



HAPPY IN YOUR OWN SKIN

NUDE-THINKING COUNSELING

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT A MERE 40% OF WESTERN PEOPLE ARE COMPLETELY HAPPY WITH THEIR BODY. THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT EVERYBODY ELSE IS SUFFERING FROM A NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE, BUT WHAT IT DOES MEAN IS THAT MANY OF US HAVE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN HOW WE RELATE TO OUR BODY. FOR LIVING IN HARMONY WITH YOURSELF INCLUDES EVERY INCH OF YOUR BEAUTIFUL SKIN.

SO LET ME SHARE THESE 29 TIPS TO SET THE PROCESS OF ACCEPTANCE IN MOTION, IT WORKED FOR ME AND I CERTAINLY HOPE THAT IT WILL TRIGGER SOME CHANGE FOR YOU TOO.

YOU ARE YOUR BODY?

OK, so you have a body. Duhuh. I take it this is not news to you? Pfew. This body, it functions, has a shape, you dress it, it gets touched, you care for it, and through all of that you are having a constant stream of thoughts about it. I know very few people who are 100% happy with their body. One person my sweat too much for their liking, another dislikes their freckles, while someone else struggles to dress their body in the latest styles, while your body might be allergic to detergents. On the surface these might seem small inconveniences, superficial stuff, but the truth is is that all of this can impact how you feel about your body. Which in turn can then impact what you believe about yourself; the way you perceive yourself (self-image). So let us not deny that the smallest thing in somebody elses eyes can still be the cause for your unease with yourself. And that feeling is just as valid and real. The effect can be just as limiting or even debilitating.

NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) teaches us how the words that we use effect our brains, our thoughts. And the brain determines what hormones get released into the body which influence your system. So if you are working off the premise that you ARE your body, that you are a sweaty man, then this believe impacts you as a whole being. Training yourself to reprogram that believe into 'I HAVE a body', makes you a man with a body that sweats. Reframing in this way will leave your personality, your qualities and talents free of this association. And if you start making your believes more and more specific, in our example that might be that this man has very sweaty feet, then you free up other parts of your body from that believe and the consequences of those thoughts. Impacting you less overall. Freeing up space for appreciation of other parts of the body. So try it, practice and don't give up when at first you don't succeed.

PUT DOWN THAT DIET BOOK!

Only you get to decide what the perfect weight, look, shape, etc for your body is. That is nobody's business but your own. For many, going on a diet is a regular thing. Just to keep the body they have or to improve on it, in their eyes. And there are a 1000 ways to do it, and many more experts to help you do it. I am definitely not going to venture there! I have no opinion on the matter.

So why bring it up? Well because what I generally see is that 89% of the people that diet to change their bodies, also believe that this change will result in a new mindset. And unfortunately it does not work that way. Your body image will improve on the surface, but those deep seeded, undermining and niggling thoughts have not been dealt with and will resurface. They are the key to your old patterns re-emerging. For many this results in a jo-jo-effect where you keep gaining the weight again after a while, often more then you weighed before, and then go back on the diet. A constant battle. Trust me, I have been there!

So this is an invitation to work on your heavy thoughts, as much as you do on those pounds. The diet books will help you create a new eating habit. Working on the root causes of your tainted body image will help you create a new thinking pattern. This way you will set yourself up for long-term success.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

It might have escaped your attention how slowly but surely certain words and expressions creep into your daily language. Words that probably serve to protect you, words that beat others to that joke at your expense, words that you use to put yourself down. And when you start to examine this language you will discover their effect on you and your beliefs about yourself. Unfortunately, not all of that will be positive and supportive. Make an inventory of your most commonly used words and expressions (one of mine was 'I am just not that smart'). Study them, knowing that language impacts us on a cellular level (please google Emoto Watercrystals). Then imagine what is happening to your body, to your mind that runs the body, when these words are undermining you. How would it feel if a loved one was saying them to you on a regular basis?

Why not adapt your language so that it serves to support you, become your own biggest fan verbally. You could try non-violent communication as a tool for instance. And as you start implementing this new language, you will soon hear others mirror you.

Double the effect!

Please don't think that I am advising you to stop being a critical thinker. Or that you should not laugh at yourself. All I am asking here is to create some awareness around your language patterns and their effect. By doing so you can actively choose what is right for you. What it is that you need. What will help you feel good in that body of yours. And it takes vigilance and calling yourself out when the old pattern pops up again. But you can do it, you have the power!

PS: if you struggle with finding those words you use then ask a friend, a loved one, to help you out. They hear so much.

AFFIRMATIONS

Right, credit where credit is due, the Guru of affirmations is Louise Hay. Please do visit her website at louisehay.com or read one of her books, if this subject interests you.

Now back to you!

Affirmations are an aide, a tool, for positive thinking. For thinking in possibilities. For visualising your life. And the more you train yourself in doing so, the easier it will become to recognise those moments in our life when that actually shows up and for you to then grab that opportunity. At any given moment everything is available to you in abundance, but if you are focused on the pink elephant, while your desire is to find that purple bear then you are simply not going to notice it.

The same holds true for our self-image. When you see yourself in a positive light, when you are your biggest fan, and you stop punishing yourself for every little mistake you make, then you will gain confidence. And confidence inspires new or other decisions. But be warned, if you surround yourself with people who don't have the same standards for themselves then it is hard to persevere.

Right, so an affirmation consists of positive words that support your journey towards new believes. Powerful language like:

- I am loved
- I like myself!
- I look beautiful
- I am healthy and strong
- I can be who I am and others will like and support that

Write your own affirmations and display them somewhere where you will see them often. Say them out loud on a regular basis.

Here are some tips for writing an affirmation:

1. Always use language in the here and now, as if this is already a fact.
2. Never use words like 'I want...!' for it will only create more wanting.
3. You are always the subject of the affirmation, no one else.
4. Use affirmative language, as our brains struggle with 'no' and 'not'. 'I am healthy' rather than 'I don't have migraines'.
5. Keep it believable. You cannot fool yourself into a believe. Smaller steps are much more effective.

SENSUAL

Your body is incredibly sensual. And by that I mean to say that you are blessed with an enormous capacity for awareness and experience through your senses. Seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling and smelling.

But I wonder... how awake are your senses? And why is that relevant? Because life is one big sensual party. A circus of experiences for the senses. And the more you allow yourself to experience life this way, surrender to the magic of it all, the more awareness will seep into your body as this is the vessel through which all of that is possible. Bloody amazing!

Just have a look at babies as they start discovering life that way. A sneeze is suddenly fascinating, surprising, funny, weird. Each new smell and taste is met with curiosity and soon the response is more than clear. But they try, it is the only way to grow and learn. They are our masters of example.

Did you ever stop being in awe and amazement of all that can be discovered through your senses? If yes, when was that? Do you ever challenge to eat new things? Touch the rough bark of an old tree? Or even come back to something which you discarded years ago, perhaps a smell, and give it another chance and see if the experience is different now? It is not always about discovering anew, but about being aware and open to be surprised. I was at a workshop a few weeks back where we were given a chocolate during a meditation. It took me an hour to eat the bloody thing as I was enthralled with all the layers and my sensual responses to this itsybitsy chocolate. Just awesome.

I think you know where this is headed. A challenge. Take 10 days, and during that time you set your intention to discover and be curious. Let your senses guide you towards a more intense experience of the world. This is going to help you 'switch on' your body. Enjoy!!

EYES WIDE OPEN

Humans have a special way of processing information; we first colour the message by running it through our filters. Now these filters have a purpose, they were created by your experiences after all, so they use experience to contextualise. It is meant to make us more efficient and protect us from harm. This is especially relevant in survival situations. But I am sure you can imagine that these filters also morph reality.

In those rare moments that something bypasses your filters, it impacts you differently. Often we will ignore those moments or see them as a fluke. For it is more comfortable to stay in the familiar. Even when the familiar is not a happy place, we prefer that to changing our world view, to having our cages rattled and possibly reevaluating ourselves. This stuff takes courage, which I know you have.

So being aware of your filters, starting to open up to the possibility of seeing the world without them at times, can create a shift in your believes.

Another thing we do is judge. Yes, you do. And we are judgemental of our judgement. So we build in filters to sift out some of our judgement. We would rather use a soft focus lens then challenge ourselves to just allow the judgement to be what it is. Which again blocks us from embracing reality. So I have found that this helps for me: 'I am not my judgement, I simply have judgement'. Which makes it easier for me to embrace it.

Ok, so what is my point here? Well... why not challenge yourself to walk out the door and really SEE the people you encounter. Observe. Try and see them without those filters, allow the judgements to arise without being attached to them. Do not jump to conclusions (ie when someone is pulling a face, don't assume you know why. All you know is what you see). And why would you do this? Because the more you train yourself to see others without filters, the more you will also train yourself in seeing YOU without them.

THE PERFECT 10

"I will only be completely happy and whole when I have created the perfect body"

This is a conviction that many hold deep inside their hearts and minds. And you have every right to strive for that concept of perfection. Nobody may judge that. This is your life after all.

Having said that, I want to propose something: give yourself permission to be happy right here, right now. There is joy and happiness to be found in this very moment.

Would you want to deny yourself that chance? Do not fear that feeling happy will kill your motivation to achieve that perfect body. All it will do is make the journey more pleasurable. It will also allow you be less averse to your body as it is now. Not because you have suddenly decided that this is perfect, but because you realise and feel that your current body is present and part of these happy moments. It is connected to those around you who you share that lightness and fun.

Perhaps this feels a little uneasy, but why not try it for a week. Who knows, you might like to continue it after that week, or not. Up to you.

Many people will tell you to stop aiming for perfection. I think that this should be your choice. But this way you may have more joy and love on your way to that goal.



BEAUTY

Yes, it is time to hit the road again.. or rather to be among others so they may aid you on this journey of discovery.

It is so much easier to see and admire other peoples' beauty. To really notice it. To appreciate a smile, a curve, and to be touched by that beauty. This is why others can be your gateway to training yourself in appreciating beauty. And to embrace that it comes in many different ways. There is no standard, there is just the beauty in the detail of that person.

Beauty is expressed in the body, in movement, in sound, in energy, personality, in how they make you feel. Oh my, it is omnipresent. It is blinding!

Please be aware of the comparison trap. Where you start comparing one persons lovely jawline to another's and decide that A is better than B and therefore B is no longer amazing. Nonsense, they are different. Life would be boring and bland if there was no variety. Celebrate that, rather than

allowing yourself to use that as a tool to limit the beauty you appreciate. Trust me: there is enough beauty for everyone!

So when you go out in search for this thing called beauty (which is probably more of a feeling rather than a definable thing) make sure you don't set yourself a task you will never realise. If you are uncomfortable going to a sauna, then do not tell yourself this is the only place to observe people. Go to the supermarket!! Plenty of lovely folks there to appreciate. And remember to look at the details. You may not find the entire being beautiful, and yet he may have beautiful hands, she could have a lovely walk, another a delicious voice, etc. There is plenty to appreciate.

You might want to note what you discovered to re-visit the list in time and add to it. Your inventory of beauty. And slowly but surely you will start seeing it everywhere, be surrounded by it. Be part of it ;-)

HUMOUR

Humour, laughter, making another laugh, all delicious stuff. It releases happy-hormones into the body which in turn boosts our immune system. Win-win then! You will understand that I am a great fan of a well placed remark or joke. I even use humour to lighten situations that are in danger of crushing the spirit. Fabulous tool. Sometimes I even use it when I am feeling self-conscious, uncertain of my body, or when I see another being uncomfortable with it and I want to show them it is ok to just name the elephant in the room. But it gets tricky. Lots of humour has a dark side. A little sharp edge often called cynicism. When that sharp edge hurts you, your soul, your feelings, or when you are covertly putting yourself down, then we cross a line. The scarring will increase and get more and more sensitive over time. You will feel the effects more deeply and immediate. Your reactions will change and you may even lose your sense of humour. So mind yourself, make sure you stay on the light side of the joke.

Another factor is that it is ok for you to joke about yourself, but that does not give others permission to do so. When they do, it can be so hurtful and damaging. Set your boundaries, speak to them, make them known. Do not get discouraged if it takes a while for others to understand these limits. Speak out each time. Tell them that you do not appreciate it. It is not their right to do make you the subject of their jokes. Do not start giving them like for like to make them experience it. This is not a competition, but a loving respect you want to give others and demand for yourself. Because people who truly love you do not want you to hurt.

Feeling happy in your own skin requires humour. It can be so good to laugh at ourselves and shake stuff off. To put things in perspective. So laugh loads, deep belly thundering sounds. But set a respectful standard and keep yourself and others to it.

SELF-CARE

How do you take care of yourself?

A very open question, I know. Being comfortable in your own skin has a lot to do with the time and attention you set aside for yourself. And there are numerous ways that you could be doing this. The key is what feels good to you, what makes you feel connected to yourself and your body. And it depends on what you prioritise, what is important to you.

On your right here some examples of self-care:

Check out the list and see what you value (or add to the list). Next, try and estimate how much time you allot yourself for it. Does that feel like enough or do you desire more? So what would it take for you to change that (if you desire more, could be the case that you are killin it)? Could it be a simple solution of better planning, setting some money aside each week, asking your kids & partner to give you more space for it. It all starts with you deciding that this is what you desire and that you deserve this.

1. Enough sleep
2. A stimulating course/lecture/workshop/training/etc
3. A peaceful shower/bath (without distractions,)
4. Exercise, dance, moving
5. A hobby like writing, knitting photography, cooking, whatever
6. Time for dreaming, to stare out into the skies
7. Making love to yourself
8. Prepare a nice and beautiful meal and eating it with all your attention
9. Prayer, meditation, spiritual time
10. Creating a lovely and comfortable environment
11. Socialising
12. Body-care (like cutting your nails or dipping your hair in some dye)
13. Having your body be cared for (doctor, physio, masseur, hairdresser)
14. Wearing clothes that make you feel 'tha bomb'
15. Connecting with nature
16. Read a book, listen to music you love
17. Travel (alone)

MIRROR MIRROR

Do you ever really look in the mirror? A tall one, so you can check yourself out from head to toe? We often look selectively, only spotting what needs checking like our hair, make-up, clothes mishap. But do you get still, just stand there, looking at yourself, look yourself in the eye, study every detail. We often don't. So if you feel inspired to do so, which I encourage, then keep in mind that this is new and might feel a little strange or uncomfortable. Keep breathing!

As you stand there... how silent are those voices? The critic pointing out those bits you feel insecure about. Let me tell you a little secret: just like your mobile it has a vibrate function!! There is no need to completely eliminate this part of yourself, this voice can also serve a purpose. But muting it will give you more peace to have that close look at yourself.

And as you do so, make your eyes go soft. Soft? Yes... think of kittens and fluffy bunnies, imagine them rolling around and being incredibly cute.

Sunsets, a child in wellies playing in a puddle of water. That's it, soft and kind eyes. Now feel the corners of your mouth pull up a little. Good, hold on. In this loving and gentle state is how you want to be looking at yourself. There is no need to lie or deny anything. You see what you see. No judgement. Look at yourself as you looked at others earlier on when you were exploring beauty.

This is a beautiful state to be in when speaking your affirmations. Or grab a post-it and give yourself a compliment. Stick the post-it on the area concerned. Or is simply looking challenging enough for you at this time? Then stay there, don't push yourself. You are doing amazingly.

Repeating this exercise regularly is an excellent way to be in contact with your body. It is not vain or silly. You want to be friends, intimate friends with your beautiful physical you. And this will help you create that relationship.

SELF-TOUCH

Your body is covered from top to bottom in skin; our largest organ. The sensory receptors in the skin activate an entire neurological network in the body. This makes any external touch so, so, so much more than skin deep.

There is a world of fun to be had in the discovery of where your skin responds to which touch, which intensity it requires, and what the response actually is. You can also find that some parts of the skin are less sensitive and need re-awakening through regular stimulus. If that is what you desire of course. No must-do's here.

Let me be very clear. I am not talking about masturbation here. Yes of course, your genitalia are very much part of your body too, and I would definitely include them in this skin exploration.

But the point here is, again, to create a deeper sense of contact with your body and your being. And it does not require soft background music, candlelight and getting comfy on the bed.

Although the latter does help to relax if your are uncomfortable.

So what I am saying is that you do not need to create a romantic or sexy atmosphere for you to explore. What I am not saying is that you should limit yourself to only using touch on your journey. Your ears, nose, eyes and tongue are just as connected to those receptors and by throwing them in the mix you can increase the intensity of your, playful, experiment. Why not brush your teeth while humming, and see what that teaches you. And the skin loves some scented oil to be rubbed on. Oh, and then you can also tick off some of that self-care on your list ;-)

The last thing I want is to freak you out and have you disconnect from your desire to be more at home with yourself. So find your own way, keep it feeling on the safe side of exciting/scary, make sure to relax when you are tensing up. The more you know your body the better you can also communicate to others what your limits are and what you crave. It is a win-win really. Start touching that skin!

STOP COMPARING!

Bizar but true, we all compare ourselves to others. But really, what is to be gained by that? In a rare case of identical twins there might be a basis for comparison, but for the rest of us it is simply useless as we are all so very different and unique. That variety is the spice of life! How 'blah' life would be if we were all clones. And even though we know all of this in our heads, still we compare ourselves to others.

Comparison helps us recognise things in ourselves and then value or judge that which we compare (I am not as fat as she is).

Happiness with oneself stems in the vertical connection. Imagine yourself as the center of a line running through you, connecting your feet to the earth below and the heavens above (the universe, God, Allah, Jehova). So you are always connected to the whole. To everything that is available. Others may add to your fulfillment, security, appreciation, etc. But you alone are responsible for them, for creating those in your life. And this vertical line is your

point of balance, your support system.

You are not less successful, beautiful, inspiring, attractive, smart, fascinating, just because another seems to have more of something. From their point of view the tables might well be turned, who knows. And you know what... this is not new to you, you are well aware that this is how it works. And still you compare yourself. STOP IT!

It is not going to help you one iota to keep doing this. And the energy you waste in the meantime could be so well spend elsewhere. Really, come on now. I gotta be strict mummy here for a second to get this through your thick skull. Stop it. Please. Not for me, but for you.

So you know the work that beckons: connecting to your vertical line.

COMPLIMENTS

Complimenting each other seems to be a cultural thing, we Dutch hardly ever do it, the Americans seem to have mastered it. So when you are unaccustomed to it, it is sometimes harder to read the intention behind the compliment. Like that manager that suddenly starts doing it and you immediately assume he has been on a refresher course 'how to connect to your team', or you are waiting for some hideous project to now land on your desk. We often brush compliments aside, clumsily, ungrateful, and simply not sure of how to respond. Even when it is our partner who notices how lovely you look in that blouse, many will say something like 'oh, this old thing?'. Where a simple 'Thank you' would have sufficed. Knowing how to deal with receiving a compliment is like a muscle that needs training. It is unfamiliar but not impossible!

It is actually muscles, plural. The first one to train is the reflex. The 'oh-my-quick-hide-and-protect-wall-up' muscle. This is also where the inner-

critic tends to show up and pushing the mute-button can really help.

Another thing to mind is your breath. Rather than stop breathing or speaking immediately (which is an exhale), try to first inhale the compliment, allow yourself to really feel and let it land. Then smile in gratitude or say thank you. Just that is enough. Beware of your body, keep it open, straight and relaxed. All a matter of awareness and training. And when this feels more natural, then watch these little compliments add some sparkle to your self-image.

Now there is great joy in giving compliments. And by doing this often, you also start seeing more things to compliment. But before you throw yourself into that game, please remember: there is no greater gift than receiving. Allowing another the pleasure to give you a compliment and see how you allow their words to uplift you and add some joy to your moment.

THE WORKOUT MUST

Exercise has become almost like a dogma. Not doing it means that you obviously do not take your health seriously and that you should know why your body is not to your liking, you are doing nothing about it.... or so the mainstream monologue seems to claim. The voices are so loud that you are not alone if this makes you feel guilty and you start labeling yourself as lazy, undisciplined, too insecure. I say: bullshit!

The body needs to be used and moved, true. And there are many people who love exercising. Whoopitydoo for them. But those of us that do not feel that desire, need not sigh in despair that all is lost. Nonsense! There are so many ways to move your body. Going for a walk with the dog or your kids, freaking out to some music at home (sorry, for many of you it may well look like dancing), yoga, gardening, cycling to the shops instead of driving, or even good old fashioned cleaning.

It may require some reframing as you believe that exercise is what you ought to be doing, but really, there are plenty other options.

Listen to your body. Does it have enough movement to release excess energy? Does it still feel flexible? Do your lungs feel strong and expansive? Then throw those set ideas of movement, the obligation for gym-time, overboard and embrace your very personal way of keeping the body fit & healthy. Remember that the official medical advice is 30 minutes daily of exercise, meaning movement not high impact bootcamp.

And remember: pet yourself on the shoulder whenever you move. Much more fun than judgement.

TOUCH

The scientists have been obsessed with understanding the effects of touch for many years now. For which I am very grateful. What they have been able to prove by now is that young children who are not touched actually die. Elderly people who are touched on a regular basis, loving/caring touch, have a much lower risk for Alzheimers. There are studies that show touch improves skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis as the touch stimulates the skins blood vessels to flow better. And we have proof that touch makes the body release endorphins, happy hormones, which just uplift you. Have I convinced you that touch is important? That we humans clearly respond positively too it?

Being uncomfortable in your skin can generally create 2 responses. You either seek out extra care and affection from others or you start avoiding it and you retreat into yourself. not allowing others close. With this second response you are depriving yourself from a source of healing. See proof above.

No judgement here, it is a choice and I just want to point out what touch could do for you. And yes, it may well be uncomfortable, you may even feel like you are not 'ready' for that. But the body will respond, ready or not. And please note, I am not advising you to have sex against your will. We are talking about touch. A hug, a hand on your back, having your hair brushed, holding hands, sitting so close that the bodies touch; this is all touch. Even cuddling your pet will have a positive effect (yes, love the scientists that researched that one).

Is there nobody around in your life? Then get a massage, a manpedi, go to the hairdressers or take a dancing class (the kind of dancing that requires a partner).

Discover for yourself what the effects are and then incorporate this in your life on a regular basis. Make hugging the new daily exercise ;-)

THE MYTH

There once was a little princess who dreamed of her knight in shining armor. And even though the props in that dream may have changed to a black bmw driving man in an Armani suit, little else has changed when it comes to the messages we are fed regarding what will bring us joy and happiness in life. To be happy we must be beautiful (fit the standard), be well educated, earn good money, have lots of friends, own a house/car/stuff, exercise, travel, eat healthily, and have a passionate relationship with another such successful person as ourselves.

So are we victims of the media and our culture? Nope. Are we incapable of having our own point of view and beliefs about life? Nope. I do not and cannot believe that. But what I do know is that these fantasy images are deeply ingrained in many of us and that we are surrounded by others who are also unaware of these driving forces in our lives. They are more deeply tied in our system than we like to acknowledge.

And you know what, who cares! It is not about right or wrong here, but what does happen to so many people is that they struggle in life because they do not fit this ideal. Their lives look differently and that then effects what they start believing about themselves. It could take years of struggle and effort before you realise that you are trying to fit a mould that was not made for you. It was actually made for very few people. So rather than trying to fit in, why not use some of that energy awakening yourself to your own beliefs and what unique version of life would feed your happiness.

Try this: sketch out your ideal life (in your eyes) and then research where you deviate from this ideal. Are there areas where you would like to shift closer to the ideal? What would that take? What help could you seek out for that? Or are you seeing elements that you would like to change about the ideal? You could find that where you are now is actually a good place to be. Enjoy!

EXCUSES OR...

It can be challenging to catch yourself out. But often you will know the difference between really not being able to do something and when you are making excuses. Somewhere deep inside you will probably even feel some form of judgement or disappointment in yourself popping up. My judgement generally is "you lazy so and so", but yours can be very different. Just look out for that familiar pattern that shows you your fibbing, making excuses. It gets much harder if you indeed believe you really cannot do something. When you are not worthy, it is not for you, etc. These are convictions that are more deeply ingrained and melted into the psyche, and need time to be freed of.

To get to know your 'blocking believes' you can start by analysing your language (we spoke of this earlier). Your language will reveal your most common themes. Others around you are another help-source to provide insight into your limiting thoughts/convictions.

Don't assume that just because they filter and have personal agenda's that they cannot be an effective mirror. But it can feel vulnerable and confrontational. So another option is talking with a professional. They will have the tools to support you in your quest to unveil those believes that are holding you in your current place.

I am convinced that you know so much, and that you have an amazing problem-solving ability. You might not think so right now, but trust me in this. Awareness is the hardest job. Next it requires tenacity, fail and try again, to create lasting change. Next you must surround yourself with supportive people who are happy for this new path you are walking, for the new standard you hold yourself to. Because they do the same for themselves.

These 3, I believe, are the key ingredients in your journey to feeling happy in that beautiful skin of yours.

FORGIVING

We all make mistakes. It is only human after all.

We were not born with a 'quick guide' attached which gets updated every year. It just doesn't work that way.

A teacher once told me: 'at any given moment in time you are the best you have to offer in that moment.' It is easy to look back and see things differently, to believe we could have done better. If you could have, you would have. So what is the point of judging yourself for something in the past. Take the lesson from it and move on. Moving through life with the weight of guilt and negativity about things you can not take back is draining on your energy.

Time and energy are usually perceived of being limited sources. So why waste them on worry and regret? Make a choice to rewrite the story. Yes, as easy as that. Not even worth discussing this point. You may now experience some resistance or disbelief. Fabulous! It's all welcome.

I will take this even further and claim that at any moment, like right here right now, you are capable of forgiving yourself (or another) and closing a subject, step off a path. You can accept that there is not one perfect solution for everyone and no unique truth.

Step back into the now. This moment. Because this moment has so much on offer, so much abundance in it, and you are missing it by staying in the past. So cut the cord and stop missing out on what is available to you at this very moment.

LET GO

Working on yourself can become quite an obsession. And I commend you for having that drive and passion for change and growth. Respect. Please do remember that you also need some down-time. Some time to relax, have some fun, do something crazy, just chill. And that does not mean that you are giving up or not taking yourself seriously. It is allowing your system to integrate what has been happening, For your body to catch up with the mind and spirit. Time to take a break!



STORIES

I am sure you have had one of those moments of seeing a scar on a friend or lover and it sparked your curiosity. "Tell me the story of what happened". Our body stores just about every memory and wears its stories in a unique way. And those stories are not limited to visible scars or markings, they are more often hidden underneath the surface of the skin. Those are the ones that can be triggered by something or someone unexpectedly, and when they arise you will voice them anew.

But are you still curious about those stories? How familiar are you with what's stored inside? And can you express them easily? There is such power in storytelling. I sharing your life-experiences. Every story can be rewritten or have a chapter added. As you develop, so does the story and your connection to it. It is not written in stone after all. Your personal tale describes your journey, but it does not define your destination.

Now, there is no need to start a campfire and gather all your friends to bare your soul. But you can decide to get curious again, to head out on an adventure past your stories. To collect them, to write them down, perhaps share some.

Perhaps words will fail you at times, if so why not draw them, express them in a flavorful dish, find another way to let it out. To let the story take shape. Many tattoos are just that, a story.

Your motivation here is this deeper understanding of yourself and bringing the stories to the surface where you can decide for yourself, consciously, what you would like to do with the emotions attached to it. Do you want to cherish, release, share, re-frame.. there are many options. But please do not let 'pull you down' be one of them. A stories power lies in the emotion attached to it. The story is just the reality of the time, the emotion is your working ground. This is where healing can take place.

CHANGING ROOM BLUES

Sometimes you can actually hear this deep frustration coming from a changing room. Blaming bodyparts, nasty words like 'fat ass', 'no tits', 'wrong proportions', 'ugly feet', etc. And the culprit is a piece of clothing. A bit of fabric that was cut up and sown together with 1 pattern as a base. And our minds may be aware that this is a result of mass production. That it is unrealistic to think that the incredible diversity of bodies will all fit this pattern. But in that changing room we sometimes forget to blame the item of clothing and instead take our frustrations out on ourselves.

As a BBW (Big Beautiful Woman) I too struggle at times to find nice clothes. I have big thighs and arms, a narrow waist, proportionally small breasts, wide feet, where shall I stop the list?? So when I go shopping I make a point of really scanning all the options and filling the changing room to the brim before I go and try stuff on.

I know beforehand that I am going to discard many items because of fit. Some won't even get passed my knees, and it's not because the size is wrong, it is a base pattern that just does not fit my body type. And yes, sometimes it is such a bummer when I really liked that item on the hanger, but I have my head screwed on and remember that this does not kill me. Next!!

In the past there were tears and anger in those moments, but now I take the item off and remember: ok so this is the wrong cut for my body. Clearly.

Perhaps you have had the same experience. If so, then train yourself to separate the clothing from your body. This can help you be more rational in that changing room. Darling, you are beautiful but that blouse looks dreadful on you. And that simply means that the blouse needs to be gone, and your beauty remains as it always was.

LISTS

Anyone who knows me is aware of my passion for making lists. Structuring thoughts, feelings, actions. Love it!

So here is a list-tip that may not be the easiest and require some work, but can really help bring insight.

- 1: what do I want to change about my body
- 2: how much time will that realistically take me
- 3: what effort will it require
- 4: how much energy will it take (little/medium/lots)
- 5: which means will need allotting
- 6: what will the change bring me
- 7: what help/support do I ask (and from whom)
- 8: now prioritize with above information

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Sometimes we forget that smaller steps can add up to a lot. And when the big change never happens then we never get to those easier ones. It might surprise you what is easily achieved. Enjoy!

PRIDE

Not all cultures embrace the idea of being proud of yourself. Especially when it relates to the body. Being humble, not standing out, being self-critical, fitting the mould is what is more commonly accepted. And that mould, that standard, is killing our body- and self-image.

Here are some examples:

You have been on a diet, you really committed to it. And then when others ask how you did you may well answer "ah well, only 4 pounds". 4 pounds? That is freaking awesome! Go and buy 4 pounds of butter to visualize what you have just shed from your body. Wow. Be proud. Shout it from the rooftops. For each time we diminish our success we also stomp the emotions attached, we devalue it.

The same is true for body-parts we may well like, love even but speak of in a derogatory fashion "Yes, I love that I have these long legs, but the have cellulite on them" And in one little

sentence you smack yourself right out of appreciating those legs and emphasize what you feel is wrong with them. "I love how firm and perky my breasts are, but they ought to be bigger with my huge frame". Can you feel that scratch on your soul? It is of your own making.

I strongly advocate "If you have got it, flaunt it". Show yourself. Be proud of yourself. Of your achievements, of your body, of your character. Do you have any idea what an amazing person you really are? Ask your loved ones what makes them proud of you, what they love about you, what beauty they see in you.

If you feel the pride but are unsure of how to show it, ask others that you see doing just that. Admire others for daring to shine. Be the exception to the rule and even start to rewrite the rules. Your rules.

Yeah baby, shine!!

FEEDBACK

I am not sure how thick your skin is, but other peoples' opinion can really hit home. And there is little you can do to arm yourself for one of those moments. For you do not influence how people say what they say.

But when it comes to loved ones, colleagues, friends you can actually share what it does to you, and that might well create a shift. And you can agree to follow some basic rules. Feedback-rules. Once I realised that you are free to do with feedback what you feel fits, it really made me more open to it. They are sharing their experience and that could give me a point to work on or I can decide that actually... this is their stuff to deal with, not me.

You may have to explain the feedback-rules to your friends, for not everyone is familiar with them. It really helps to create that shift from criticism to feedback. Which is less confrontational. And when you receive feedback, by all means ask questions, ask them to clarify, to give you an example. Use it as

your learning tool. Separate what is yours to work on and what is theirs. And if it makes you feel bad, then look at the intent behind what was said. Was that kind? Then they were just clumsy in their word choice. And was there a negative intent? Then drop their shit, it is not yours to carry!

Wat is deel van de anders proces en waar merk jij dat je een bouwsteentje krijgt? Dat is de puzzel. En doe er dan je voordeel mee. Maar laat het je nooit minder doen voelen, dan was het geen feedback.

Feedback-rules:

1. Think about what you are going to say
2. Use the i-form, this is your observation
3. Limit your feedback to what you saw in this moment, do not point out patterns
4. Describe your feelings
5. Describe the effect it had on you
6. Be open & vulnerable. Listen and be honest
7. Always ask permission first

DANCING!!

Yeah baby, put on some music that makes you happy. NOW! Nice and loud. Can you feel the rhythm? You are allowed to move that body, you know. Not everyone is build for dancing or will love it, but you have got to admit that it feels good to just allow the rhythm to move you. And dancing can be done from your comfortable chair even. Bop your head, move your hands or feet, or both. Even your face van dance, it can express the music. Just let go of the notion that it looks strange, who cares!

Have you jumped up and are you jumping around? Go for it. Shake that booty. Your body is now allowed to be free; to be free in movement, to be free of judgement, to be free to have the blood flowing a little faster. All of this is healthy and feels nice, no?

Is someone else present? Then playfully touch the other somewhere on their body. Challenge them to start a dance move from that place. So a touched

shoulder may start moving up and down. Explore where the body moves easily and what is less available to you. Does the movement limit itself in direction of pace? Who knows, you might uncover a hidden talent ;-)

Touch your body. Hands in our hair, bellydrum, be merry and celebrate your body. Perhaps your music choice is mellow and invites you to stroke yourself, roll around on the floor, close your eyes. Just feel it, breathe and be in the moment.

Dancing is a method of expression and the music helps to bring it out of you. It can be subtle, big, soft, dynamic, local, all over the place. And yes, you may not take to it. Not even in the shower? Perfectly fine. Then why not find another way to play with freeing your physical expression? Theater improv perhaps? Singing? There are plenty choices and so worth doing it.

PLEASE KEEP THE LIGHTS ON

Do you prefer not to be seen naked? When you get intimate with a lover it is pretty inevitable. Off they go. Running for the light switch is probably as uncomfortable as the idea that your hairy chest or potbelly are on show. Set aside your worries and fears. You are turned on, you want to devour your lover. And they want to be there, doing this with you. It is ok to show yourself, to be naked in every sense of the word. We call that 'surrender'. Be in the moment, with the all the feelings, smells, the excitement, with the other. Turning off the lights would also limit your view of your sexy partner. What a shame that would be!

Duh, I know that a little soft lighting feels easier. No-one looks good in harsh light. And there is no need for spotlights either. You are not on stage performing after all. Which is why I believe in good prep. Setting the scene. Making sure that the distracting mess is gone, soft lighting, candles perhaps,

closed curtains (if you feel uncomfortable with your neighbours looking in), comfortable temperature, fresh smell, towels in the bathroom, and a clear and comfortable space to roll around in.

Does this limit the spontaneity? It does. Partly. But the benefit of the peace of mind, and relaxation balance it out in my experience.

Being comfortable in your own skin in all situations won't come automatically and all at once. That is too tall an order. So if a little preparation and setting clear boundaries (let your lover know you require that extra time) can help you get more comfortable. Even in such an intimate setting. And as you start to relax and surrender your partner will quickly grasp that this is beneficial for your time together. Win-win, I believe...

BAD DAYS

Ugh, some days you are simply having a crappy day, a day where you just don't like yourself very much. Horrible. You look crap, your clothes look stupid on you, and you are not sure if you will survive this day. It happens. Do not fear! You are not having a relapse and are back at square one. You do not need immediate professional help. It is just not one of those days where positivity is within your grasp.

Treat yourself as you would a dear friend on one of those days: with care and gently. Be even more aware today of the language you use concerning yourself, really try to soften that up. And perhaps today is not the best day to delve into the harsh truths, let's keep it kind today. This is for you after all. Perhaps you can manage some humor and giggle about your day, knowing that this too shall pass. You are giving into that crappy feeling and really going for it. There is actual fun in that, and a freedom to just be bummed out.

And please don't think that you are the only one who has those days. We all suffer from them from time to time, it is human! And when somebody asks you what is going on with you tell them the truth: I am having an off day. No need for explanations, even when being prodded. This is a perfectly acceptable state of being and you are ok with it today. It is not your permanent state.

So buy yourself some flowers, make a nice meal, put fresh linens on the bed and take a nap, whatever feels good to you right now. Just keep breathing and remember that tomorrow is another day. A fresh start.

CELEBRATE YOURSELF

1x a year we are the center of attention: our Birthday. Only once!! While the world is brighter, happier, more beautiful, special, safer, richer, warmer, crazier, with you in it. You and that body of yours. And even though a daily party might be a bit much, I do advocate that you create more moments to celebrate yourself.

And that can vary from a small gesture like washing your body attentively with a fragrant soap, to creating a path of flower petals from your doorway to your bed and have flowers around that bed with some soft music and a candle. Just for you! Or ask a friend to take some time out to take some new and fun pictures of you so you can update your online profiles. Compose a song for yourself. Whatever you can think of that will bring you joy. The focus here is highlighting yourself and surrounding yourself with your own positive energy.

If this seems too far reached for you right now, then you could try starting a gratitude journal. Every day you write about 6 things for which you are thankful. 3 examples from your life in general, and 3 specifically about your body. And it is ok for it to be a small thing. Not every day will bring enlightenment. Embrace the small just as heartily (ie. today was a good-hair day)

We take time out to create memories with our children, with our partners we go on date-nights, we plan outings with friends, so now add yourself to that list: creating time to be conscious of yourself and the relationship with yourself is just as valuable.

Editor's Note



First let me say that I am no expert on the subject of YOU. Only you hold the answers. This is your path to walk and create. Your responsibility. That is why I have collected a number of ways for you to approach your work on yourself. It may well be that not everything here is relevant for you or that the method sits well with you. But don't dismiss it before you try it. Sometimes the learning is in the trying, which requires an open mind and guts. Discovering that you have that it growth in itself. I too suffered a very negative BodyImage for many years. It was crippling. And I am sharing this to let you know that I am proof, change is possible. I did not suddenly wake up thin and stunningly beautiful. And yet I have learned to really see and appreciate myself. And sure, there are crappy days, still. The work is never done. But I no longer fear intimacy with myself. I am my own best pal. I am available for coaching through my website if you feel that is what you need. Or for any questions!

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