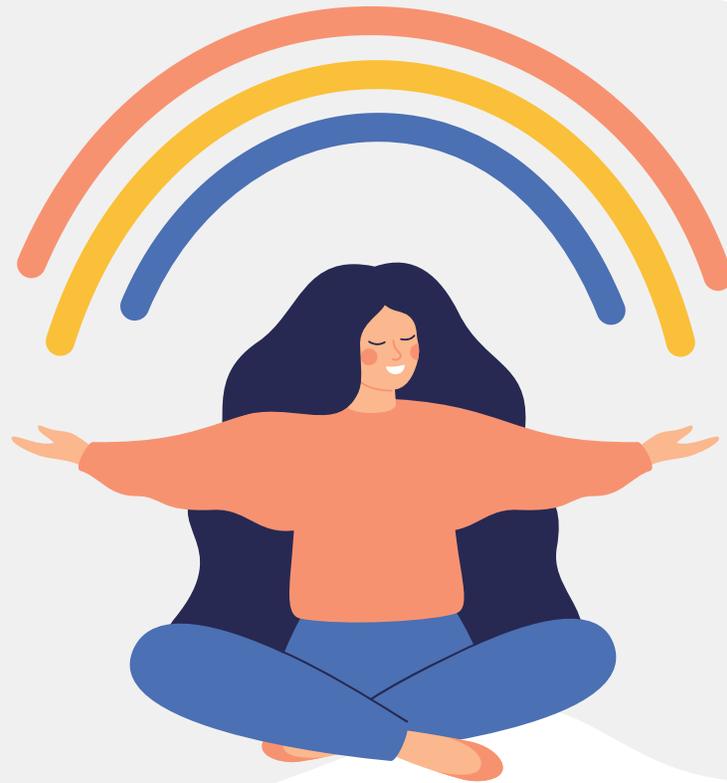


# Your Toolkit for **Self-Acceptance** and Positive Change in

**2024**





# Make this the year to just be you.

Instead of making resolutions...resolve to accept yourself as you are.

Instead of setting big, aspirational goals...focus on small steps that you know you can achieve.

Instead of striving to be your best self...recognize all the good stuff you're already bringing to the world.

Instead of trying to completely transform your life...identify what's working right now and what you want to change.

In this toolkit, we offer exercises and approaches designed to support you in being okay with exactly where you are right now—because embracing *what is* is the first step in moving forward to *what's next*.

This year, we invite you to make a different kind of resolution: to minimize stress and striving, and maximize joy and meaning.





## ➤ Practice Self-Acceptance

When you practice self-acceptance and self-compassion, you extend the same kindness and unconditional love to yourself as you would to a friend or loved one.

Research shows that self-acceptance and self-compassion are more important for happiness than self-esteem. People who are compassionate to themselves and accept themselves, just as they are, are much less likely to be depressed, anxious, and stressed, and much more likely to be happy, resilient, and optimistic about their future.

Kristin Neff is one of the best-known researchers on the topic of self-compassion and how it enhances well-being. The exercise below is adapted from her work.

## ➤ A Self-Compassion Exercise

Try this when you find yourself thinking critically about yourself or talking negatively to yourself.

1. Pause and notice what the emotions feel like in your body. Recognize that this is a moment of stress, discomfort, and suffering. You might want to put words to the feelings, like, *This hurts. Ouch. This is stress.*
2. Consider this truth: Suffering is a part of life. You are not alone. Other people experience this, too. All humans struggle at times.
3. Put your hands over your heart. Feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch of your hands on your chest.

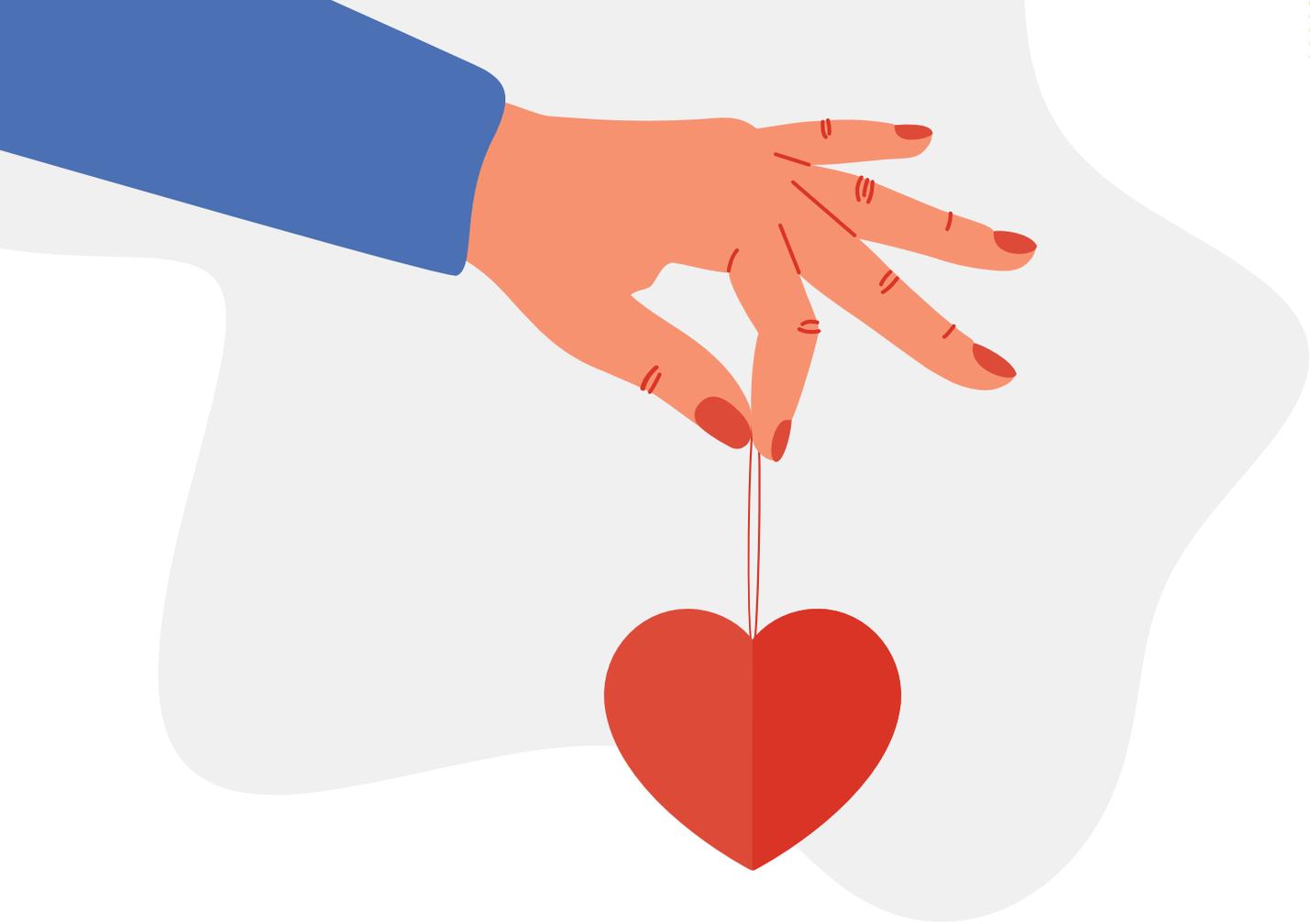
Ask yourself, *What do I need to do or hear right now to express kindness to myself?*

### **You can try saying a phrase to yourself**

- *May I give myself the compassion that I need*
- *May I learn to accept myself as I am*
- *May I forgive myself*

This practice can be used any time of day or night, and will help you access self-compassion and self-acceptance when you need it most.





## Recognize What's Working

Have you ever noticed that negative events, interactions, and feelings stick with you more than the positive ones? That's because of the negativity bias.

The negativity bias refers to the fact that people are more likely to pay attention to negative emotions and experiences vs. positive ones. Researchers believe this bias developed as part of human evolution, to protect us from threats in our environment. To survive in the jungle, for example, people needed to be alert to tigers, poisonous spiders, and other dangers.

Negativity bias serves a purpose—but it also undermines our worldview and our self-worth. It makes us more likely to seek out and believe negative information about ourselves and the world around us.

What if you tried focusing on the positive instead of the negative? Studies show that the more we recognize and savor the good things in our life, the more they multiply. Positive psychologist Tal Ben-Shahar puts it like this: “What we appreciate, appreciates.”





**To help you focus on what's working well in your life, complete these sentences:**

I feel best about myself when \_\_\_\_\_

My family and friends appreciate me for \_\_\_\_\_

I flourish when \_\_\_\_\_

What makes me strong is \_\_\_\_\_

I'm excited about \_\_\_\_\_

I feel most relaxed when \_\_\_\_\_

**Three of my biggest strengths are:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Five things that went well this week were:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Five things that make my life great are:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_





# Reach Meaningful Goals Step by Step

Studies show that most people give up on their New Year's resolutions just a few weeks in. That's partly because we tend to set unrealistic expectations and goals. We set out to do too much in too many different areas of life, and quickly give up because the tasks we've set for ourselves are so daunting.

Another reason resolutions fail is because we tend to use others' achievements as a guide instead of examining our real desires and motivations. We strive toward an idea of what will make us more likable or impressive, rather than what really matters to us.

Our goals are most meaningful when they're connected to our deepest values and the things that make us happiest. And we are more likely to achieve those goals when we anticipate potential obstacles and create a plan to overcome them.





## ➤ 5 Steps Toward Making Positive Change

### Step 1: Identify a Goal for 2024

- What small or big change do you want to work toward this year?
- What will it look like and feel like when you achieve it?
- What will be different in your life when you reach this goal?

### Step 2: Identify the “Why” for Your Goal

- What motivations and values underly this goal?
- What makes it personally meaningful for you?
- What beliefs do you hold that align with this goal?

### Step 3: Choose the First Action

- Identify one clear, specific, manageable action step you can take toward your goal. “Manageable” is key here—make sure this is something you can really do, right away.
- If you wish, plan the action steps that come after that first step. Or, if you prefer, wait until you’ve taken this first step before you map out the next ones.

### Step 4: Make a Plan

- Think about the emotional and practical obstacles you may encounter as you take this step toward your goal.
- What will make it easier for you to take this step?
- What would make it more fun and enjoyable?
- What would make it more meaningful?
- Can you set aside a specific time for it, every day or every week?
- Is there someone who can support you in taking this step, by doing it together or by keeping you accountable?





## Step 5: Reassess as You Go

- As you take your first steps toward your goal, set aside time to observe how it's going. You might want to journal about it or make notes. What's working well? What could be adjusted?
- If progress has been slower than you'd hoped, practice self-acceptance and self-compassion. Remember that failure is part of growth, and that you are not alone: Making change is difficult for all of us.
- To address challenges, go back to Step 4 to consider ways to make this action step more fun and effective.
- To strengthen your motivation, go back to Step 2 and remind yourself of your "why" for this goal. Is it still important to you? Is this where you want to focus your energy? Maybe taking the first step has made it clear to you that this isn't the direction you ultimately want to go in. If so, that's great! You've learned something important about yourself and about what you want.



# More About PrairieCare

## ➤ Providing Hope and Healing

At PrairieCare, we believe that mental illness is real, common, and treatable. Our programs and services span the full continuum of care, knowing that each patient has unique experiences, life stages, and set of needs. Whether a patient needs perinatal psychiatric care or managing anxiety in school, our clinicians are accredited and trained to help. We support patients during their time with us and create sustainable outcomes for them to reach their goals.

## ➤ We Treat

- Depression and suicidal ideation
- Anxiety disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Trauma and PTSD
- Neurodevelopmental disorders
- Disruptive behavior disorders
- Mood and personality disorders
- Co-occurring disorders

## ➤ We Offer

- Clinic & Outpatient Services
  - Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)
- Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)
  - Pregnancy and Postpartum Mental Health
- Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP)
  - Healthy Eating and Living (HEaL) Program
- Inpatient Hospitalization Program
- Residential Treatment Program



# Call us or visit our website

to access more resources and support  
for children, adolescents, and adults.

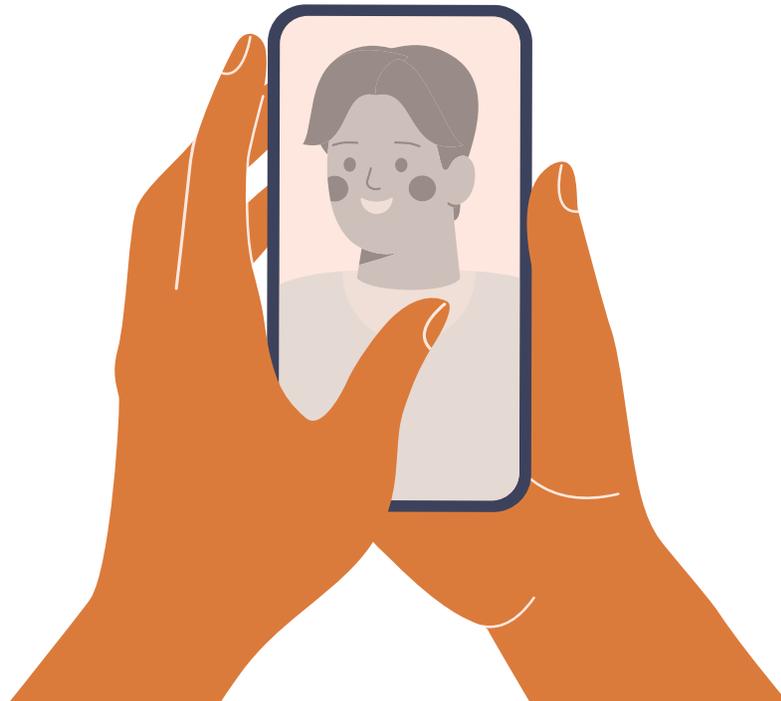


## PrairieCare

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