

Q: What does it mean to love myself?

I'd been wrestling with that question, so I posed it to a group of friends over lunch recently. Our kids are grown, but we've been meeting regularly since they were little. We usually talk loudly and long about almost everything, but I couldn't believe how quiet everyone suddenly got.

"I have to push past a big bump of psycho-babble, because loving myself sounds so self-centered," a friend finally offered.

"I don't love myself well because when I try to name what I like about myself, it's much easier to name what I don't like," another offered.

"And I was taught to put others first," someone added. "That means I come in last."

"Maybe it's not about priorities but about simply loving ourselves as we love our neighbors. Caring for ourselves like we'd care for another person."

"Loving ourselves comes from the overflow of receiving God's love, but I'm not sure I understand that kind of love," confessed another.

Her comment sparked a memory for me. "When I became a mother for the first time, I got a glimpse of unconditional love. Here was this baby who kept me awake at night, spit up all over me, pooped on my clothes and sometimes even rejected my comfort. Yet I loved him with a powerful, intense and tender love I'd never known before, simply because he was my child."

The conversation shifted as we reflected on the ways we've loved our children through the challenges and hard parts. The way God loves us, in spite of our mess-ups and melt-downs.

"I think loving ourselves means ordering dessert," a friend added, which sent us in another direction of conversation.

Later, as I was driving home, I thought about this circle of friends and how we talk about our children and marriage and jobs and food and health and other stuff. But we often come back to one central theme — receiving and believing God's love, which changes the way we see and love ourselves.



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MENTOR PERSPECTIVE



by Carol Kuykendall, the author of *Five Simple Ways to Grow a Great Family* and co-author of *What Every Mom Needs*, available at MOPShop.org.

MOM PERSPECTIVE



by Dale Skram, the imperfect mom of four girls. She has been active in MOPS for 10 years in Boulder, Colorado, as a mom, leader and now as a speaker (DaleSkram.com).

MODELING & REMODELING SELF-LOVE

As I sat in the bleachers watching my daughter Ansley's Tiny Tots gymnastics class, I could see she was growing more and more frustrated with herself. They were working on cartwheels and Ansley's body would not cooperate, no matter how hard she tried. She held it together until we got to the car and then she burst into tears.

"Sweetheart, what's wrong?" I asked.

"I can't do a cartwheel. I hate myself!" she told me.

I was heartbroken. At age 4, my sweet daughter hated herself over a dumb cartwheel. I tried to encourage her, but I knew Ansley needed more than words to start learning to love herself. She needed to see me doing the same.

I've struggled with perfectionist tendencies for years, thinking that I should be better, smarter, thinner, happier ... you name it. And while I tried to keep these feelings in check, sitting in the car that day, I realized I was passing my unrealistic expectations down to my daughter. Even though making mistakes and not

achieving a desired goal are normal parts of life, I knew she needed to accept her imperfect self before she'd be able to love herself.

So I started admitting my mistakes and revealing more of my failures out loud in front of all four of my daughters, so they would see that even as a mom, I'm still learning and messing up in the process. Every time I burned the toast, or broke a glass or got a speeding ticket (that only happened once), I started saying, "Uh-oh, Mom messed up," before dealing with the consequences.

Deep down I fear my failures and imperfections make me unlovable. But I know they don't; they make me human. So every time I have to work through the consequences of a bad grade, or bad attitude or bad choice with my four daughters, I want them to know that they are lovable. God loves them when they mess up. I love them when they mess up. And they can even love themselves when they mess up.

I know my girls are watching me and my responses to my mess-ups these days. I hope that's helping them learn to love their imperfect selves. But I know it's helping me do a better job of loving my imperfect self too. **M**