

Our Behaviors Are Our Children's Greatest Teachers: Everything We Do Teaches a New Lesson

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Self-love is not a destination but a multidimensional and often learned process that requires consistent, on-going attention. Which school would you choose for your child?

School A teaches children to fear others' judgments, self-criticize, and involve themselves with energy draining people and activities.

School B teaches children the importance of life-giving people and activities, and to exercise self-compassion and self-acceptance.

School B is the obvious winner, but we make this choice daily. Our modeled behaviors are our children's greatest teachers, and self-love is our most powerful lesson. Whether we're criticizing our appearance, or taking time to relax, each behavior witnessed teaches our children new lessons. **By modelling the 5 dimensions of self-love, we empower our children to honor the bodies, minds, and spirits of themselves and others:**

1. Self-awareness.

What we think of ourselves, others, and the world influences how we feel and react to circumstances. When we tell ourselves "I am not good enough and unworthy of love," we react in ways that support this belief. Self-love involves gaining insight into your self-talk and shifting your reactions to conscious responses.

Internal Eavesdrop. Sit still and attend to the thoughts and feelings entering your awareness. Are they gentle? Harsh? Soothing? Hurried? Without attempting to eliminate these thoughts, ask yourself, "how does this thought or belief lead me to react in life and relationships?" These answers may provide guidance into which self-love dimension(s) need attention.

2. Self-compassion.

Teaching our children to be kinder to themselves when it seems easier to continuously self-criticize, offers them the freedom to be human as opposed to feeling paralyzed by their shortcomings or perceived failures. Self-compassion relies upon self-acceptance—our non-

judgmental embrace of who we are including aspects we believe to be negative.

Externalize to Internalize. When you experience self-criticism ask, "If my child were in this position, what would I say or feel towards them?" Write down these statements and feelings and read them aloud. Notice any physical or emotional shifts you experience; consciously transfer this compassionate voice into other self-critical areas.

3. Self-expression

Encouraging our children to explore their passions; embrace creativity and spontaneity; and express their honest and unique voice is invaluable. Still, when we fear others will not accept our true self, we model ways to stifle our self-expression. For example, we say yes, when we mean no, or display socially acceptable personas that constrain our true selves. Modeling self-expression, teaches children that the thoughts of others do not define their inherent worth.

Passion Project. Answer the following without judgment of how silly, acceptable, or likely your answers feel: what could you talk about or study for hours? What activities do you enjoy and lose time doing? If money were not an issue, what career would you seek? These are your passions; nurture them! Read a related book or join a club.

4. Self-care:

Realizing the importance of our family's safety and well-being, we would not consider changing the tires on our car to be selfish; nevertheless, while our personal well-being also impacts our family, we avoid physical, mental, and spiritual self-care because it feels like a waste of precious time. The truth is, modeling self-care teaches our children that their healthy presence is the best gift to give.

Care List. Write three things that enhance your physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Next, write one thing you could do this week to move towards something on that list. Initially avoid activities you "should" do (e.g. eat a salad for every meal) and focus on activities you enjoy to increase your likelihood of follow-through.

5. Self-extension:

Self-love is also about consciously choosing to whom we open or extend ourselves. Love is not about being fully open to all relationships regardless of how they

impact our well-being. Dr. Brené Brown states, "...boundaries [are] about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others." Modeling boundaries teaches our children that we can set limits *while* respecting others as divine creations.

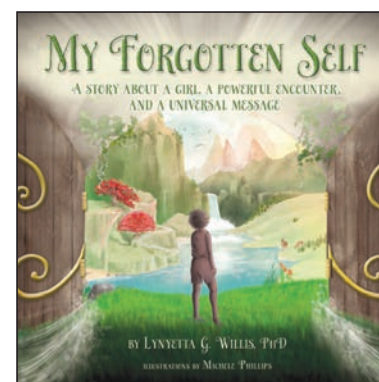
Find your tribe. Make a list of people with whom you feel supported, connected, and safe. These people may challenge you; yet their challenges usually offer clarity as opposed to exhaustion, anxiety, or confusion. Mutual replenishment occurs when you are with your tribe; make time for them.

While implementing these dimensions and modeling self-love, remember to be patient with yourself. This process is not about perfect parenting, but about becoming aware of how you react

to circumstances so you can consciously model loving responses towards yourself and others. As parents, if we consistently model the dimensions of self-love, our children can learn to live them. ✨



Dr. Lynyetta G. Willis is a psychologist and author of the spiritual children's book, **My Forgotten Self: A Story about a Girl, a Powerful Encounter, and a Universal Message**, a tale of self-worth, purpose and unconditional love. Having



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