

Condition Yourself to Love Unconditionally

By Mary Jo Shaffer



Even in the healthiest of relationships, opportunities abound to find fault, criticize or "tweak" the other person no matter whether we are talking about a mate, a child or a friend. Most of us were raised in an environment where rather than focusing on the positive, we were taught to zoom in and dwell on the negative. Breaking that habitual way of thinking is a matter of conditioning our minds to refocus and learn to love with abandon, without any requirements, without any rules and without any limitations.

Here is our list of top ten ways to condition yourself to love unconditionally:

10. Develop Amnesia

Forgive and forget—knock the first three letters off of both of these words and what you have is "give" and "get." When you *give* forgiveness, **you** *get* so much more in return. You no longer have the burden of carrying around, remembering and reliving the ways you have been wronged, hurt, or upset. You free up your mind and your heart to receive.

The forget part of this equation does not mean that you erase the event or circumstance that caused you pain, just that you release it, and minimize it in your mind to the point that you do not dwell on it or use it as artillery every time an argument or disagreement comes up. Please note that we are not talking about abusive relationships here. Physical and emotional safety are your **unconditional** right, and not an option in any type of interpersonal relationship or affiliation.

9. Don't Pick Fights; Pick Your Battles

Whether you know it or not, everyone has their own personal credo that spells out what is and what is not acceptable to them. When someone crosses that line of what is tolerable to you, it is certainly worth a discussion or two to communicate those boundaries to insure that they are not breached again. But is anything less than a hands-down, unacceptable violation of your personal credo worth arguing about? If harmony and unconditional love are your goals, the answer is "no."

If you don't know what your personal credo is, maybe it would be a good idea to define it for yourself.

What are your fundamental beliefs about how you want to live your life? What are your irrevocable core values? What are your guiding principles?

For example, someone whose personal credo includes a high degree of order and cleanliness might feel disrespected, angry and resentful when a loved one continually leaves dirty socks lying all around the house. On the other hand, if your personal credo does not have order and cleanliness as high priorities, or if those qualities are not on your list at all, you may only be frustrated or mildly irritated. So in other words, one person's view of dirty socks is that they are an all-out affront to their personal credo and another's might be that they are just a stinky annoyance.

The point is that you choose whether or not something is important enough to be a source of contention for you. If it truly is, then it's time to communicate—and we are using the word "battle" in this segment to mean "take a stand," not to wage an all out offensive—in a loving but convincing conversation. If not, let it go. Laugh it off. Try to ignore it.

It's your credo, so you decide; you choose; but remember to pick your battles wisely, because your harmonious relationships and your own peace of mind are at stake.

Note: While this may appear to be a set of rules or restrictions that you are putting on someone in order to love them, it really is just making your values and desires known to someone who you love in order to have a happy, mutually-satisfying relationship.

Negotiation and compromise are at the heart of this 9th way to condition yourself to love unconditionally.

8. Be Prepared to Switch Rather than Fight

OK, even if stinky socks are just an annoyance to you, stinky socks lying around the house are still stinky, and you may not want company in your living room wondering what that strange smell is emanating from under your couch. So you may decide that you want to express your disapproval or embarrassment with the situation. But when you do that, if you feel that things are escalating into a fight, walk away and switch your focus to a predefined list of things that make you happy and that you appreciate about your loved one. Make up your list in advance and keep it handy for whenever such a disagreement looms on the horizon. Switching to a feeling of love and appreciation is a much better place to be than focusing on a negative activity that really is not all that important to you.

7. Mistakes Are Meant To Be Made

Mistakes—everyone makes them, that's how we learn. When we love someone, we naturally want to make them the beneficiary of our vast experience and knowledge. But if you have observed in the past that your suggestions appear to be unwanted, are met with resistance, or are falling on deaf ears belonging to your loved ones, make it a point to reserve your "help" until it is asked for. Let's face it, constantly telling someone else what to do can be really annoying to the person on the receiving end of the advice. Now I'm not talking about holding your tongue concerning situations that could be potentially unsafe or dangerous, particularly for children. What you should look out for are sentences that start out with, "I think you should..." "It would be better if you..." "Why don't you try..." ...You know what I mean. Allow your loved ones the freedom to make their own mistakes.

6. Love Means Never Having To Say You're Sorry—NOT!

We are all human and we all use poor judgment or are insensitive to the needs or feelings of others at times. When this happens, 'fess up; apologize; ask for forgiveness; and don't do it again.

And when you are on the receiving end of an apology, listen attentively; graciously accept it; and then forgive and forget (See #2.).

5. See Adults As Children and Children As Adults

Often times even as adults we are living out recurring dramas that started as a result of childhood issues. For example, wanting more love and attention could have lead to an obsessive need to be noticed, resulting in an overwhelming desire to be first, to be the best, to be right at all costs. The same lack of love and attention in another child could have left him or her feeling defeated, invisible, unlovable. Recognize the wounded child in your loved ones when they make an appearance in their adult life. Acknowledge the unfulfilled need and try to help them satisfy their own wounded child self.

Children are not little adults, they are children, but they do have an inner, older, wiser soul. Do not put off their opinions, observations or questions as silly or childish. Show them the love and respect for their words and actions that they deserve at all ages and stages of their lives.

4. WYSIWYG

"What you see is what you get" is a very important distinction in giving unconditional love. It's all about what you are focusing on in the relationship, because what you focus on is that you get. If you are only looking at the things that make you want to criticize and find fault, you will get more and more of those kinds of things to criticize and find fault with. Concentrate on the positive aspects of your loved ones and that is what you will see more and more of.

3. Affirm Away Negativity

Sweep away any negative thoughts that you may have about your relationships and replace them with positive affirmations that express exactly how you would like the relationships to be. Affirmations are tiny sound bites that are transmitted directly to your subconscious mind, where their creation begins. Think or say your affirmations out loud *with emotion* for the best results. Also, make sure that you create them in the present tense as if they are already happening. Here are some examples: "I love and respect my mate and my mate loves and respects me." "My children are a constant source of love and joy in my life." "I lovingly and effectively communicate my wants and desires."

2. Don't Be An Energy Hog

Did you know that you can actually "steal" energy from someone else? Along with our physical body that we can see, we also have an energy field surrounding the full length of our body and extending out as far as our outstretched arms. This energy network is an expression of our personal power. Power struggles ensue when we attempt to control or manipulate someone else and the "loser" can actually lose some of their power to another. (Haven't you ever felt "drained" after being in an argument or a confrontation with someone?) Let go of your need to control or dominate someone else or, conversely, of your incessant need to cling to your loved ones. These are both energy-robbing

activities. A feeling of powerlessness activates the need to take power from others, even—and maybe especially—our loved ones. Keep this in mind as you go on to #1.

1. It Takes One to Know One

"If you aren't good at loving yourself, you will have a difficult time loving anyone, since you'll resent the time and energy you give another person that you aren't even giving to yourself."

Barbara de Angelis

Until you love yourself unconditionally, you cannot unconditionally love someone else. Period. Love and respect yourself just the way you are...**NOW**. Not in the future, not *whenever* you achieve *whatever*... **now**.

Your power and capacity to love lie in the present moment and it starts with loving yourself.

We are all spiritual beings living in a physical dimension. Invite the spiritual part of you to join the physical part of you as you experience your life. See your world through the eyes of spirit and you will recognize the truth of it. Everything is perfect as it is right now. You are perfect as you are right now. Embracing your perfection will condition your heart to love and accept others as they are, too.

Buddha said, *"You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."* Truly hear these words in your soul and you'll see the results in your heart. Your happiness will not depend on your loved ones acting in a certain way; your happiness will depend on you!

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