

Chapter 6

Being Your Own Best Friend

Everyone wants to be happy. Everyone wants to have friends. Everyone wants to be liked and admired, and everyone wants to feel good about themselves.

If everyone wants these things, then why are so many people unhappy, lonely, and negative about themselves? The answer is easy: Just because you want something doesn't mean it will be yours automatically. There is no button to push that will bring you long-term confidence and joy. Both may come after you have figured out how to handle a few of the twists and curves of life.

Have you ever heard the old expression *you have to love yourself before you can love anybody else*? It sounds a little funny doesn't it? *Love yourself*. If you had to make a list of the people in your life whom you love, you probably would not start with *I love myself*. But why not? If getting along with yourself, and accepting yourself, are so important, then why not make that the starting place? We are not talking about self-centered love, the voice of *me, me, me*. We are talking about taking care of yourself, understanding yourself, and being in control of your circumstances.

No, not me, you might say, *I'll never be in control of my own life!* We have good news for you—well, for those of you who are willing to put a little muscle into your goals. Here's the secret: with lots of hard work and determination, you can accomplish anything you dream. But the first step is learning to be your own best friend.



Changes Begin with You

We have already talked about the importance of attitude—how you look at your life, and circumstances. But did we mention that change in your life begins with you? You have a choice: you can join the Army of Complainers, who are always recruiting new members all over the world, or you can decide to step out on your own and take control of your life.

In order to step out on your own, you are going to have to fight some tough battles. You are going to have to learn to leave some old beliefs behind. Forget all of the moments of comfort that you found in saying (and thinking): *It's not my fault; if only I were smarter; everyone else has it easier than I do!* Those days are over! You are no longer going to blame.

Blame what? Blame yourself, blame your parents, your friends, your teachers, your neighborhood, your lack of money, your slightly too small nose, your height, your hair color, your shoe size or anything else! You are going to take responsibility. So, start by repeating this statement to yourself: *all change begins with me!*

Taking Care of Yourself



How do you think you can best take care of yourself? When discussing this subject, we felt that both body and mind need care, and that each are important. What do you think?

Your Body—Caring for the Outer You

Last year, while teaching a class, I noticed that several of my students were often ill. They suffered from every known problem: headaches, backaches, sore teeth, stomach problems, an ulcer, exhaustion, and plain lack of energy. One boy would come in every day and drape himself over his desk and say, "I don't feel well."

After this went on for several weeks we had a discussion. I asked the students what they ate, if they slept and if they exercised. I discovered that they almost all exercised (one was on the football team, another on the wrestling team). Two of them were not getting the sleep they needed. None of them, that's right, not one of them was eating well. I asked them to write a list of every item they placed in their mouth and swallowed for four days.

Their lists looked very similar: chips; candy; soda; frozen pastries;

hamburgers; pizza; doughnuts; ice cream; and cupcakes. When I asked them if their parents ever made dinner the reply was: "Sure, but I don't usually eat what they eat!" No wonder they felt so awful in school!



Taking care of your body is one aspect of being good to yourself. If you eat a steady diet of junk food, spend your lunch money on soda and chips, and run from any food that may be good for you, then you will surely suffer. Aside from eating well, your body needs exercise, enough sleep, and to be kept reasonably clean. A lack of any of these things can make you feel lousy.

Imagine that you were your best friend. How would you take care of yourself?

Your Mind and Spirit—Caring for the Inner You

Just before a class a few weeks ago, one of my students approached me. She showed me a CD of one of her favorite rappers. She said that she had asked for it as a birthday gift, and that her mom was upset when she heard some of the lyrics. The student, Katherine, said that she loved this man's music, and thought he was talented. She asked me to listen to a few songs.

Always curious, I agreed. I was surprised, although not shocked. If I didn't know that this type of music was popular I would have been shocked. All three songs I listened to were a long stream of bad language. All of the songs talked about murder, drugs, alcohol, prostitutes, sex and hatred.

When I had heard enough I asked Katherine if she listened to that type of music every day. She nodded her head enthusiastically. Then I asked her, "What do you think happens to your mind when you listen to this kind of music all of the time?" "I don't know", she said, "I never thought about it." Then I told her something like this:

"Just like your body, if you feed your mind and spirit junk food all of the time you will feel sick. If you listen to angry rappers screaming curse words through your headphones every day, eventually this will seem normal to you."

The conversation didn't end there, but now let's talk. What do you listen to on the radio, and watch on TV every day? Do you ever play video games?





What's going on in those games? If you are like most of us, you are surrounded by bad language, shows on TV where half the actors are killed, and songs about sex and murder. It is difficult to escape these messages.

Your mind is like a big suitcase. What you fill it with is what will come out. If you fill your mind with a constant stream of mental junk food, you will feel pretty junky after a while. As they say, garbage in garbage out. But if you fill your mind with healthy thoughts and ideas, you will be able to tap into your creative potential.

What you fill your mind with eventually determines how you think and feel.

This is how one 14-year-old girl experienced it:

Two years ago my older brother started listening to some rough music. The lyrics were about death and murder, and a super-race of people. One guy sang about killing the police, and authority figures in general. I am five years younger than Tim, my brother. I wanted him to think I was cool. I did everything he did, and his friends liked me because I am pretty good-looking. I also look older than I am. That year everything started to change for me. I didn't play with my old friends as much, I started to look at the world differently. I began to think that all people were bad, and that they were just hiding it under the surface of their phony smiles. My grades went down, and I began to act really tough in school. Before that I had a few good friends, and I was a good student. But being around people who looked at the world like that and believed that what they were listening to was all true, changed the way I felt inside. I felt angry and distrusting toward the world. Maybe I joined Tim because I wanted to be noticed, I had always been the good one, in school and at home. I was noticed, but instead of feeling good about myself it made me feel bad. My feelings about myself became my feelings about the world. What a terrible way to look at life. Tim went to college last year and I've made some new friends. I'm glad it's over.

Gabriela, 14

Although it might not seem like a big deal, how we eat, what kind of music we listen to, and the TV programs we choose to watch all influence our physical and mental well-being. It's easiest to be healthy when you surround yourself with healthy food for

your body and mind. So, next time you switch on the TV or head to the fridge, you should ask yourself, *How will this make me feel?*

Talking to Yourself

Do you talk to yourself? We bet you do. Everyone does. At least, neither of us has ever talked to someone who didn't admit to talking to himself. What do you say to yourself when no one else is around? What does the conversation in your head sound like? We asked John, an eighth-grader, to write down how he thought his inner conversation would go if he forgot something important at home. Here's what he said:

Oh man, I forgot my homework...

You're such an idiot! You're going to mess up your grade now...

Who cares anyhow...

Maybe Mr. Preston will believe me and let me turn it in late...

I doubt it, he caught you trying to cheat that once, he'll never believe you now!

I'm sunk. I wish I were sick today...

You're always forgetting everything...

What's wrong with your brain?

Then we asked Bill, a teacher and once semi-pro-basketball player (no fair, he's already almost totally grown up!) what his conversation would probably sound like if he forgot something important. Here is what he said:

Oh shoot, I forgot my teacher's manual at home with all of my notes!

I'll never get through this day without it, I really need that book...

But I haven't got time to go home, I'll be late...

I will have to do my best. I know what I want to say, and how I want things to go, I just wish I had the material.

I've done this before, though, I know I can do a good job. I'm a good teacher.

The most important point is that they understand the concept.

Next time I'll remember, but today I'll make it work out...

Okay, we admit those conversations may sound a little "fixed up" so they make a point. We knew that John had a habit of putting himself down, because he did it in school when he muttered to himself. We also knew that Bill had trained himself to work things out, and not to put himself down. He told us that

when he played basketball in college and as a career that he had to use a lot of *positive self talk* if he was going to play a strong game.

Positive self talk is when you intentionally talk to yourself in an encouraging and understanding way. Just like anything else, the way you talk to yourself is a habit. You have probably been saying the same types of things to yourself for a long time. Talking to yourself politely and patiently is a way of encouraging yourself and helping yourself to do your best.

Think about the people in your life who help you and support you the most. How do those people talk to you? Do they tell you that you stink, you're a loser and that you never do anything right? Probably not. Do they tell you to try your best, to keep trying and then to try some more? Maybe they remind you of your past accomplishments, or your skills and your abilities.

Have you ever been to a marathon? If you have, then you won't be able to help but notice that there are herds of people standing on the sidelines all the way through the race screaming words of encouragement to their friends and family members. What do they say? *You can do it! Don't give up! Pace yourself! You look fantastic! You're almost there! You are ahead of your time! You're beautiful! Keep it up! We're so proud of you! Go! Go! Go!*

The way you choose to talk to yourself can make or break you. It may be the single thread of difference between two otherwise equal competitors. We are not suggesting that you need to go out and run a marathon or even get involved in sports in order to learn how to encourage yourself. We are also not talking about always thinking like a fan—*rah, rah, rah!* We are talking about creating a good relationship with your own self through your thoughts.

Learning to mentally build yourself up instead of putting yourself down is a habit. Start to listen to your inner conversations and decide if you like the way you're talking to yourself. If you don't like the way you talk to yourself and you want to make a change, start by imagining that you are talking to your best friend, someone you admire and respect. Use the words you would use when you talk to that friend.

The True You

Who is the true you? Take a moment out of your day, maybe when you are alone at night before you go to sleep, and try to



imagine your ideal self. How do you feel about yourself? What qualities have you developed that make you who you are? Are you thoughtful, hard-working, courageous and fair? Are you kind, compassionate and diplomatic?

Whether you realize it or not, you are creating yourself every day. The choices you make, the words you use and the way you behave all determine what kind of person you are.

Your life is like a painting, and you are the artist. Every day you choose the colors and style of your painting.

And every day you can add to its beauty, if you choose. Will you create a masterpiece? It's all up to you!

Journal

What traits do you want to possess and what traits do you have that others may respect and admire?



To Do

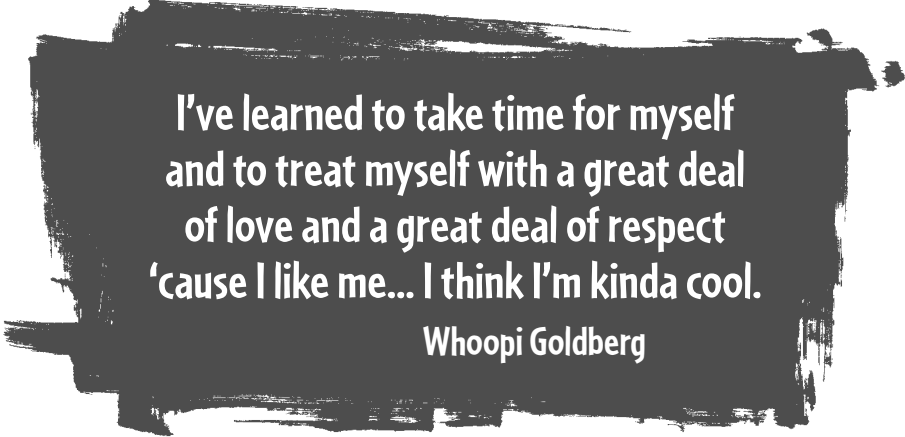
1. How do you take care of yourself? Do you think that you treat yourself as well as you treat your friends? If you had one day to do whatever you wanted to do for yourself, what would you do?
2. Write a common conversation you might have with yourself. How do you talk to yourself, or think about yourself? Do you encourage yourself, or do you put yourself down? If you could change the way you talk to yourself, what kinds of things would you like to say instead?



Key Ideas

- ☉ Learning to be your own best friend will help you to be a friend to others.
- ☉ Hard work helps you to find out what you are capable of doing.





I've learned to take time for myself
and to treat myself with a great deal
of love and a great deal of respect
'cause I like me... I think I'm kinda cool.

Whoopi Goldberg