First Step to Change: Accept What IS

Imagine you are standing in front of a full-length mirror. Naked. You have been asked to gaze at yourself for two full minutes.

Now take a quick inventory of the feelings this suggestion aroused. Did you feel curious or afraid? Interested or hesitant? Willing or unwilling? Or did you reject the whole idea as something you would absolutely never do? Imagining the experience gives you an indication of your level of self-acceptance; actually doing it will tell you even more.

Self-acceptance is an action; it is something we do, not just something we feel. To say “I value myself” is an act of self-affirmation that provides a base from which self-esteem develops.

When we practice self-acceptance we don’t have to condone or even like everything about ourselves. In fact, it’s almost certain that we won’t. What it does mean is that we recognize and accept our thoughts, our actions, our emotions, our bodies, our dreams—everything about us as our own.

“But I don’t want to be insecure (or afraid or judgmental or angry or fat or old or alcoholic or any of a dozen other things),” someone might say. “If I accept that about myself, it means I don’t want to change. Or I won’t change.”

The paradox is: without acceptance of what is, it is impossible to change.

When we deny any part of ourselves we name that part alien or outside. To say, “I don’t want to be _______, therefore I won’t accept that I am,” is self-rejection, the opposite of self-acceptance. To say, “I don’t want to be _______, but I am and I’m willing to change,” is self-acceptance that gives birth to transformation.

Healing and growth can enter only when awareness and acceptance open the door. According to Nathaniel Branden, author of the classic The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem, “Nothing does so much for an individual’s self-esteem as becoming aware of and accepting disowned parts of the self.”

Here’s another exercise: As if it were a sweater or a pair of shoes, try on any emotion that is difficult to face—incest, jealousy, anger, fear. Breathe into it, focus on it, feel your feelings. Notice how, as you accept and experience it, the feeling begins to melt away.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.”

—Marianne Williamson

If you are resisting—tightening your muscles, holding your breath—accept your resistance. If you deny the resistance, it will only gain in strength. But, like the feelings themselves, if you embrace the resistance, it will dissipate.

It’s not only negative feelings or thoughts we sometimes don’t accept; we refuse our positive sides, too. In fact, some of our bright side can seem more frightening than the dark. What a loss to refuse to accept our excitement or joy, our sensuality or our beauty. How sad to be frightened of our brilliance, our ambition or our dreams.

It has been said that the greatest crime we commit against ourselves is not that we deny and disown our shortcomings, but that we deny and disown our greatness.

Self-acceptance keeps us alive. It is the strength that keeps us moving; it is what gives us the courage to finally say “No!” or “Yes!” It is the hand that reaches out for help.

To be self-accepting is to be for yourself, not against yourself. It is the birthright of you as an individual and of every human being.

A Letter From Dr. Jane M. Fink

It’s our biggest paradoxes: that accepting yourself as you are—accepting what IS—is a prerequisite to change.

As discussed in this issue’s page 1 article, self-acceptance doesn’t mean you have to condone everything. It doesn’t mean you stop striving. But healing and growth can enter only when awareness and acceptance open the door. Read the full article for insights into this sometimes confusing paradox.

Perfectionism, the topic of this issue’s quiz, is one of the traps that leads to never accepting yourself. It’s like a mirage. Tile closer you think you’re getting, the more that elusive “perfection” moves into the distance. And like a mirage, it’s not real. There’s no there there, as the writer Gertrude Stein said.

Tile page 3 feature article offers some guidelines on excessive drinking and questions that will help you discover if this is a potential problem area for you or perhaps for a loved one.

And, finally, a list of 10 tips for having “big talks” with your children about important issues and a look at where resentments come from and how to get rid of them round out this issue. Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. Feel free to ask for more copies and don’t hesitate to call if you have any questions or want any more information about any of the articles.
Everybody has some “built-in” perfectionism, especially in our achievement-oriented, competitive culture. But there’s a difference between doing the best job you can or maintaining high standards or working hard to reach your goals. Harmful perfectionism is a long, maddening drive down a never-ending road for flawlessness; it provides no rest stops for mistakes, personal limitations or the changing of minds.

This kind of perfectionism can cause feelings of anxiety, fear, and self-doubt; it can cripple self-esteem, stifle creativity, and put a stumbling block in the way of intimate friendships and love relationships. It can even create or aggravate illnesses such as eating disorders, manic-depressive mood disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and substance abuse.

Take this quiz to discover whether perfectionism is holding you back.

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<td>1</td>
<td>I never do anything halfway; it’s all or nothing for me. Every time.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>I believe there’s a certain way to do things and they should always be done that way.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>I get angry or defensive when I make mistakes. I hate to make them, and I hate to admit them.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>I often procrastinate on starting projects. I seldom meet deadlines. Or if I do, I kill myself meeting them.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>I feel humiliated when things aren’t perfect.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>I don’t like to admit not knowing how to do something or to being a beginner. If I can’t do something well, I won’t do it.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>People say I expect too much of myself. Or of them.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>In my family, you could never completely measure up to expectations. There was always something “better.”</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>I’m hard on myself when I lose, even if it’s only a friendly game or contest. I’d just as soon not play.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>I often withdraw from others and from group activities.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Even when I accomplish something, I feel let down or empty.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>I criticize myself and others excessively.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>If I can’t be in control then I won’t participate.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>No matter how much I’ve done, there’s always more I could do.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>I don’t delegate often and when I do, I always double-check to make sure the job is done right. It never is.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>I believe it is possible to do something perfectly and if I keep at it, I’ll get there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I don’t like to admit not knowing how to do something or to being a beginner. If I can’t do something well, I won’t do it.</td>
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There is a difference between excellence and perfection. Striving to be really good is excellence; trying to be flawless is perfectionism. If you’re concerned about your perfectionist behavior, don’t hesitate to call.
Drinking More: When Does it Become a Problem

Office parties, social gatherings, family celebrations. The holidays are often a time of more drinking. More drinking and driving occurs during the holidays than any other time of the year, too. And sometimes people who don’t normally drink much may indulge in more than they intended and trouble follows.

It’s not true that increased drinking causes alcoholism. Alcoholism is a disease with many “causes.” Just because someone drinks more frequently, or consumes more alcohol than they usually do, doesn’t mean he or she has become an alcoholic. But there are warning signs that drinking may be a problem, for example:

- starting to drink earlier in the day
- increased drinking (drinking every day or every few days, or drinking increased quantities)
- continuing to drink when you’ve “had enough”
- denying you’ve “had enough”
- urging others to “have one more” when they’ve said no thanks
- including alcohol in every activity
- always making sure there’s “enough” alcohol (buying excess liquor for gatherings)
- refusing to discuss it when anyone expresses concern about their drinking

Alcoholism is a family disease. That means it affects not just the person who drinks, but everyone in the family they’re called co-alcoholics, and they may need help as much as the alcoholic.

Answer the questions to the right to see if you might have a problem with alcohol or to determine if you’re affected by the excessive drinking of someone close. If you answered yes to three or more of these questions, you may be affected by someone else’s use of alcohol or you may have a problem with excessive drinking yourself.

The most common symptom of alcoholism is denial that there’s a problem; the first step in recovery is to admit there might be a problem. If alcohol caused a problem during the holidays and you’d like to talk about it, don’t hesitate to call.

Problem with Alcohol Yourself?
1. Do you lose time from work due to your drinking?
2. Is drinking making your home life unhappy?
3. Do you drink because you are shy with other people?
4. Is drinking affecting your reputation?
5. Have you ever felt remorse after drinking?
6. Has drinking gotten you into financial difficulties?
7. Does drinking make you careless of your family's welfare?
8. Has your ambition decreased since drinking?
9. Do you crave a drink at a definite time daily?
10. Do you want a drink the next morning?
11. Does drinking cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
12. Has your efficiency decreased since drinking?
13. Is drinking jeopardizing your job or business?
14. Do you drink to escape from worries or troubles?
15. Do you drink alone?
16. Do you drink to build up your self-confidence?
17. Have you ever been in a hospital on account of drinking?

Affected by Excessive Drinking of Someone Close?
1. Do you worry about how much someone else drinks?
2. Has someone else’s drinking caused you money problems?
3. Do you tell lies to cover up for someone else's drinking?
4. Do you blame the drinker's behavior on his/her friends?
5. Do you feel angry, confused or depressed most of the time?
6. Have you said, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll leave you"?
7. Do you secretly try to smell the drinker's breath?
8. Are holidays and gatherings spoiled because of drinking?
9. Have you been hurt or embarrassed by a drinker's behavior?
10. Do you search for hidden alcohol?
11. Do you often ride with a driver who's been drinking?
12. Have you refused social invitations out of fear or anxiety?
13. Do you sometimes feel like a failure when you think of the lengths you have gone to control the drinker?
14. Do you think that, if the drinker stopped drinking, your other problems would be solved?
15. Do you feel that if the drinker loved you, he or she would stop drinking to please you?
16. Are plans frequently upset, or cancelled, or meals delayed because of the drinker?
17. Are you afraid to upset someone for fear it will set off a drinking bout?
Why do people come to counseling?

Students generally take on many roles and may encounter a great deal of stress (i.e. academic, financial, social, family, and work) while attending school. Some common concerns dealt with in counseling include:

- stress
- low self-esteem or confidence
- confusing and/or distressing feelings
- relationship problems
- poor academic performance
- issues related to disabilities
- recovery issues
- anxiety
- problems with eating and body image
- depression
- career exploration
- identity issues
- alcohol and substance abuse
- sexual assault/abuse/harassment

Personal Counseling

Counseling is a chance to talk confidentially with a licensed mental-health professional who can help you learn skills and new ways looking at and dealing with situations. Counseling is free to currently enrolled Wayne College Students. You can set up an appointment by stopping by the Smucker Learning Center or the Student Service Center, or by calling 330-684-8960 or 330-684-8900.