



Emotional Self-Care - Learning to Be Gentle with Myself

by Matt T.

When I first came into recovery, the idea of **emotional self-care** seemed almost backwards. After all, wasn't "self-love" part of what got me into trouble? Wasn't my problem that I was too selfish and self-centered? Didn't I need to be **hard** on myself, not gentle?

But over time, I've learned that recovery is a completely different way of treating myself — one that may feel counterintuitive, but is absolutely essential if I want to heal and grow.

Recovery Is Hard Work

Working through my addiction in SAA hasn't been easy. Recovery itself is hard work. Life and addiction both tear us down inside. They leave wounds that go deep — wounds from loneliness, failure, rejection, and shame.

In the past, I tried to handle this pain by numbing it. I used my addiction to avoid feeling anything at all. But there's a big problem with that: **I can't selectively numb**. When I numb pain, I also numb joy, gratitude, peace, and connection.

Now, recovery asks something different from me. It asks me to be willing and to surrender, rather than to muscle through by sheer willfulness and control. That's a new way of living. It's learning to **accept and let go**, to find the courage to face the truth — which, by the way, is not all bad.

Learning a New Kind of Strength

Real recovery requires strength. But it's not the old kind of strength I used to rely on — the kind that said, *"push harder, be tougher, never let them see you sweat."* This is a different kind of strength: the willingness to be vulnerable.

Step 1, for example, demands honesty and openness. It asks me to admit my powerlessness. That's an act of vulnerability. It's scary. But it's also what makes genuine connection possible.

I've come to see that my vulnerability is actually what makes me beautiful. When I'm willing to be real — to show my flaws, my hopes, my struggles — that's when I'm most able to connect with others. That's when compassion flows, both ways.

And compassion for others has to start with compassion for myself. Emotional pain is just as real as physical pain. If I broke my arm, I wouldn't berate myself for being weak. But with emotional wounds, I've often done just that. Recovery has taught me to treat my heart with more care.

Practicing Emotional Self-Care

So how do I actually do that? It's not complicated, but it does take practice. Here are some things I'm learning to incorporate into my daily life:

- **Practicing mindfulness.** Noticing my thoughts and feelings without judging them. Letting them come and go. Staying present, even if it's just for a few moments.
- **Being gentle and patient.** This doesn't come naturally. I have to remind myself that change takes time, and small steps count. Even five to ten minutes a day of quiet reflection makes a difference.
- **Taking my emotional pulse.** Checking in with how I'm feeling — not just what I'm doing. Writing in a journal. Pausing for gratitude.
- **Remembering that self-care gives me strength.** It's not selfish. It's what allows me to keep showing up for others, to keep doing the hard work of recovery, to keep facing the truth.

A Few Extra Encouragements

If you're looking for inspiration, there are a couple of TED talks I highly recommend:

- [Guy Winch, "Why we all need to practice emotional first aid."](#)
- [Brené Brown, "The power of vulnerability."](#)

Both speak powerfully about the importance of tending to our inner lives, of embracing imperfection, and of living more wholeheartedly.

In the End

I've discovered that learning to be gentle with myself is actually one of the bravest things I can do. It gives me the capacity to keep moving forward, to keep connecting with others, and to keep becoming more of my authentic self.

And for me, that's what real recovery is all about.