



## Love Starts Where You Are

by Karen Kral, M.A., LPC

[www.corequestpotential.com](http://www.corequestpotential.com)

What does it mean to love yourself? My understanding of love is that it is, first and foremost, a “turning toward” whatever is going on inside of you.

Love never happens by telling yourself that you should be thinking nicer, kinder, more loving thoughts about yourself or others. Nor does it start with shaming yourself for the addictive and unhealthy patterns you find yourself stuck in. Instead, love starts where you are. It starts with recognizing that you may not be having kind and loving thoughts, that you may be right-smack-dab in the middle of your painful coping strategies, and that you may not even want to love yourself in this moment. In fact, you may really, really, really want to be *right* about your situation--that you are the victim, that someone else is to blame, that you don't have choice, that you are unworthy or unlovable.

Can you be okay with this, at least while it is happening? Can you turn toward your unhealthy thoughts, feelings and behaviors with your curiosity? Can you simply turn toward anger or shame and say, “I see you”? Can you take it even just one tiny step further and say, “I see you and I am *here* for you?” If you can, well then, this is where love starts for you.

Whether what you are doing or saying in this moment is loving and helpful to you or unloving and harmful, by “turning toward yourself” with your awareness and curiosity, you create a friend inside of you instead of an enemy. You have chosen to embrace what you are feeling or doing rather than hide from it, condemn it, ignore it, or anesthetize it. You don't even need to “choose love” at this moment. Well, in a way, you already did. But, let's not tell the wounded self that, just yet. Instead, let the wounded self know she can go on being as mad or guilty as she wants to be. Let him know he can go on “checking out” on the internet. Really. Tell him that. He will be happy to know that he has choice here, and that you are not going to “control” him like everyone else in his life has tried to do!

Did you know that when you use your awareness to embrace a “negative” feeling or behavior that you actually raise your energetic vibration? You begin a healing process simply by turning your gentle attention toward, rather than away from, your feelings and your strategies. And your vibration goes up. Instantly.

Mind you, “turning toward” your feelings is different than letting your negative feelings swallow you up or allowing your unhealthy behaviors to take you over. By turning toward your feelings, you find the part of you that can actually see what you are doing. It is this part that can say, “Ah, this is what I am doing.” And, when you find this part, when you take one small step back from yourself--back just far enough so that this part of you can witness the feelings you are feeling or the coping strategy you are in--you actually simultaneously move toward self love and healing. Yes. It's that simple.

Try it if you don't believe me. The next time you feel stuck—and especially if you feel stuck in your Inner Bonding process—try just turning toward your stuckness. Instead of doing something to fix the problem, just take a small step back from yourself and watch what you are doing. Turn toward this part and say to it, “I see you and I am here for you.”

Maybe you are trying this now and saying, “Well *that* didn’t work! Now I’ve got a critical part of me jumping down my throat saying ‘This is stupid’, or ‘I must be doing it wrong’.” Well, that’s great. Really. I’m not joking. Why is it great? Because now you are in contact with another part of yourself, who is showing you that it also needs your attention. If you really want to know the truth, this part is jealous. In a round-about way, it is saying, “Do you see me, too? Do you see me, too?” So, now’s your chance. Turn toward it. Say, “Ah ha. Now I see you, and I’m here with you, too”. If another part comes up that says, “That’s dumb! You’re not here with anyone!”, well then, turn toward this part, too. Tell it, “Yes, I hear that you don’t believe that I am really here for you. Maybe you are right. But, I want you to know that even if I’m botching this all up right now, I still SEE you, and I’m trying to be here for you.”

As you can see, this “turning towards” thing can go on and on all day. Well, in a way, that’s the point. If you are new to taking care of yourself, you probably have a whole lot of voices inside that need to be heard. Can you turn toward them, one at a time--with nothing more than a simple acknowledgment that they are there? If you do this all day--with each judgment, each fear, each binge or purge, each drink, each rage, each self-loathing thought, each choice to make someone else more important than you, each dissociation, each intellectualization, each rush of anxiety, each self abandonment in any form—you will be practicing love right alongside your longtime practice of harming yourself. After a while, the love will simply take over. It is as simple as that. When you turn toward the voices, the strategies, the pain, and are willing to “see” them with your gentleness, they will transform. They will transform because your love has given them the space to just be. You have said to them, in an unspoken way, “You have the right to be here, just as you are.” This is love. It is spacious. It is gentle. And, it is subtle. Each moment offers the opportunity.

*Karen Kral is a licensed psychotherapist and offers workshops and retreats in the US and Europe. She lives in Colorado with her husband, Mark, who is also a certified facilitator of Inner Bonding®. Please check out [www.corequestpotential.com](http://www.corequestpotential.com) for information on events in your area.*