

The Art of Nurturing Self-Talk: How to Tell Yourself What You Need to Hear

By [Rita Loyd](#)



“You will never speak to anyone more than you speak to yourself in your head. Be kind to yourself.” ~Unknown

Talking to ourselves in a nurturing way can be a challenge if we rarely heard nurturing words in the early formative years of our lives. In fact, if we were often criticized or neglected, we probably learned to criticize and neglect ourselves instead.

When I was growing up, my mom was a dedicated wife and mother, but she suffered from deep [depression](#), anxiety, and low self-esteem. She didn't know how to be encouraging or nurturing because she was never nurtured or encouraged by her parents while she was growing up. So her words to me reflected the negativity that she felt about life and herself.

I have forgiven my mother for all the mistakes she made in my childhood, and, in fact, we ended up extremely close during her last years of life. But that doesn't mean that there

wasn't work for me to do on myself in order to [heal the self-hatred](#) that had been unconsciously passed down.

Growing up as I did, I struggled with low self-esteem, I was deeply depressed, I found myself in an abusive marriage with my first husband, I depended on other people for approval, and I neglected my dreams, since I didn't believe in myself.

Over the years I've done a lot of work to heal and have made significant progress in all these areas. I've discovered the meaning of [unconditional self-love](#). I've learned to set healthy boundaries and accept myself as I am, without needing approval to feel good about myself. And I've educated myself so I'm able to handle stress and face my problems in healthier ways.

Most importantly, I've learned to speak to myself in a more loving and nurturing way. In fact, just recently, I learned how to find those words more easily by using the following exercise.

First, I made a list of all the influential people from my childhood and early adulthood. Then I asked myself, "What loving words did I need or want to hear from each person even if I don't think I still need to hear those words today."

Then, I wrote down everything that I wished I could have heard them tell me from a loving and understanding place in their hearts. And if someone in my life had spoken to me in a loving and supportive way, I wrote those words too.

Here is the list of influential people from my childhood and adulthood: Mom, Dad, brothers, sister, relatives, neighbors, friends, teachers, coaches, ministers, therapists, doctors, bosses, co-workers, and spouses.

As I began to make the list of statements that I wish I could have heard from these people, I could feel that these were words that my heart still needed to hear today, but now from myself.

It's interesting how appropriate these statements feel even after I switch the person speaking them, to be from me. For example, when I read the statement that I wished I could have heard from my mother, "You are so talented and creative," and then switch the giver of the statement to be from me, I felt a rise of recognition lift inside of my chest as if I was being seen and heard for the first time.

When I work on this exercise, I let go of any judgment toward the people on my list because I realize that everyone did as well as they could, considering the stress they were under and the state of mind they were in.

This exercise is not about them, it's about me and my healing; it's about taking the time to listen to the neglected person inside of me and allowing her voice to speak up about what she has needed for so long but has rarely received from others or from herself.

Then the exercise shifts into being about giving and receiving these words to and from myself, in a loving way, so that I can learn how to nurture myself on a deeper level.

Here are a few of the [statements that I wish I could have heard](#) from my mother in my early years:

- I cherish you.
- I want the best for you.
- You are a good person.
- I want you to keep growing.
- You are smart and creative.
- I see so much good in you.
- I respect your opinion.
- I believe you.
- I trust you.
- I appreciate how hard you try.
- I admire you.
- I am here for you.
- I appreciate your help.
- You can depend on me.

At first, I wrote the statements in a stream of consciousness, without editing. I kept asking myself, "What words did the [little girl inside of me need to hear](#) from others when I was so young and vulnerable? What did the young woman inside of me need to hear in order to feel valuable and confident in herself?"

I allowed myself to take breaks in my writing and return when I felt ready to continue. I found that each time I came back to the exercise, I always thought of something new to write, and as I wrote it, I would feel a sense of relief inside of me.

Once the names on the list were all addressed, I began to gently edit the statements so that they became more appropriate for my life now. For example, I changed the statement I wrote from my brother, "I am sorry I didn't play with you," to read, "I allow myself to play now and have fun."

For the sentences that clearly did not fit, I looked to see if they had a message of their own that could be worded in another way.

Here is an example statement from my P.E. Teacher: "I see your potential to become a strong athlete." My first response was to delete this sentence since I am no longer involved in sports. But then I chose to rewrite it to read, "I see your potential to grow physically stronger," which is helpful to me now since I struggle with chronic fatigue syndrome.

I think there will always be at least a seed of something valuable to work with from each statement you've written.

Once I got into the rhythm of this exercise, it woke up other nurturing thoughts in my mind that I also needed to hear. So I wrote those messages too.

After I edited all the statements, I kept a master list and then made another copy to work with further. With this new working copy, I removed all the names that I first started with and then combined all of the statement together.

Next, I wrote beside each statement what kind of statement it was: apology, praise, a question, or a statement of truth. Then I grouped the statements into these four categories.

Each group has its own healing benefit. For example, the apology statements reflect the areas in my life that I may have felt neglected in. With each apology statement, I ask myself if I still neglect myself in this same area.

For example, after I read the apology statement "I am sorry I let you down," I can ask myself, "In what areas of my life do I let myself down now?" Or the apology statement "I am sorry I scared you." I can ask myself, "Do I scare myself today by the way I speak to myself? Do I worry myself into a state of depression?"

The group of question statements is a helpful list to use later as a source of inner reflection as it pertains to my life currently.

Here are some example questions that I wrote on my list:

- Tell me how you feel?
- Tell me what is on your mind?
- Tell me what you dream about?
- Tell me what you want for your life?
- Tell me what you believe in?
- How can I best support you?

Now with the two groups remaining, the praise statements and statements of truth, I used them to create my master list of nurturing things to tell myself. As I edited the statements, I either wrote them so they were speaking to me or as if I was speaking to myself, depending on what felt better. For example, "You are a precious person to me" or "I am a precious person."

Here are some examples of my new nurturing self-talk statements:

- I care about myself.
- My health is important to me.
- I love myself.
- I believe in myself.
- I see my future with confidence and trust.
- I am grateful for my life.
- I am safe and loved.
- I am a creative and caring person.
- I allow myself to grow.
- I am a smart and resourceful person.
- I cherish the happy moments in life.
- I appreciate kindness.
- Life is beautiful in so many ways.
- There is always something new to discover.
- Never give up hope for a better day.
- My life is guided by love.

When I finished this exercise of nurturing statements to tell myself, I had a few hundred statements written and some were duplicates, so I chose to only keep the statements that really spoke to me and deleted the others, making it a stronger and more powerful master list.

Now that I have made my master list, it has become an empowering tool that I can use every day. The more time I take to read and nurture myself with these loving words, the more peaceful and grounded I feel.

And by speaking to myself more kindly, I am better able to [practice unconditional self-love](#) and make healthy choices for myself.

You can also use this exercise as a way to build your inner sanctuary—a place you can go to in order to find nourishment and rejuvenation. This inner place of refuge will become stronger and more dependable the more you practice loving exercises like this one.

Artwork by the author, Rita Loyd