

THE JOURNEY OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE

UNDERSTANDING SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Beginning the journey with kindness

ARTICLE 1 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Understanding Self-Acceptance

Beginning the journey with kindness

"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." — Carl Rogers

Introduction

For many LGBTQ+ people, self-acceptance is not a single moment but a gradual journey. It is shaped by personal experiences, relationships, culture, family beliefs, religion, education and the messages we receive from society about who we are "allowed" to be.

Some people grow up in environments where their identity is accepted and celebrated. Others receive messages—spoken or unspoken—that being different is something to hide, deny or feel ashamed of. Even in accepting environments, subtle experiences of exclusion or fear of judgement can influence how we see ourselves.

Self-acceptance is not about becoming someone new. It is about recognising that your identity is a valuable part of who you are and allowing yourself to live with greater honesty, compassion and authenticity.

This journey is deeply personal. There is no right timeline, no checklist and no "perfect" way to reach acceptance. Your experiences are unique, and your journey deserves to be approached with kindness rather than criticism.

What Is Self-Acceptance?

Self-acceptance means acknowledging yourself without constantly wishing you were someone else.

It does not mean believing that every day will feel easy, nor does it mean never experiencing doubt or fear. Instead, it involves recognising your worth regardless of the opinions, expectations or assumptions of others.

For LGBTQ+ people, self-acceptance often includes:

- Accepting your sexual orientation or gender identity without shame.

Recognising that your identity does not need to be justified.

Allowing yourself to experience joy, connection and belonging.

Treating yourself with the same compassion you would offer someone you love.

Acceptance is different from approval by others. While external support can be incredibly valuable, genuine self-acceptance develops from within.

Why Can Self-Acceptance Feel So Difficult?

Many people wonder why accepting themselves feels harder than accepting other people.

The answer often lies in the experiences that shaped them.

Throughout childhood and adolescence, we learn about ourselves through the responses of the people around us. Families, schools, communities, religious organisations, media and peers all contribute to our understanding of what is considered "normal" or "acceptable."

If those messages suggest that being LGBTQ+ is something to hide or fear, it is understandable that self-acceptance may become more challenging.

These messages are not a reflection of your worth.

They are experiences that have influenced how you learned to view yourself.

Recognising this difference can be an important first step towards healing.

Carl Rogers and Unconditional Positive Regard

Psychologist Carl Rogers believed that people thrive when they experience unconditional positive regard—being accepted as they are rather than only when they meet someone else's expectations.

Many LGBTQ+ people have experienced the opposite.

Perhaps acceptance felt conditional.

"We love you... but don't tell anyone."

"Just don't make it your whole personality."

"Can't you keep it private?"

"It's just a phase."

Even subtle messages like these can leave people feeling that acceptance must be earned.

Rogers believed lasting growth begins when we experience genuine acceptance.

One of the most important questions you can ask yourself is:

What would it feel like to offer yourself the same acceptance you hope to receive from others?

Self-Acceptance Is Not the Same as Confidence

People often assume that self-acceptance means feeling confident all the time.

It doesn't.

Confidence changes depending on the situation.

You might feel confident at work but anxious socially.

You might feel confident with close friends but uncertain around family.

Self-acceptance runs deeper.

It means recognising your value even during moments of self-doubt.

Rather than asking:

- "Am I confident enough?"

You begin asking:

- "Can I be kind to myself while I continue growing?"

That shift changes everything.

Letting Go of Comparison

It is easy to compare your journey with someone else's.

You might wonder why another person seems completely comfortable with their identity while you still feel uncertain.

The truth is that every LGBTQ+ journey is different.

Some people come out young.

Others come out later in life.

Some never feel the need to share their identity widely.

Some find acceptance quickly.

Others spend years unlearning shame.

There is no correct timeline.

Growth is not a race.

Small Acts of Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance is often built through small, everyday moments rather than dramatic life events.

It might be:

- Using language that feels authentic.

Correcting someone politely when they make an assumption.

Wearing clothes that genuinely reflect who you are.

Talking openly with someone you trust.

Allowing yourself to acknowledge your feelings without judgement.

Choosing relationships where you feel respected and safe.

Each small step reinforces the message:

- I deserve to exist exactly as I am.

Reflection Questions

Take a few moments to consider:

- When have you felt most accepted for who you are?

What messages about LGBTQ+ identities did you hear growing up?

Are those messages still influencing how you see yourself today?

What would treating yourself with greater compassion look like this week?

If fear were less present, what small step towards authenticity might you take?

There are no right or wrong answers. Reflection is not about judging yourself—it is about understanding yourself more deeply.

Key Takeaways

Self-acceptance is a journey rather than a destination.

Your worth is not determined by other people's opinions or expectations.

Past experiences can shape how you see yourself, but they do not define your future.

Self-acceptance is different from confidence; it is about recognising your inherent value.

Small acts of authenticity can gradually strengthen self-acceptance over time.

You deserve kindness, compassion and respect exactly as you are.

Final Thoughts

The journey towards self-acceptance rarely follows a straight path. There may be moments of uncertainty, fear or self-doubt, particularly if you have spent years adapting to environments where you did not always feel understood or accepted.

These moments do not mean you are failing.

They are part of being human.

Learning to accept yourself often begins with one simple but powerful decision: to stop treating yourself as someone who needs fixing.

Your identity is not a flaw to overcome or a problem to solve. It is one part of the rich and unique person you are. As Carl Rogers so beautifully reminded us, change begins not through self-criticism, but through acceptance.

As you continue your journey, remember that every small step towards authenticity is a step towards greater freedom. You deserve to live a life where you are not merely tolerated, but where you can experience genuine belonging, self-respect and the confidence that comes from knowing you are enough.

Be patient with yourself. Growth takes time, and every act of self-compassion is an investment in your wellbeing.