

Loving Someone For Who They Are And Still Making Requests

LaShelle Lowe-Charde

The idea of loving someone for who they are is a slippery concept. It presupposes a shared reality regarding the definition of “who” that is very difficult to come to intrapsychically, much less interpersonally. When someone says, “Love me for who I am,” they are likely expressing a wish for acceptance without sharing what that means to them. Do they want more celebration of their eccentricities? Do they want more compassion for the challenges they face? Do they want more shared activities? It’s helpful to be curious about what would contribute to their need for acceptance.

When requests for change are met with “love me for who I am” it might also denote a lack of emotional security within them or within the relationship. For our purposes here, it is essential to understand that you can contribute to someone’s need for acceptance or emotional security and still make requests for changes in behaviors. This is because your requests are about you, not about them. Requests are an invitation to contribute to your needs in specific ways.

Hearing “love me for who I am” in response to requests, you could consider at least two basic responses. One is to offer empathy and curiosity about what is happening for them when they express this. You can attempt to gain understanding about how to contribute to greater acceptance and emotional security in the relationship.

The other is to clarify that the request is about your needs and what really works for you and that you are truly making a request not a demand. It’s also important to clarify how important this request is to you and how negotiation could look. There are, of course, deal breakers for particular relationships. Providing clarity about what this is for you gives the other person an opportunity to opt in or out. It offers respect for their choice.

Tragically, even though the other person may have the desire to say yes to your requests, they might not have the resources and skills. When this goes unnamed, reactive dynamics like gas-lighting, minimizing, criticizing, defensiveness, and fear about requests may appear.

As you make requests in your relationships the following might help you stay grounded in the validity of your experience and needs:

1. You can love someone for who they are and still make many requests to have your needs met in new or different ways. If they are responsive, the two of you can learn to love and support each other in ever more subtle and deep ways.
2. You can love someone for who they are and know that a particular form of relationship may not be a fit for the two of you.
3. You can also love someone for who they are and make many requests that are really asking for more personal growth or vulnerability than they can access at that time. Understanding this you can let yourself grieve and lovingly leave the relationship in

its current form or examine whether there is a way you can thrive in the relationship without this change.

4. Your ability to love someone is not in conflict with your hope for personal growth or behavioral change.

Practice

Take a moment now to bring to awareness a relationship in which you want to see a specific change in the other person's behavior. Practice going back and forth in your awareness between connection with your need and desire for change and your love for the other person that goes beyond what happens or doesn't happen.

I often see folks suffering from this kind of confusion. You can get confused here in at least two basic ways.

Here's the first: You have peak experiences with someone. There is an enticing chemistry. There is a particular way this person can see you that you haven't experienced before. You share a passion together like art, music, spiritual practice, or a love of nature. There are moments when everything drops away to reveal love. You imagine that one or more of these things is enough to sustain your relationship.

These experiences are an important part of a lasting partnership. Unfortunately they are not enough to sustain a relationship long term. There is the practicality of daily life. Here you need to have some basic things in common like lifestyle values (e.g., daily priorities, how to handle money, long term goals, relationship to stuff and home, use of mood altering substances, etc.) and some sense of agreement about how to handle difficulty. You can deeply love someone, yet if these things are not in place the road ahead will likely be very difficult.

For the second basic confusion, you have some of the peak experiences listed above, and you even have in common many lifestyle values, and yet there is something major missing. There is some way you want your partner to show up that she or he isn't.

Often this has to do with a level of vulnerability or personal growth. You see so much potential in your relationship and in this person. You keep making requests of him or her hoping you can bring forward this potential or this willingness to be more vulnerable. You have the sensation of longing and sometimes pulling at them. They may be saying things like, "You want me to be someone I'm not." Or they may attempt to make you the problem, saying that you have too many needs or that you ask too much and that you should just be happy with the way things are.