

Love is ...

Mature love is union under the condition of preserving one's integrity, one's individuality. Love is an action, the practice of a human power, which can be practiced only in freedom and never as the result of a compulsion (passion). Erich Fromm

Loving yourself first:

1. If you accept your own idiosyncrasies, you will be accepting of those in others.
2. What you are able to do for yourself you will find easy to do for others.
3. If you can love yourself despite the inevitable mistakes you make, you will find it easy to feel compassion for the human-ness in others.
4. If you learn to be accepting and loving of others just the way they are, you will become more accepting and compassionate towards yourself.
5. When you can be aware of and accept your own struggle, the challenge to manage painful emotions, your good intentions, and the desire to do what you can to create a safe, happy and secure life, you will also see all of this in others, and have compassion for their journey also.

Recognizing and honouring boundaries:

6. Encourage others to develop a way and a will of their own just as you would want for yourself. Accept and promote the interdependence and autonomy of the other.
7. Choose to be with or even live with another, whilst still being quite able to live a full life and feel whole without the other. Recognize, respect and encourage the uniqueness and separateness of those you love.
8. Actively choose and intend to expand your boundaries to incorporate the world of the other person without trapping them or yourself in the process.
9. Allow yourself to support another's personal growth and journey without any personal gain. Hereby we allow the experience and feelings of another to permeate our own ego boundaries, whilst maintaining an awareness that we are separate from that other person, and not in control of their choices.
10. Expand and enlarge yourself and your boundaries to take in the experience of fully being with others, and ultimately, of feeling connected to all beings. To do this requires a strong sense of self, of identity, so that your ego boundaries can be totally and safely collapsed (such as during intimacy, or empathizing with another's pain) in the knowledge that we can erect them again whenever we wish and without being overwhelmed.

Being honest:

11. Be able to negotiate roles, preferences, needs or desires in a relationship despite the norms generated by familial, gender, social or other expectations. Allow yourself to expand to be who you really are, and not hide, deny, or diminish the person that you are when in relationship.

12. Be able to confront another with respect and humility; to take responsibility for expressing your concerns about that their actions towards yourself, and to do so as an equal knowing that your perspective is but one of many.

13. To offer respectfully both judicious giving and withholding - judicious praising, affirming and supporting, criticizing, arguing, confronting, and urging. This involves offering considered judgment, thoughtful and often painful decision-making, and facing the risk of speaking up.

Caring, accepting and honouring uniqueness:

14. Be fully aware that the other is a worthwhile person who is also a lovable and worthwhile person despite their mistakes or idiosyncrasies.

15. Be willing to empathize with another, to feel what they feel, to recognize, accept and respect the other's feelings and world view. Without this ability, intimacy is not safe and so not possible.

16. Allow the other to be who they are, however inconvenient that may be. To recognize, honour and accept difference unconditionally. (The only caveat here is that abusive, unsafe or disempowering behavior is not acceptable. Such behaviours contravene many of the points above.)

17. Allow the other person to express their fears, frustrations, frailties, and foibles, even when these might be directed at you. To know that what goes on for another need not be any sort of commentary about self.

18. Recognize that as a general rule women are more aware of their feelings, practiced at communicating them, and seek attachment more than men. Women express feelings of love and intimacy more than men do, and often do so verbally, which women do better than men. This does not make them superior.

19. In general, men are less expressive and attuned to their feelings. Their training is to be more autonomous and successful at work as a way to honour the relationship. This does not make them superior because they contribute in this way. Their offering can be just as valuable although perhaps not always expressed as easily through affection or intimate connection.

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A commitment to growth - theirs and yours:

20. Give full and undivided attention to those you love; the ultimate gift is to listen fully to those whom we love as an act of love. We express love to, and value those to whom we truly listen. Listening promotes growth of self-esteem, and self awareness.

21. Recognize that most women want their feelings heard as a priority, most men want their viewpoint taken seriously. Both feelings and viewpoints are best taken seriously, no matter how much these deviate from your own.

22. Commit to another's welfare, inviting their guidance about how best to support their development. To act in their support, remembering that genuine love is not just intentional, but behavioural. Love without action is empty.

23. Commit yourself to consistency in your relationship. This is essential for the growth of any human being at any stage of life. Consistency is the soil in which genuine love grows, because it provides safety. Commit to the long haul, despite the difficulty this may seem to present.

24. Know that true love involves spiritual growth and our evolution as humans, and may involve some unhappiness, loneliness and suffering. Loving is not always easy because it can be involve unpleasant feelings, exhaustion, or a focus on someone else.

25. Discipline your own behaviour in such a way as to foster the growth of others and minimize any experience that will hinder their opening and discovering. Indulgence in behaviours acquired in childhood will undermine love.

26. Have the courage and take the risk to discuss the needs of the relationship. Moving towards another always runs the risk that the other person will move away from us, perhaps leaving us more painfully alone than before. Love usually includes times of discomfort or even pain.

27. Support the other to make the journeys to peaks that can only be climbed alone. Often we can only hold a hand, and not lead the other to the places we would prefer they go. Love them despite the inconvenience of empowering choices.

28. Have the courage to step out from under the shadow of your conditioning and emotional reactivity. Self-love demands we think and act for ourselves, and take full responsibility whenever our buttons are pushed. This is a pre-requisite if we are to tread higher spiritual paths and manifest our love to many.

29. Love others so as to nurture your own self-love. The more you love, the more you will open to life, the larger you will become, the more complete you will get, and the more you will grow spiritually. This is without doubt the road less travelled.

30. A recipe for love with commitment includes the following ingredients:

<>1. Caring – empathy, warmth and the active concern for the life and growth of the other;

2. *Intimacy* – the ability to share hopes, dreams, concerns, needs, values, and the emotional well-being of the other.

3. *Responsibility* - an ability and willingness to respond to the needs of ourselves and others;

4. *Respect* - for another's uniqueness, individuality, and their journey;

5. *Understanding* - the struggle of another, noticing the parallel to our own struggle, and having compassion and empathy for this process.

6. *Commitment* – the determination to make it work, and to hang in, knowing that difficulties occur in all relationship, and that the perfect relationship doesn't exist.

7. *Honesty* – knowing that you're not perfect either, and that relationship is the interface between two people both of whom have issues to work through, and that these require constant attention.