

Developing the Anchor Within: Two Exercises in Self-Love

Elisa Salazar, LMSW, GVSU Work Life Consultant



How do I develop internal strength?

How do I increase self-love?

How do I become more connected to myself?

Oftentimes we define our worth and value by how effective we are at work, how much we do for our children, how we provide for our families, or even how many tasks we accomplish. When we experience any intense emotion like anxiety, anger, or betrayal, our minds become like floating objects and we begin to feel disconnected from ourselves. Our bodies can become disoriented and we feel consumed by the emotion. When we place our value on these other things, we are on shaky ground.

In reality, our worth is in being, not doing. Despite how external forces may influence us, we can be empowered by holding on to deep personal love, like an anchor within us to keep us stable. Learning to listen and trust yourself fosters self-love and is the ultimate form of self-respect. There are some practical and tangible exercises that will increase self-awareness and encourage self-love.

1. Name three people.

This is an exercise that can help define those values you are drawn to and foster a deeper personal connection. This exercise will increase your awareness of what qualities you are thirsty for and what would be impactful for you in the moment. This is an especially helpful tool if a person is experiencing complacency.

1. Think of three people who you admire. These could include celebrities, athletes, or family members.
2. Hold them in your mind and list all the qualities you admire.
3. Use the list and look at how you spend your time, energy, and resources.

Interestingly, the list you generate is like shining a flashlight on the values and skills you aspire to have in your own life. You can then begin to look for opportunities to expand these values and skills through personal coaching or counseling. Perhaps you admire someone who speaks eloquently and you want more of that in your life. You could begin spending time with others who possess this quality, take a class to develop this skill, or set an intention to act more in that manner throughout the day. It is great to get feedback from others and it is also a very loving gesture to look within yourself for the same feedback.

2. Breathe in ____, breathe out ____.

This is a great exercise for learning how to give yourself what you need. It can be a calming and grounding exercise in times of stress. The “pre-work” to this exercise, is taking a moment to ask yourself, “what do I want or need more of in life?” For example: love, healing, forgiveness, financial freedom, discipline, contentment, peace, or strength.

1. To start the exercise, breathe in the word that represents what you want. You can even nod slightly, indicating your confirmation of taking this word in.
2. Then consider the opposite, such as hate, resentment, fear, uncertainty, pain, debt, or anger. Then breathe that out, gently shaking your head “no.”

Once in a groove a challenge is to let your mind wander. Maybe you started with healing and love pops into your mind. Go there for a few rounds, then maybe self-control comes up. When you allow your mind to wander, things from your heart will begin to surface to tell you what it needs.

These are tangible personal exercises in self-love, self-validation, and fostering a loving connection with yourself. This awareness and intentionality will spill over to your choices, reactions to difficult situations, and will push you toward functional healthy outlets. The more these are built into your routine, the more growth and self-validation you will have to anchor within you, and a deep authentic internal trust is the best guide.