



Daily Practices

31 Days

Reflection &
Action



October is

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION
MONTH IN COLORADO**

Listen. Talk. Work it Out.

conflictresolutionmonth.org

1 Become mindfully aware

“To become mindfully aware of our surroundings is to bring our thinking back to our present moment reality and to the possibility of some semblance of serenity in the face of circumstances outside our ability to control.”

Jeff Kober

Changing your breathing can change your state of mind. A deep breath calms you down. Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. Throughout your day pause to be intentionally mindful. Take a deep breath. Become aware, with each of your senses, of where you are and what you're doing. Notice how this simple act impacts you.

“What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality.”

Plutarch

2 Experience the language of nature

“It is not the language of painters but the language of nature which one should listen to, the feeling for the things themselves, for reality is more important than the feeling for pictures.”

Vincent Van Gogh

Spend time in nature to become aware that you are part of nature and nature is part of you. Sit in the sun and note how your body feels and responds, what thoughts come to mind, and how your spirit relates in feelings. Sit in the same spot as the sun is going down. Does your body, mind and spirit respond differently? Sit in the same spot in the dark. Now how does your body, mind and spirit respond? As you visit different settings, different altitudes, and encounter different wildlife notice your feelings for each.

3 Challenge your favored image of yourself




“No one is immune to becoming defensive and shutting down when our favored image of our self is challenged.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

Does your view of yourself ever get in the way of being able to admit you're wrong? Be curious. Ask yourself questions like, “Why do I see myself the way I do? Is my view accurate? What causes me to become defensive and unable to admit when I'm wrong? Would my relationships change if I adopted the mindset, “I'm not okay, you're not okay, and that's okay?”

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

4 Find your authenticity



“We all have a better self we can reach for, but sometimes our anger, fear, stress, or exhaustion blocks us from doing so.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

Find wonder and awe again. Find your authenticity. Be truthful with yourself. Be compassionate toward yourself. Respect yourself. Schedule times to be alone with yourself to rediscover your authentic self.

“Children are filled with life, a sense of wonder, and the desires to explore or create and live in the moment. Children have no past baggage or future anxieties so they express what they feel and aren't afraid to love unconditionally... as children our self-worth came from our authenticity.

“After the age of 3, however...Something changes within us and we begin to lose that wonder, that innocence of childhood. Our thoughts become more dominant putting our authentic feelings in the background...With thoughts come fears, and suddenly our need to be accepted grows. Our self-worth is now put into the hands of other people and their opinions of us.”

*Mateo Sol,
Authenticity: Finding Your Soul Within the Dreams of Reality*

5 Conflicts within yourself

“The conflicts we have with the outside world are often conflicts we have within ourselves.”

Bryant McGill, Voice of Reason

“The most difficult thing in life is to know yourself.” Thales

Discover who you are at your core. You might start by asking yourself questions.

We are not talking about taking a personality test or learning your family history. Neither are we talking about your favorite colors, your best childhood friend or your high school prom experience (thank goodness).

We are talking about something much greater and of higher consequence. We are talking about who you are at your core, what most matters to you, what makes you come alive, what feeds your soul and what drains your spirit, and how to know the difference so you choose well as you move forward in life.”

*Prolific Living.com,
Get to Know Yourself: 29 Questions to Discover the Real You*

6 Our judgments of others exposes ourselves

“The best characters to play are the ones who have deep internal conflict.” George Blagden

How well do you know yourself? Are you aware of inner secrets and mysteries that lie hidden from your conscious awareness? These are the parts of us that don't fit our image of our ideal self, so we deny and suppress them, but they often reveal themselves through our judgments of others.

We strongly react to others when we see attitudes and behaviors in them that we deny and suppress in ourselves. These hidden parts are often the cause of conflicts. Make a list of the qualities that you strongly dislike or treat with contempt in others. Then, carefully and honestly look within to see if you have exhibited these same qualities. Simply owning and accepting these things in ourselves allows us to understand and accept them in others without judgment.

“Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict.”

William Ellery Channing

Are you a fascinating character who has deep internal conflict between your ideal self and your shadow self?

7 Affirmation

*"We may talk a good game
and write even better ones, but
we never outgrow those small
wounded things we were when
we were five and six and seven."*

Chris Bohjalian, Secrets of Eden

Our negative self-talk, the lies we tell about ourselves, tend to hinder us from living authentically, creatively and in intimate community. Take a sheet of paper, fold it in half, and on the left side write the self-limiting statements you've been saying and thinking about yourself. Then on the right side of your paper, next to each statement on the left side, write a new statement that transforms the negative one into a positive one.

If your positive statements feel like lies or impossibilities, instead of saying, "I am good at _____" say "I am getting better at _____" "I am acquiring knowledge and building skills to _____" Then destroy the list on the left side of your paper and post the list on the right side where you'll see it regularly. Anytime you become aware of playing an old message, stop and correct it. And then begin to affirm those around you, too.

8 Compassion and our shared humanity

"The world is perfect. It's a mess. It has always been a mess. We are not going to change it. Our job is to straighten out our own lives." Joseph Campbell

Practice: Look, notice, feel the mess inside and around you. Be mindful but not judgmental. Let your passion and compassion be roused. Accept the mess. Embrace the mess. Love the mess. Love yourself. Love your neighbor. Love the world. Love is not an emotion. Love is action. When our passion and compassion is roused, through acts of love we straighten out our own lives, and we encourage those around us to straighten out theirs, too. What acts of love can/will you do today to begin to straighten out one little mess today?

"Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity."

Pema Chodron

9 You deserve your love and affection

Many of us are all too used to bashing ourselves. In our society, we're taught that being hard on ourselves and ashamed of everything from our actions to our looks gets results. Self-criticism is the preferred path to success. We rarely think about showing ourselves kindness. Or if we do, we worry that doing so is selfish, complacent or arrogant.

Research has found that self-criticism only sabotages us and produces a variety of negative consequences... Self-compassion has been linked to greater well-being, including diminished anxiety and depression, better emotional coping skills and compassion for others.

According to Kristin Neff, Ph.D., associate professor in human development at the University of Texas at Austin, self-compassion consists of three components:

(1) Being kind, gentle and understanding with yourself when you're suffering.

(2) Realizing that you're not alone in your struggles...these very struggles are part of our shared experience as humans.

(3) Mindfulness—observing life as it is, without being judgmental or suppressing your thoughts and feelings.

*Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S.
5 Strategies for Self-Compassion, psychcentral.com*

10 Gain a broader view



“Of far greater value than diagnosing and labeling people is knowing their history and their stories, and having a solid theory about how anxiety and shame can drive good people to do bad things. ...gain a broader view and more objective understanding of family members, which includes recognizing their strengths and their vulnerabilities. We all have both.

Knowing the facts of family history over generations, achieving a wider historical perspective, and understanding the patterns and triangles in which we all participate, can change the meaning of a family member’s behavior. As we pull back and widen the lens setting, we temper our anger with compassion, even as we hold that person accountable for their actions.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won’t You Apologize

Make a list of habits, patterns of behavior, beliefs about yourself, relationship strategies, or anything else that comes to mind, that you believe you learned early on and is now causing you problems in your life. We can change when we become aware.

11 Grow into yourself through awareness

"...we can become so much more through awareness. ...If we understand ourselves, how we think and react, why we do things... Then we can think more constructively, act more usefully, do things more easily, become more of the person we really want to be deep down inside."

Julia Woodman

(1) Breathe into pain.

(2) Embrace the uncomfortable...lean into the feeling... Act in spite of fear.

(3) Engage and listen to your instinct, rather than making a list of pros and cons.

(4) Engage your shadow. Ask yourself if there is anything you're hiding from yourself. Shine your light on it.

(5) Follow your bliss—your higher calling. Trust your highest excitement. Let the pull take you in a new direction.

(6) Spend time alone, free from influences of other people. See where your thoughts take you. By opening yourself up to these new feelings, you'll add a whole new layer of depth.

(7) Get outside of yourself by being with others... Try to give them your full energy and attention so you can understand them just as you did yourself. Lose yourself in the beauty of others; see what they can teach you about yourself."

lifehack.org, article, 7-ways-open-your-heart-the-world

12 Accept reality, choose to let go

“Letting go means protecting ourselves from the corrosive effects of staying stuck. Chronic anger and bitterness dissipate our energy and sap our creativity, to say nothing of ruining an otherwise good day. If nonproductive anger keeps us stuck in the past, we can’t fully inhabit the present, nor can we move forward into the future with our full potential for optimism and joy. There is a difference between healthy anger that preserves the dignity and integrity of the self, and ruminative anger that wakes us up at three in the morning to nurse past and present grievances and drum up fantasies of revenge. The latter accomplishes nothing except to make us unhappy.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won’t You Apologize

Practice: Acceptance.

We need to accept the reality that sometimes the wrongdoer is unreachable and unrepentant—or perhaps long dead—and we have a choice as to whether we continue to carry the wrongdoing on our shoulders or not.

“There are countless resources out there to aid us with the process of letting go... Therapy, meditations, medication, yoga, religious and spiritual practices, exercise, writing and making art, breathing and relaxation exercises, and being useful to others, are just a few of the available paths... It’s worthwhile finding a concrete strategy, healing practice, or larger perspective... or a new way of thinking...”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won’t You Apologize

13 Be curious about why people do what they do

"We all want to suffer less, yet we may reflexively lock ourselves into ways of thinking that block us from resolution and letting go. Our longing for justice, the singularly human struggle to make sense of the other person's behavior, and our tendency to take things personally, are among the factors that may keep us from moving on."

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

Consider whether you have locked yourself into ways of thinking that block you from resolution and letting go of injustices, small or large.

"Don't take things quite so personally; unhappiness or insecurity can make people say stupid things. When other people act badly, it has to do with them, not with you... see people as more complex than their worst behaviors, to develop empathy, and to be curious about why people do what they do."

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

14 Make a conscious effort to pay attention

“The biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished.”

George Bernard Shaw


“No one would talk much in society, if he knew how often he misunderstands others.”

Goethe

We are prone to becoming distracted to other things going on around us or things going on in our own heads while others are speaking. We can improve our listening skills by practicing active listening. Make a conscious effort to pay attention, to hear not only the words, but the entire message that another person is saying. Ask questions. Restate what you heard.

Describe an experience when you made a conscious effort to pay attention, and an experience when you didn't.

15 Be willing to change first



“Under stress, people easily get polarized and divide into opposing camps. We get overfocused on what the other party is doing to us or not doing for us, and underfocused on our own creative options to move differently and de-intensify the situation. We want change but we don’t want to change first—a great recipe for relationship failure.”


Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won’t You Apologize

Focus Awareness. What are you focused on? Focus: a central point, as of attraction, attention, or activity.

“What you focus your attention on receives a flow of consciousness—of creative energy. Think of it as sunlight; wherever it shines in a garden there will be growth. This is true for flowers and weeds.”

Bill Phillips

16 Embrace a mindset of grace



“The natural instinct is to join in the chorus of conflict, to make your voice louder, your point bigger, and your position stronger. But we will not solve the significant and real problems our country faces if we cannot bring ourselves to embrace a mindset of grace.”

Betsy DeVos

Make a list of qualities or traits that you believe a mindset of grace includes and how you can adopt and include them in your interactions and communications with others.

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

Stephen R. Covey

“With the gift of listening comes the gift of healing.”

Catherine de Hueck Doherty

17 Our interpretation of circumstances and events

"...the capacity to take responsibility, feel empathy and remorse, and offer a meaningful apology rests on how much self-love and self-respect that person has available. We don't have the power to bestow these traits on anyone but ourselves."

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

"It's our interpretations that shape our responses to life and our futures. Circumstances and events don't shape us. We're shaped by the meaning or spin we give to those circumstances and events."

Matthew B. James, MA, Ph.D.

Reframing: a way of viewing and experiencing events, ideas, concepts and emotions to find more positive alternatives. For example, rather than perceiving unkindness, reframe it as lack of understanding.

"Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth." Marcus Aurelius

18 Softening our heart



“When the non-apologetic wrongdoer has never been accountable, our reactive brain excels in rehashing grievances. Our anger may be totally legitimate, but rather than leading to productive problem-solving, it just digs a big negative groove in our brain and disrupts our sleep.

If we soften our hearts toward the target of our resentment of hatred, or start letting the anger recede into the background, we may be confronted by a new set of challenges that we don't anticipate.

Sometimes it's easier to cling to old resentments, and continue to carry their full weight, than to put down the heavy load of resentment and hurt.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

Practice emotional validation. Emotional validation: the process of learning about, understanding and expressing acceptance of another person's emotional experience.

19 Become curious. About the other person.

"When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness."

Joseph Campbell

"...think about a tense, preferably ongoing dispute you have with someone. Maybe it's a co-worker... Maybe it's a family member... Whoever it is, you're used to them being wrong and you being right. You tend to even jump to disagreeing with them regardless of what they are arguing for..."

Now imagine the entire situation from that person's point of view. The person is probably not evil or an idiot. They might not even be wrong about whatever it is you disagree about... How does this person feel about how you respond to them when you disagree? What fears cause the other person to be tense and hard to reason with? How do you exacerbate those fears rather than calm them? What valid arguments could this person make against your views and your handling of the situation? What good intentions does this person hold? What are the positive motivations behind what you perceive as a negative outcome? Do you agree with the motivations? If so, are they more important than the specific conflict?

If you're like me, just going through this exercise... can greatly reduce your frustration and anxiety over some of the most stressful inter-personal situations.

Chad Fowler, Blog: Your Most Important Skill: Empathy

20 Listening without defensiveness

“Listening is an intensely active process, and one that comes far less naturally than talking.”

“There is no greater challenge than that of listening without defensiveness, especially when we don’t want to hear what the other person is telling us.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won’t You Apologize

Become aware of how you respond when you feel like you’re being criticized, attacked, or misunderstood. Does your body get tense? Does your breathing become fast and shallow? Do you get angry? Do you withdraw? Do you find it impossible to listen carefully? Do you interrupt and argue? Look for and experiment with ways to calm yourself so you can learn to concentrate on listening actively in even difficult situations. Take deep breaths. Focus on relaxing your muscles from the top of your head to the tip of your toes. Remove focus from yourself by becoming curious about the person confronting you and their perception of the situation that causes conflict. Listen to find something that you can agree with and apologize for your part in the conflict.

21

Quiet your mind, open your heart, ask questions



“Wholehearted listening requires us to quiet our mind, open our heart, and ask questions to help us to better understand... It requires us to get past our defensiveness when the critical party is saying things that we don’t agree with and don’t want to hear, and instead let her [his] voice and pain affect and influence us.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won’t You Apologize

Experiment to find a practice that works for you to quiet your mind and open your heart on a regular basis so that when conflict arises you have a plan to help you be present, in the moment, so you can make yourself available to be affected and influenced by another’s pain. Some options include meditation, yoga, breathing slowly and deeply from the abdomen, and journaling.

22 Become aware of how you respond to conflict

"We cannot choose our external circumstances, but we can always choose how to respond to them."

Epictetus

"People who are prone to anxiety are nearly always people-pleasers who fear conflict and negative feelings like anger. When you feel upset, you sweep your problems under the rug because you don't want to upset anyone. You do this so quickly and automatically that you're not even aware you're doing it."

David D. Burns

Consider how you respond to conflict. Are you aware of your pattern of dealing with or avoiding conflict?

"Cycles of attack, defense, and counterattack often dominate the action in a conflict...Listening past attack is not easy. Instead of hearing attack, listen for what people are really trying to say, even if they are saying it very badly... Focus intently on the why."

Dana Caspersen

From Changing the Conversation, The 17 Principles of Conflict Resolution

23 Self-worth and genuine accountability

“For an individual to look squarely at his or her harmful actions and to become genuinely accountable, that person must have a platform of self-worth to stand on. Only from the vantage point of this higher ground can people who have hurt others gain perspective and access empathy and remorse. Only from there can they look out at their less-than-honorable behaviors and apologize.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

“According to Christina G. Hibbert, PsyD, in her method for developing our true self-worth...the ‘Pyramid of Self-Worth.’ Instead of creating our sense of self by what we think, how we look, or what we do—self-esteem—we must first build our sense of self-worth by going deep inside, into our soul. The pyramid consists of these components:

- (1) self-awareness: seeing ourselves exactly as we are, including strengths and weaknesses.*
- (2) self-acceptance: accepting all these parts of ourselves.*
- (3) self-love: learning to appreciate ourselves as we are today and as we grow. This includes self-compassion, self-care and giving and receiving love.*
- (4) self-worth: by practicing the parts above, we start to feel our true worth. Self-worth is a lifelong process. Learning to like and love ourselves takes time, work and practice.”*

*Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S.,
PsychCentral, Practical Tools for Developing Your Self-Worth*

24 See mistakes as part of being human

Consider how you can enhance self-respect of others while accepting no excuses for their wrong-doing.

“The refusal to take on an identity defined by our worst deeds is a healthy act of resistance. If one’s identity as a person is equated with one’s worst acts, it can be impossible to accept responsibility or access genuine feelings of sorrow and remorse. To do so would destroy whatever remnants of self-worth a person had left.

As a therapist who has worked with serious offenders, I have helped men and women to resist the notion that their crime defines them. In treatment, a person can have the opportunity to begin to remember and share incidents in his life where he believed, felt, or acted in ways he could identify as good and honorable, whether a son, brother, husband, neighbor, or breadwinner. Only by enlarging the offender’s platform of self-worth might that person find his way to empathize with the pain the hurt party feels, apologize in a heartfelt way, and work to ensure that it will never happen again.

We have the best chance to reach people who do serious harm in treatment programs that do not label them as bad or sick, but rather enhance self-respect while accepting no excuses for violent behaviors.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won’t You Apologize

25 Criticize the behavior, not the person

"If you want to invite the other person to consider his behavior and offer an apology, remember the most basic rule of good communication. Criticize the behavior, not the person."

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

Become aware of how you think and speak. Are you critical? Will you commit to changing your thinking, from criticizing to asking for feedback?

"We don't criticize because we disagree with a behavior or an attitude. We criticize because we somehow feel devalued by the behavior or attitude. Critical people tend to be easily insulted and especially in need of ego defense."

Think of what you automatically say or think to yourself if you drop something or make a mistake. Critical people will typically think, Oh you idiot, or curse or sigh in disgust. If you do that to yourself, you most likely do it to others."

Criticism focuses on what's wrong; implies the worst about the other's personality; devalues; implies blame; attempts to control; is coercive.

Feedback focuses on how to improve; is about behavior, not personality; encourages; focuses on the future; respects autonomy; is not coercive. I know we can find a solution that works for both of us."

Steen Stosny, Ph.D.

From Psychology Today, What's Wrong With Criticism

Move away from blame, toward problem-solving

“Blaming obscures the mechanics of the conflict and keeps the focus on the past. It distracts us from finding out what happened and why and makes it much more difficult for people to talk constructively about difficult things.”

Looking at contributions, however, illuminates the mechanics of conflict in a way that orients our focus toward the future and toward functional solutions. This can be accomplished even with people who prefer adversarial interactions.”

Dana Caspersen

*From Changing the Conversation, The 17 Principles
of Conflict Resolution*

Become aware of your natural way of dealing with conflict. Be intentional about looking at contributions of everyone involved, including yourself, rather than blaming.

27 Reflection, observation, and personal growth



"If you shame someone in a lesser position of power, it can lead that person to conform, obey, and give the obligatory apology. But shame will not inspire reflection, self-observation, and personal growth. These are essentially self-loving tasks and do not flourish in an atmosphere of self-depreciation and self-blame.

We can apologize for what we do. We cannot apologize for who we are."

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won't You Apologize

"Self-observation requires practice and being present; it also engenders compassion for us and others through non-judgment. When we are "identified" with our habitual ways of thinking, feeling and behaving we are unable to be aware and self-observant because we think that we "are" the thoughts that float across the sky of our minds. This process of "attachment" binds us and causes suffering. Through compassion we are less likely to judge ourselves and others, thus creating a more open, expansive inner landscape from which we can be engaged in the world but not totally of it because of the self-observing faculty. Monitoring our thought-life enhances our experience of reality. In essence, when we practice self-observation we are becoming more aware of the "thinker" behind the thought. Who am I?"

Ron Esposito, Conscious Living Center

28 Celebrate diversity



“Appearance is something absolute, but reality is not that way - everything is interdependent, not absolute.”

Dalai Lama

Diversity is about learning to accept, appreciate and honor people from all different cultures, races, and creeds. Notice the diversity that surrounds you. Listen to music from a different culture, try a foreign restaurant, or read a book that explores a different culture.

“When we’re talking about diversity, it’s not a box to check. It is a reality that should be deeply felt and held and valued by all of us.”

Ava DuVernay

29 Become mindful of the powerless

“Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.”

Paulo Freire

Look, notice, feel the needs of the powerless. Ask, “What can I do?” If you can pray, then pray. If you can vote, then vote for those who have a heart for the powerless. If you can give, then give generously to those at ground zero who faithfully aid the powerless. If you can march to join a collective voice demanding change, then march. Go and do as the spirit in you leads.

“We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths; in feelings, not in figures on a dial. We should count time by heart throbs. He most lives who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.”

Aristotle

30 Creating mercy

"The same boiling water that softens the potato hardens the egg. It's about what you're made of, not the circumstances."

Unknown

"Embracing our brokenness creates a need for mercy."

I began thinking about what would happen if we all just acknowledged our brokenness, if we owned up to our weaknesses, our deficits, our biases, our fears. Maybe if we did, we wouldn't want to kill the broken among us who have killed others. Maybe we would look harder for solutions to caring for the disabled, the abused, the neglected, and the traumatized . . . We could no longer take pride in mass incarceration, in executing people, in our deliberate indifference to the most vulnerable."

Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy; Richard Rohr, Center for Action and Contemplation daily meditations

Practice: Consider your brokenness. Are there parts of your heart and mind and soul that are hard, needing to be softened? Are there parts that are soft, needing to be hardened? Will you embrace your brokenness and the world's brokenness and realize our collective need for mercy?

31 Proficient in the two most healing words

“I’m sorry” are the two most healing words in the English language.”

“When they are spoken as part of a wholehearted apology [empathizing with the pain the hurt party feels and follow up to ensure the offence will not happen again], these words are the greatest gift we can give to the person we have offended.

The apology is also a gift to our self. Our self-respect and level of maturity rest squarely on our ability to see ourselves objectively, to take a clear-eyed look at the ways that our behavior affects others, and to acknowledge when we’ve acted at another person’s expense.”

Harriet Lerner, PH.D., Why Won’t You Apologize

Give the gift of the two most healing words to the person you have offended, and at the same time give yourself the gift of self-respect.