

Is Self-Acceptance the Key to Change?

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In this article I'd like to explore the idea of self-acceptance and its importance in healthy relationships--both within ourselves and with others.

Self-acceptance may seem like a somewhat counter-intuitive part of the change process. *However, acceptance is actually the first step to changing anything.*

If we don't learn how to deeply accept and even love our so-called flaws, *then there are always parts of us that we will defend against feeling.* We are then likely to be defensive if someone that we are close to touches that sore spot--or even points to it!

As the wise Byron Katie says, "**defense is the first act of war**" and, as I mentioned in my article on Roadblocks to Communication, relationship researcher John Gottman says that defensiveness is one of the "4 Horsemen": one of the 4 most important harbingers of the end of a relationship, or--perhaps worse--long-term unhappiness in a partnership.

And as Debbie Ford discusses in her books, **until we expose to ourselves our own "dark" parts--whether it be our selfishness, our vulnerability, our jealousy--you fill in the blank for the part of yourself you like least or avoid most--we will sometimes act out in harmful ways to protect ourselves from feeling the discomfort of self-loathing.**

And you can bet that the things you defend against most fiercely in your relationships with others are the parts of yourself that you have not brought into the light of awareness--to accept and even to find the good stuff in them.

Interestingly, when these parts are brought into our awareness with compassion and acceptance, they often lose their negative power and begin to shift on their own.

I've found it helpful to try and examine my own defensive reactions when they come up, to see what it is that I'm trying not to feel or be aware of. And the good thing is, if I don't do it the first time, life will always give me another opportunity to grow!

Another clue to finding your own unconscious darkness is to observe what triggers you the most in others--what do you complain about, criticize, or notice the most? *As the saying goes, you spot it, you got it!*

Here's to deepening our knowing and our acceptance of ourselves, and thus taking one step closer to inner--and outer--peace.

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p.s. Working with an effective counselling professional one-on-one can often be helpful in discovering the parts of yourself that need acceptance, and learning how to embrace them. If you would like more information, please email me at tamara@inessencecounselling.com or call **1 888 504 4111**. I'd be honoured to work with you!