

Coping with College Series

In Search Of Self

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When you were young, knowing who you were was easy. You were Ray's daughter, Tanya's brother; you were going to be a gymnast; your favorite color was blue. But identity rarely stays that simple. Certainly by the time you entered school, you probably struggled with how to define yourself. You may have been "the football star," "the band geek," or the shy kid that no one noticed. You might have defined yourself by the group of people you hung out with, or you might have felt like you never "fit in" and were always searching for your self and your place.

This search for self continues during college. College is a big time for self-exploration. Most students are still experimenting with who they are and are constantly evaluating themselves.

It's hard work. And it's especially hard if you have looked to others to validate your worth, or based your self worth on achievement. Unfortunately, many of today's standards are unrealistic, exaggerated, and impossible to meet. If you do not have a strong sense of who you are as a person, you are extremely vulnerable to these messages about the importance of appearance, achievement, and money. The truth is, there will always be someone who is thinner, getting better grades, more popular, exercising more, eating healthier, or someone who is a better friend. And there will always be pressure to do more than you can do. So how can you fight back?

One way is to practice self-acceptance. Self-acceptance is feeling compassion for who you are NOW. It is an agreement with yourself to appreciate, validate, accept and support who you are at this very moment, even the parts you would like to change. Yes, you can accept those parts of yourself you would like to change. How? First, take a hard look at your expectations. What are your standards based on? Are they reasonable, or do they reflect unrealistic expectations by the media or someone else? Next, identify specifically what you do not accept about yourself and ask yourself why you refuse to accept this part of yourself. Finally, understand that you are doing the best you can at this given time. The greatest gift we have is that time brings change. Be patient; perhaps you will be able to change, or perhaps you will have to accept yourself just the way you are.

If there is a part of your life that you are not happy with please contact Student Counseling Services at 438-3655. There are people who can help you learn to value yourself now. Remember that you are not alone in your search to find yourself, and that you do not have to define yourself by other's standards. Start now by making your own definitions of who you are based on what feels good to you. You have a choice.