it.

Prove It To Yourself (The 72-Hour Test)

Before I tell you what to DO with this information, I'm going to prove to you that your RAS is real, that it's working right now, and that you have more control over it than you think.

For the next 72 hours—three days—notice one specific thing: The number 143.

That's it. Just notice it. Don't try to make it happen. Just pay attention.

- Clocks (any time ending in :43)
- Addresses
- License plates
- Receipts
- Page numbers
- Anywhere numbers show up

I'm willing to bet that within 24 hours, you'll see it at least once. Probably multiple times.

Not because of magic. Not because of coincidence. **Because you just told your brain it matters.**

What You Just Proved

Did you see 143? Of course you did.

Maybe on the clock at work. Maybe a house number you never noticed on a street you drive every day. Maybe on a receipt, a page number, somewhere random.

That's your RAS working.

The number was always there. You just weren't looking for it. But the moment you told your brain it mattered, it appeared everywhere.

Most people stop here. They learn about the RAS, do the fun experiment, say "Wow, that's cool," and move on. They go back to letting their brain show them all the ways they're not enough.

We're not doing that.

We're going to take this tool—this incredible, programmable filter—and use it to build something better.

The Tool: Turning 143 Into Self-Love REPs

Here's what most people don't know about 143: In the old pager days (before texting, before smartphones), people sent numeric codes to communicate.

143 meant "I love you."

- 1 letter in "I"
- 4 letters in "love"
- 3 letters in "you"

So every time your RAS shows you 143—every time your brain filters through thousands of pieces of information and says "Hey, look at this"—**it's offering you a reminder. A reminder to choose love.**

How It Works

Every time you see :43 on a clock, look at the hour. Say "I love you" that many times.

- 1:43 = Say "I love you" once
- 7:43 = Say "I love you" seven times
- 12:43 = Say "I love you" twelve times

Say it to yourself. Use your name—"I love you, [your name]." Say it to someone you care about. Say it as gratitude for something in your life. **Just make it about love.**

The number changes every time, so your brain can't automate it. At 1:43 you say it once. At 8:43 you say it eight times. It stays fresh. It stays intentional. **It stays real.**

Why "I Love You" Changes Your Brain

Here's what nobody tells you about self-love: **Your brain doesn't know the difference between hearing "I love you" from someone else and hearing it from yourself.**

When you say "I love you" out loud, using your own name, something remarkable happens. The same neural pathways light up as when someone who cares about you says those words. Your brain registers: Compassion. Safety. Worth.

It doesn't check the source first. **It just receives the message.**

Think about how many times you've said "I hate you" to yourself. Those words didn't disappear. They became evidence. Data points your RAS collected: "See? Proof that I'm not enough."

But evidence can be rewritten.

Every "I love you" is a brick. One brick doesn't build a house—you can't say it once and expect transformation. But when you lay brick after brick, day after day, hour after hour? **Something solid starts to take shape.** Something you can stand on when everything else feels shaky.

When You're Going Through Hell

When your relationship is ending. When you lost your job. When you're sitting alone at night wondering if you'll ever feel okay again.

"I love you" becomes a lifeline. Not because it fixes everything instantly. Not because it erases the pain. But because it reminds you: **Love hasn't left. It's right here. It's been here the whole time.**

Some days, you'll say "I love you" and mean it. Really mean it. You'll feel it in your chest, warm and true.

Some days, you'll say it and feel absolutely nothing. The words will sound hollow and fake and you'll think "This is stupid."

Some days, you'll say it through tears, your voice breaking, barely able to get the words out.

Say it anyway.

Because your brain is listening. And **repetition**—consistent, relentless, stubborn repetition—is how we teach our brains new truths.

What This Is (And What It Isn't)

This Will NOT: Cure depression • Fix anxiety overnight • Solve all your problems • Make you suddenly confident • Replace therapy or medication

This WILL: **Interrupt negative self-talk** that's been running on autopilot for years • **Give you micro-doses of self-compassion** throughout your day • **Create spontaneous moments of joy** when you least expect them • **Build evidence** that you CAN rewire your brain • **Prove** that confidence comes from action, not waiting to feel ready

When you've spent years—maybe decades—saying cruel things to yourself, this practice creates **competing evidence**. Your brain starts to hear "I love you" more than "I hate you." And slowly, gradually, **the balance shifts**.

The Science: Why Variable Repetition Works

Three neural mechanisms make this practice effective:

1. RAS Reprogramming Through Pattern Recognition - You've already proven your RAS works by noticing 143 everywhere. Now you're using that same system intentionally—telling your brain "love matters."

2. Self-Directed Affirmations Activate Reward Pathways - When you say "I love you, [your name]," your brain processes it similarly to external validation. The reward centers light up. **Your brain registers: I am loved.**

3. Variable Repetition Prevents Habituation - Saying it different numbers of times (1, 3, 7, 12) keeps the practice effective. Your brain can't tune it out because **the pattern keeps changing.**

Multiple daily repetitions compound. **Neuroplasticity**—your brain's ability to form new pathways—happens through consistent repetition over time. You're not rewiring in one dramatic moment. **You're rewiring one "I love you" at a time.** Dozens of times a day. Hundreds of times a week.

How To Actually Do This

Week 1: Just Notice (The Proof Phase) - Spend three days noticing 143 everywhere. Don't pressure yourself to do anything with it yet. Just train your RAS. Prove to yourself this works.

Week 2: Start The Practice (The Action Phase) - Every time you see :43 on a clock, say "I love you" based on the hour. If you miss one, that's okay. Catch the next one. This isn't about perfection. It's about repetition.

Week 3+: Make It Yours (The Integration Phase) - Find what feels authentic: Some people say "I love you" to themselves. Some direct it toward people they care about. Some use it as gratitude—"I love this moment," "I love this coffee," "I love that I'm trying."

The most important REPs are the ones you do when you don't believe the words. Those are the ones that matter most. Say them anyway. Fake it until your brain catches up.

The Real Story: Why This Matters

The first time I really noticed 143, I went to a friend's new house for dinner. Their address was 143. Then I started seeing it everywhere.

This was right as my 13-year relationship was ending. Right as everything I thought I knew about my life was falling apart. I was sitting in that space between who I was and who I was becoming. I had no idea if I was going to be okay.

Every time I saw 143, I thought: *I deserve love. I deserve love. I deserve love.*

Some days I believed it. Some days I didn't. **But I kept saying it.** And slowly, something shifted.

Now every :43 is a reminder. Love—for myself, for others, for this wild, messy, beautiful life—is always available. **Even in the hard moments. Especially in the hard moments.**

The Difference This Makes

You're not waiting to feel better before you practice self-love. **You're practicing self-love until you feel better.** That's the difference.

Your Turn.

Set a timer for 72 hours from right now. For the next three days, just notice 143.

Then on day four, when you see :43 on a clock, try it. Just once. See how it feels.

You don't have to commit to anything. You don't have to believe it will work. **You just have to be willing to try.**

Your RAS is already listening. Let's give it something better to show you.

Quick Reference Card

The 143 Challenge in 3 Steps:

1. **Notice 143** (Days 1-3): Train your RAS by simply observing the number
2. **Take Action** (Day 4+): Every :43, say "I love you" [X] times based on the hour
3. **Make It Yours**: Direct it however feels authentic—to yourself, others, or as gratitude

Remember: The number changes = your brain stays engaged • Missed one? Catch the next • Don't believe it? Say it anyway • The reps you do when you don't believe are the ones that matter most

This is proof of presence. Every time you choose to say "I love you," you're proving you're here. You're choosing yourself. You're building the foundation.