



# The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom

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## ***Healing Your Childhood Wounds Lets You Be Seen, Known and Feel Loved — 12 Practices***

© Don St John, PhD

Excerpted from [\*Healing the Wounds of Childhood: A psychologist's journey and discoveries from wretched beginnings to a thriving life\*](#) by Don St John, PhD. 2015.

I believe most human beings want good relationships, at least one in which they are really seen and deeply understood. It is very special when someone knows you, not just superficially, but all of you: your challenges, your victories, your dreams, your hopes, and the different and sometimes complex parts of your personality. It is a priceless gift when someone sees who you are beneath any social façade. It is an experience of love to be seen, enjoyed or admired, and related to.

What is really sad, and far too common, is to live your life to the end without ever feeling seen and known. But there is a catch here: in order to be seen and known, deeply, you must be able to soften or release the protective structures that you have built. We all have these structures. They can be soft, light, simple and easy to open when we wish; or, they can be rigid, complex, fragmented, deeply engrained, and seemingly impenetrable. The more im-

## Greetings

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penetrable the structure, the more difficult it is to feel seen, known and loved. The majority of us are somewhere in the middle of that scale. So to achieve and sustain those special, deep and intimate relationships, most of us have some work to do. We have to heal the wounds around which we built those layers of protection.

Let me ask you a delicate question. Do any of the following apply to you? Did you have a mother who was depressed for a long time after your birth? Did you suffer a traumatic birth? Did your parents divorce before you were seven years old, which suggests that they were miserable during most of your formative years? Did you have an alcoholic parent or a parent with a serious anger problem? Were you in a serious accident in childhood? Did you have at least one parent who, regardless of how caring he or she might have been, had no clue what it meant to be emotionally present? Did you have a parent who was heavy handed expecting you to adhere to standards well above your age?

Did you receive a good deal of empathy and emotional guidance? Did you feel seen and understood by at least one parent? Was discipline meted out firmly with love and respect? I could go on, but I'm sure you get my point.

It is often quite difficult to examine your childhood in terms of whether or not you experienced “trauma”. The problem is that the conclusions we draw can leave out a great deal of useful information. Many patients over the years told me that they experienced very little “trauma” in childhood. Initially, they usually say they had a normal childhood. Then, within the next fifteen minutes, they tell me their mom was depressed for two years after their birth or their father was an alcoholic who came home enraged once a week. Many tell me their parents never openly expressed affection to them or to each other, that feelings didn't exist in their homes, and on and on. But there was “no trauma.” Theirs was a “normal childhood.” Yes, I agree. It was normal, but only in a statistical sense. A much more useful conclusion is we all can improve and grow.

One thing our culture has as yet to fully grasp is that these wounds are not just psychic. They are wounds that affect you as a whole organism. They affect your core beliefs, your

sense of yourself, how you feel about yourself, your relationship capacities, your brain and nervous system and your very tissues, structure and movement.

My childhood was extreme in its violence, abuse, and ignorance. The “beatings” were almost daily events and they began before I could walk. Substantial evidence suggests that anyone reared in my circumstances is not likely to have a healthy, vital, and satisfying life. Yet, I can claim with gratitude and humility that my life has evolved beyond anything I or anyone else ever could have imagined or predicted.

Through my long journey out of the dark trenches of my childhood and into the sweetness and blessedness of my current life, I evolved a comprehension of what happens to us when we are poorly tended or maltreated, and what happens to us when we don’t have sufficient understanding of what it means to be alive in these human bodies. Included in the comprehension I have achieved is an understanding of what it takes to restore the full, rich quality of our humanity. I have learned what it takes to live in a body I actually can enjoy and which is capable of deep, loving connections. I have become appreciative of its sensual nature. These days, I live with mostly positive feelings, such as gratitude and appreciation. I



have learned what it takes to have a delightful marriage, replete with deep, intimate communication and even a modicum of sizzle as we journey into our seventies.

Sadly, living this fully is not the norm; yet, it is a potential we all can realize. Following are practices that will guide you in your personal and relational evolution. From my point of view, emotional, personal, spiritual growth is what we are here to do.

## ***Practices That Enrich Relationships***

*1. Speak from your heart.* This is also called transparent self-disclosure. It can be helpful to ask yourself: What is the simple truth? Learn to identify when you are simply saying it like it is without adding an element of attack, blame, or criticism. You want to be known. We all long for someone to know us deeply. Practice letting yourself be seen and known. Here is an example: “I like you, and I am afraid to get closer because I don’t know if you have really separated from your last boyfriend.” It’s simple and true.

*2. Listen to your partner.* Listening to your partner means paying attention. Try to understand what your partner is saying. This may seem obvious, even trivial, but consider how



often you are formulating your response or thinking about something else while someone is speaking to you. Intend to become a better listener. To become a better listener, you have to be willing to be changed by the other person. This leads naturally to the next practice.

3. *Attune.* Attunement is a type of listening that involves your heart and requires an ability to demonstrate through your facial expressions that you really are getting what your partner is saying. It is a mutually engaged form of attention, and it creates resonance. It is often experienced as love. Let yourself be affected by those close to you while in conversation. Notice if your facial muscles feel engaged or if you are trying to hold a particular expression. Genuine interest is not feigned interest; let yourself feel what is being communicated.

4. *Learn to detect ruptures in your relationship and repair them skillfully.* Sometimes, I describe the intimate connection as a filament between two hearts. From time to time, the filament gets very thin or tears and needs to be restored. In most relationships, there are frequent moments of little annoyances, exasperations, or forgetfulness that can create tiny—and sometimes not so tiny—ruptures in your connections. The flow of good feeling begins to diminish. Pay attention to these ruptures so that you can catch them and repair them quickly. If they persist too long, and especially if they accumulate, it does not bode well for your relationship.

5. *Release frustration, irritation, disappointment, and resentment gracefully.* It is characteristic of a good relationship that the vibes between the couple are mostly positive. If disappointment, resentment, or frustration tend to linger, and especially if they characterize the tone of the relationship, the odds of a long-term and satisfying relationship drop. Make it your priority not to dwell in negativity. This is not easy but very much worth cultivating given the effects of negativity on your health and well-being. The first thing required is your sincere desire not to dwell in negativity. Then, the moment frustration, for example, occurs do not allow yourself to go into a mental story justifying it; rather, feel the sensations in your body, feel its effects; then take several deep breaths and imagine or sense those effects dissolving with every exhalation. Then decide what action, if any, you want to take to improve the situation.

6. *Self-soothe.* Self-soothing and the ability to let go of negative experiences are important aspects of self-regulation. Talk to yourself gently and clearly. Guard against self-talk that induces self-pity, feelings of victimization, or defensive anger. Listen to how you speak to yourself. In what tone does your inner voice speak? Is it harsh, demanding, or critical? Is it self-indulgent or excusing? How would you speak to yourself if you really liked yourself?

Sometimes, it is important to be firm and clear. Sometimes, it's important to be comforting. Sometimes, it's important not to speak at all, just to feel and be.

7. *Choose your response; don't just react.* This may be the most challenging of all our practices. It is also the most powerful in terms of promoting self-development. The story of Dr. Victor Frankl is among the most inspiring stories of courage and wisdom that I have ever come across. Victor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist and author in Austria during the reign of Hitler, when he and his family were captured and placed in a concentration camp. His entire family was killed and his papers and books burned. What else can be done to a human being? As horrendous and painful as these experiences undoubtedly were, they did not crush Victor Frankl's spirit. We might say that he became enlightened as a result. Here is a quote from his marvelous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." Practice choosing your response. If your mate, child, or employee disappoint you and you are just at the edge of a verbal barrage of berating and belittling, pause. Count to ten. Speak from your heart after you have calmed down. Ask yourself how you want to be in your relationships. Do you want to be the one who blows up, criticizes, and puts down? Or do you want to be able to speak clearly and firmly, with care and consideration?

8. *Remain centered while engaged in difficult conversations.* For many couples, distance may develop gradually over time, and the relationship begins to lose its appeal. Often, a contributing factor is avoidance of difficult conversations. You see, if you go with the easy way out (avoidance), you will pay a price. You must be willing to be uncomfortable and/or to allow your partner to be uncomfortable. If you can stay centered and remain open, available, and receptive, your partner will probably be able to stay engaged in the conversation. How, then, can you stay centered? If you keep part of your attention in your lower body—your abdomen, pelvis, and legs—it will help keep you centered. Feel the support of your lower body; feel the strength of your back, right there behind you. Feel your heart, too, and your intention to strengthen the relationship.

9. *Make room for new aspects of yourself to emerge.* Who you are carries a tapestry of possibilities. If you are unaware of aspects of yourself, especially those you deem unacceptable, they tend to unexpectedly emerge in others around you. Alternatively, you may constrict yourself in an effort to cut that part of yourself away. If you can recognize those parts and embrace them, your sense of yourself expands, and conflicts can resolve more organically.



In your essence, you have the possibility of moving fluidly among different “selves” as called for by the situation. A good way to approach this practice is with judicious use of the word “*and*”. For example, I can be tender when called for *and* assertive when called for. I can be silly and playful when appropriate *and* quite serious when necessary. If you find you can’t move out of a particular way of being, for example, if you are always serious, regardless of the circumstances, then this is an area for you to develop.

*10. Embrace and support your vulnerability.* When the conditions of your first years, from minus nine months to, say, four or five years, are optimal, there is a bright glow to that soft, tender part of you. It has been held in a way that is conducive to feeling safe and secure. But if the wounds have been significant, your vulnerability gets tucked away behind a wall of protection. Embracing vulnerability involves taking risks. If you are scared, unsure, or tender, it is easier to keep it under wraps, protected. Practice allowing your partner to see and be with you when you are feeling vulnerable. Sometimes, it doesn’t even require words. However, in order to be okay with your vulnerability, you must be able to support it. In fact, it is essential. If you don’t believe you can support your vulnerability with strength, you are not likely to expose it in the first place.

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How do you support it? If, for example, you tell your partner you're afraid and he laughs at you, it is important to let him know, clearly, that you do not allow anyone to make light of your vulnerability. When choosing a partner, it is important to observe how he responds when you are vulnerable and if he can display his vulnerability. Deep intimacy and vulnerability go hand-in-hand. You can't have one without the other.

*11. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude and appreciation.* If you want to live in an environment that feels good, that contains humor and care and delight and affection, it is up to you to create that environment. Lots of people respond to that suggestion with, "It takes two to tango." I suggest a more useful attitude is, "It takes one to tango." If you can keep the focus on what is positive, if you can be generous in expressing appreciation and gratitude, if you can feel free to acknowledge what your partner means to you, your chances for reciprocity along the same lines are so much higher.

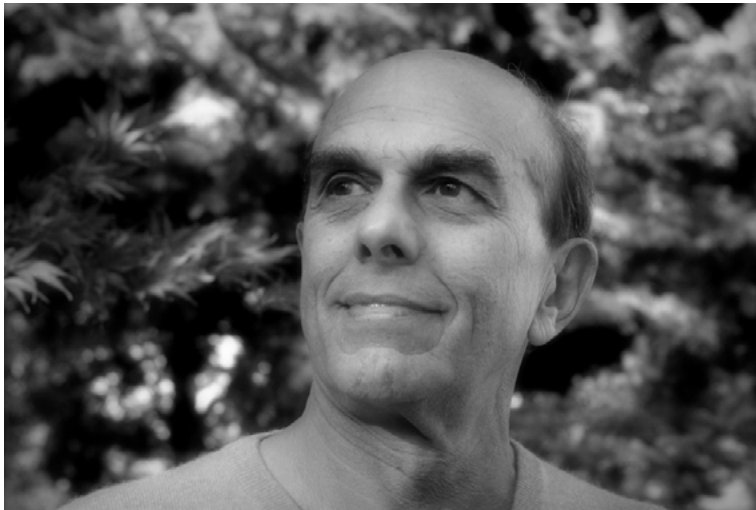
*12. Engage in mindful self-care.* It is your responsibility to take care of yourself, to listen to your heart, to care for your body, and to honor your nutritional and spiritual needs. It is your responsibility to handle what needs to be handled.

From my perspective, the above capacities are so much of what life is all about. If you can take good care of yourself, live with gratitude and appreciation, embrace and support your vulnerability, welcome new aspects of yourself to emerge as life conditions change, remain centered in difficult conversations, not allow your reactions to take over but pause and respond according to your values, self-soothe, let go of negative experiences gracefully, become skillful at repairing ruptures in your connections, attune to and empathize with your partner, be a skillful listener who can hear the music between the words, and speak from your heart, unguarded and without vigilant censorship, that would be quite a group of skills.



It would be hubris of me to claim mastery of them; however, I can assert without hesitation or doubt that in my late twenties I would have been classified as retarded in most of them, if such a classification existed. Today, however, that is clearly not true. It is possible to change and grow substantially!

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Don studied Gestalt Therapy at the LA Gestalt Therapy Institute, and Neo-Reichian therapy with Drs. Allan Darbonne and Jack Lee Rosenberg; the Psychology of Selves and Voice Dialogue Method with Drs. Hal and Sidra Stone; Hakomi with Dr. Ron Kurtz, Coherence Therapy with Dr. Bruce Ecker, AEDP with Dr. Diana Fosha and CIMS with Dr. Albert Sheldon and Beatriz Winstanley. He has taken immersion courses and core training in Dr. Sue Johnson's emotionally focused Couple's Therapy. He is certified in Somatic Experiencing, the work of Dr. Peter Levine. For fifteen years Don has been studying and practicing Continuum Movement developed by Emilie Conrad and Susan Harper.

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# *The Rhythm*

© [Tara Sophia Mohr](#)

In any creative feat  
(by which I mean your work, your art, your life)  
there will be downtimes.

Or so it seems.  
Just as the earth is busy before the harvest  
and a baby grows before its birth,  
there is no silence in you.  
There is no time of nothingness.

What if,  
during the quiet times, when the idea flow is hushed and hard to find  
you trusted (and yes I mean trusted)  
that the well was filling, the waters moving?

What if you trusted  
that for the rest of eternity,  
without prodding, without self-discipline,  
without getting over being yourself,  
you would be gifted every ounce of productivity you need?  
What would leave you? What would open?

And what if during the quiet times you ate great meals  
and leaned back to smile at the stars,  
and saw them there, as they always are,  
nourishing you?

There are seasons and harvest is only a fraction of one of them.  
We forget this.



# *Mindfulness and Numbers*

© Beth Crittenden

I'm wondering if you have ever looked at your bank balance and been hit with waves of fear and/or shame? Have you ever felt stuck in “not enough-ness”, based on how much money you earn? Have you ever injured your wellbeing in any way, to pursue “more money” in general? Did you ever keep a financial secret from people with whom you otherwise share just about everything?

If you have not experienced those things, then I salute your freedom!

If you have felt any of those things, well..... I know for a fact that you're not alone.

I am deeply curious about why we have societal taboos around a topic that affects everyone every day. Isn't it interesting, and potentially limiting to one's freedom, that it's “not polite” to discuss financial numbers? Again, maybe it's different for you. But for some of us, we were trained (consciously or unconsciously) to keep feelings about finances to ourselves. I sense a collective assumption that if numbers are brought in to the open (either verbally or visually), then someone will get hurt, or offended, or lose something they value (even if it's not clear what specifically would be lost). When that did that come to be? Did that societal taboo exist when currency itself was created?

I'm an independent contractor. I absolutely love what I do professionally, and I relish the freedom that comes with setting my own schedule. I feel creatively expressed, and satisfied by making a positive difference in my clients' lives. Part of the “cost” of that freedom, is tolerating the lack of steady paycheck associated with being an employee. Otherwise, though, on a day-to-day basis, I am delighted to be doing what I do.

As I write this, it's the very beginning of 2015. Recently, I added up my 2014 earnings to get the annual income total. Definitely throughout the course of 2014, I knew that I was a bit behind in reaching my income goals, but it never seemed like a terrible problem at the time. Actually, I earned more in 2014 than any previous year. Sounds pretty good, right? I would anticipate that someone in this situation would feel happy after seeing the annual

total. To recap, I love what I do, I get “paid” in myriad ways in addition to financially, and I was aware all along of what I was earning each month.

I want to share with you that simply not reaching my annual financial goal, and what I thought and believed about that, led me to a situational depression that took my breath away for a couple of weeks. I felt angry, ashamed, disgusted with myself, harshly critical, and an overall sense that I was failing IN LIFE IN GENERAL. It was as if someone was bruising me internally. I felt battered by the emotions, beliefs, and fears. Within seconds, my internal condition plummeted in to deep despair. Just from seeing a number, which I could have easily estimated in advance. Wow. That’s a formidable shift.

My meditation and mindfulness practices, thankfully, gave me some distance from believing these painful internal assessments for too long. I will share more specifics about my practices later in the article. These challenging and painful moments are exactly why I meditate. I sit when the proverbial weather is calm, so that I have some relative ease with accessing awareness when the foul weather rolls around.

What fascinated me in particular about this process was that instant big jump the mind took. I went from last year thinking consistently, “I’m ok. Numbers are a bit behind where



I'd hoped they would be, but overall things are going well." Then when I took the step of knowing the specific number for the year, for some reason the mind led me to experience painful self-hatred and an essential lack of faith that I was doing ok. For such a rational piece of information as a financial amount, the reaction was patently irrational.

Mind you, I am extremely organized. Part of how I personally generate a sense of safety is to keep on top of tracking my numbers. I look at them weekly, at a minimum. I am officially a geek when it comes to tracking this stuff, and proud of it! So how was it, then, that I could faithfully keep up with the micro-picture of my finances all year and suddenly feel like a complete failure in life when viewing the macro-picture? That is a big instantaneous jump!

I will share with you how applying mindfulness and gratitude helped me navigate the very difficult set of emotions, resulting from a mere mental interpretation of my 2014 earnings number.

## ***Difficulty #1: Panic***

### ***Tool #1: Mindful Noticing***

Have you heard the story of Chicken Little? Poor little guy. He fully believed that the sky was about to fall at any minute. His mind had no doubt that something terrible and world ending was about to happen. And he reacted accordingly with anxiety, fretting, panicking, and freely sharing those things with everyone around him. The folktale apparently dates back 25 centuries! That tells me that I am not the first to panic about a terrible thing that is not yet reality, but seems like it will happen soon.

I learned a helpful acronym for Fear: "**F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal". It helps me to fact-check the fears that arise. Back to my 2014 earnings story, I noticed that before I computed the number, it seemed like I was fine financially. Then after I computed the number, all of a sudden, my mind panicked, and tried to convince me that my proverbial sky was falling. "It's not enough! We didn't make enough! We must change things, immediately, to fix this emergency! This is terrible!" (False Evidence Appearing Real)

Mindful noticing helped me detect the painful fears exploding like fireworks. When I observe my thought stream, sometimes I can detect the False Evidence that is Appearing Real. The panic doesn't just stop in my mind, however; my body reacts accordingly and the "fight or flight" system kicks in to gear. As if I'm a firewoman and the mind is sounding

a false fire alarm. The firewoman doesn't know it's a false alarm until she investigates the situation.

Helpful practices for when panic blooms:

- \* Focus on breathing regularly and evenly, and count the breaths in and out to 10.
- \* Write a non-judgmental list of the thoughts and fears the mind has generated, just to

clear them out and gather them in one place that is not inside the head.

- \* Label sensations in the body, especially where there is tightness. Say out loud something like, "Chest feels warm. Cheeks feel tight."

- \* Look around the room, and say out loud a simple description of what is seen (i.e. green lamp, gray carpet, blue sky through the window).



## ***Difficulty #2: Shame***

### ***Tool #2: Affirmations***

I'm so curious why the mind generates harsh judgment towards me for things that I cannot change, especially when those things are in the past. If the mind said something like, "It's ok, kid, you'll get 'em next time", I can understand working with that and getting constructive

feedback out of it. But when the mind generates any kind of "should", I can be pretty sure that it's not my Highest Self delivering that message. I am not able to change anything that I have already done. No intensity of "shoulda/woulda/coulda" thinking, will allow me to revise history.

The specific interpretation of the 2014 income number in my mind sounded something like, "You didn't work enough. You did that year wrong. You don't deserve to have a business. You may as well quit, you failure." Woah there, mind! That is super harsh! Where did that even come from?

I've learned another helpful acronym for this pinch. Shame...Should Have Already Mastered Everything. The shame response tells me that I did wrong, and am falling short as a person somehow. I should already know how to do everything, and do it perfectly. The shame response told me that the entire year was a failure for me personally, due to not meeting my income goal.

I can take great benefit from cultivating self-love and tenderness towards this creature (who is always doing the best that she can). For whatever reason, it comes more naturally to me to act and feel tenderly towards other creatures. At some point, my mind exempted me from the Deserving of Tenderness Club, and mindfulness practices help me get back in the club. If it doesn't seem to come naturally to speak kindly with myself, then I need to cultivate the skill. That's where the "practice" part comes in; I do it over and over until it becomes second nature.

Helpful tools for when the shaming self-critic is activated:

\* Write affirmations. I've learned that I cannot just stop thinking the negative thoughts. I have not found the Mute button for them. I need to consciously replace them with positive





## **Perspectives on Self-Care**

Be careful with all self-help methods (including those presented in this *Bulletin*), which are no substitute for working with a licensed healthcare practitioner. People vary, and what works for someone else may not be a good fit for you. When you try something, start slowly and carefully, and stop immediately if it feels bad or makes things worse.

thoughts. If the positive feels too hoky, especially when taking on an affirmation practice, then neutral affirmations (in my experience) are far better than no affirmations at all.

\* Imagine the last time I was kind and gentle towards someone else. Pretend I am dealing with them, and speak to myself in a similarly kind manner.

\* From the field of Embodied Cognition, make sure my body temperature is warm. Research is showing that we more naturally have access to positive regard for self and others, when our physical body temperature is raised comfortably. (From Sensation. The New Science of Physical Intelligence. by Thalma Lobel.)

## **Difficulty #3: “Compare and Despair”**

### **Tool #3: Reality-checking**

A painful second wave of self-judgment washed through when I compared myself to other business owners who I assumed made more money than I did in 2014. At the time, my defenses were down from the pain of the first wave of self-judgment. The negative process seemed to pick up momentum and cast its net wider for more potential proof of my failure. This type of thinking can spread like wildfire without my taking some mindful action to change its trajectory.

Helpful tools for when suffering from imagined comparison:

- \* Just the facts. Really, do I specifically know other peoples’ financial information?
- \* The 12-step tradition says, “Don’t compare your insides to other peoples’ outsides.” I have no idea how it feels to be that other person who I am envying. When I stop the comparison cycle, I am better able to access compassion, patience, and friendliness.
- \* If I can’t be 100% loving towards myself in the moment is there anyone from who I could request verbal appreciation? Sometimes I have said to friends, “Could you remind me what you love about me? I’m having a hard time remembering in this moment.” I’ve noticed that it can be intensely vulnerable to make that request, and I acknowledge that it is easier said than done. However, no one has failed me yet, especially when I choose mindfully who to ask.

\* Metta meditation is a lovely, structured way to cultivate kindness towards myself and others. Simply focusing on wishing myself health, happiness, safety and ease, changes the trajectory of self-judgment. It's disruptive, as they say in the tech world. I am definitely interested in disrupting the brutal self-talk that became a habit (but never actually improved anything about my life). Metta also helps me remember kindness for self and others. As in any sitting, the more I do it when times are easy, the more accessible it is for me when times get more challenging.

I encourage you to select any of these practices that would fit where you are in life at this time. I know for a fact that each of us deserves an internal experience of kindness and acceptance. Habitual self-criticism is one my greatest ongoing life challenges. Undertaking mindfulness practices, and using them in good times and bad, has made a world of positive difference for me.

May you be kind to yourself and others.

May you accept the perfection of who you Are.

May you see Reality and Truth under all circumstances.

May you be well right now.

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Beth Crittenden is a financial organizer and counselor based in Mill Valley, California. She has been in deep spiritual practice for the past 15 years, and focuses on being clear with The Big 3 in life....food, sex, and money. Her primary teachers have been Byron Katie, Eckhart Tolle, Adyashanti, and Nicole Daedone. More information is available at <http://www.lovethezeros.com>.

# *Skillful Means*

[Your Skillful Means](#), sponsored by the Wellspring Institute, is designed to be a comprehensive resource for people interested in personal growth, overcoming inner obstacles, being helpful to others, and expanding consciousness. It includes instructions in everything from common psychological tools for dealing with negative self talk, to physical exercises for opening the body and clearing the mind, to meditation techniques for clarifying inner experience and connecting to deeper aspects of awareness, and much more.

## **Self Advocacy**

### **Purpose/Effects**

Self-advocacy here means treating yourself (and demanding, albeit gently and reasonably, that others treat you) as if your worth is no less than any other being. We live in a culture that alternately promotes self-esteem and equality while promoting interests that are often destructive to individuals and groups. Women, especially, are often taught as girls not to speak up and assert themselves for fear of being “unladylike.” We often neglect our own needs and yearnings for the benefit of others. When this becomes pathological and crippling, it inhibits our true wills, and practice in self-advocacy is needed.

### **Method**

#### **Summary**

Learn compassion, advocacy, and lovingkindness for others, then apply it to yourself.

#### **Long Version**

##### **Exercise #1: Basic Advocacy:**

Sit in a comfortable meditative posture, relaxed and alert. While breathing gently and calmly, begin to think about something for which you have unequivocal good feeling. It could be a parent or a child, a pet or a friend, or even a place or a concept. Begin to wish that person or thing well. You might want to use the lovingkindness techniques detailed [here](#). Consider fully this sensation of caring. Fill yourself with this feeling of support for something and explore it. Examine how advocacy of this sort makes you feel, how you think about the object of your advocacy, your emotions and attitudes. Perhaps slowly try to ramp

up this feeling of goodwill. Love fiercely. Care strongly. Then, center your attention on the power of your caring and your commitment to this positive feeling. You might also try to weaken the feeling to see how your mind behaves under those circumstances. Then dial it back up. Notice how your advocacy is something you have control over, and how good it feels to be fierce and strong about love. Enjoy it; it is beautiful.

This exercise reminds us of the warmth and pleasure that come from caring, especially caring strongly. It tells us about our own strength and determination. We also find in ourselves the capacity to love completely an imperfect thing. These skills will help us to then begin to self-advocate.

### **Exercise #2: Self-Advocacy:**

Settle into the same relaxed and alert posture as before. Now, bring to mind yourself as a child. Focus on your many qualities, how worthy of love you were and how vulnerable. Consider how, even as a child, you were imperfect but good enough. Have compassion for that young child. Then, gradually, move that compassion to yourself now as an adult. Have compassion for your foibles and misadventures as well as for the trauma, bad luck, and hard circumstances you've had to endure by virtue of your humanity. Settle into this compassion, allowing it to flow into you with each inhalation. Move on to lovingkindness, feeling it for the child you once were and moving it into adulthood. Feel lovingkindness for yourself now, expressing with your inner voice well-wishes and affection for the person you are, despite your flaws. Finally, move toward advocacy. Return to the child you were, and think about how, if you needed to, you would protect that child and would help that child just as you would any child. See if you can bring this same advocacy to your adult self, empowering you to protect and help yourself and to advocate for your own wellbeing. Consider how you will act in your best interest in the face of illness, bad luck, mistreatment, and suffering, just as you would for the interest of a child. Fill yourself with this powerful feeling of self-advocacy and enjoy it. Allow your mind to commit itself to advocating for you.

### **History**

Self-advocacy has its roots in 19th-century psychological and philosophical thought that questioned the self-sacrificing ideals of Western culture. The concept of will evolved from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (who often viewed it in rather bleak terms) into something positive and empowering with the movement toward self-esteem in the late 19th century.

### **Cautions**

Do not confuse your selfish wants with things that must be advocated for. You, as a human being, have the right to advocate for equal treatment, freedom from abuse, the ability



to follow your dreams, and respect from others. Self-advocacy does not mean that petty emotions and greedy desires are okay just because you think them.

### **Notes**

Self-advocacy is also a term used in the disability rights movement expressing the right that people with disabilities (especially the developmentally disabled) have to control their own lives and to self-determine. The ability to speak up for oneself is crucial for human beings in order to feel empowered about their own lives.

### **See Also**

[Establishing Safety](#)

[Lovingkindness](#)

### **External Links**

[Developing assertiveness](#)

## ***Fare Well***

***May you and all beings be happy, loving, and wise.***