

Love Them As They Are How to Love Unconditionally

By Patricia Morgan

We all crave unconditional love. That's what Gloria Steinem, a leading feminist, shared in her book, *Moving Beyond Words*. It took her years to figure out what was missing from her life. She wrote, "The need for supporting core self-esteem doesn't end in childhood. Adults still need unconditional love from family, friends, life partners, animals, and perhaps even an all-forgiving deity. 'No matter how the world may judge you, I love you for yourself.'"

But what is unconditional love? It's the care of a newborn baby as her parents awake night after night. It's the offer of shelter to a homeless person. It's the tail wagging on your dog. Our dog provided no household help, required regular walks, was fed and loved for *just being*. Sure, she was reprimanded for her "accidents", but her unique loveliness was never questioned. Regrettably, many people, including children, are not given the same message of irreplaceable value.

To love unconditionally is to give love for no other reason than this person, this being, this child of yours, is believed to be lovable.

Now we've moved into a psychological, maybe spiritual realm. Bear with me. The basic premise is that all beings are lovable and valuable. Yes, even those who break the law. I've written about that in my book, *Love Her As She Is*. Loving *as is* provides the underpinning concept.

You may be muttering, "But I have a hyperactive pre-schooler," or "I'm living each day challenged by an uppity teen." Yes, and you can love them "as is." My invitation is for you to separate the doer from the deed. This separation requires you to have obvious and stated rules and expectations of behaviors. This helps the child and you decide where your disappointment, frustration and sometimes anger are directed...towards the *act* and not the *being*. Here's a formula for loving unconditionally while maintaining clear limits.

1. Be clear in your *conditional* messages about rules and expectations. Clarify acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.
2. Encourage and support cooperation for acceptable behaviors. What you focus on expands.
3. Use some of the following phrases to reinforce the idea of, "You are capable and I like what you do."

- I like your decision.
 - Making mistakes is OK.
 - I like how you remembered.
 - I appreciate your honesty with me.
 - I saw you make a wise decision.
 - I liked how you told your brother you felt frustrated.
4. Carry through with previously established and age-appropriate consequences for unacceptable behaviors.
5. No matter how challenging the child's behavior, at the end of each day express some **unconditional love**. Give messages that express, "You are loveable."
- We had a rough day and I love you.
 - I care for you . . . no matter what.
 - I see you. I hear you.
 - I'm glad you are my child.
 - Whatever you feel is OK.
 - I am here for you.
 - I love you, dear. Yes, I do!

Patricia Morgan is a counselor and speaker who helps parents and others lighten their load and brighten their outlook. She has authored *Love Her As She Is: Lessons from a Daughter Stolen by Addictions*, *She Said: A Tapestry of Women's Quotes* and four upbeat booklets