

10 ways you can build and protect your identity

How to be yourself



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How can we truly be ourselves?

Our personal identity is our sense of who we are, what matters to us and how we feel about ourselves. Our ability to build, nurture and protect it has a significant bearing on what we get from our lives and our experience of them. It is particularly important to have this ability when we live in a complex world, full of choices and with many influences acting on us, where it can sometimes be a challenge to stay happy with who we are and maintain a clear sense of our genuine needs and wants, rather than those that other people are trying to instill in us. A strong sense of identity gives you a secure place from which to deal with the world around you – a set of judgements and instincts you can trust. You can also return to this place whenever you like to remind yourself of who you are, what your qualities are and of what makes you happy. The poster on the other side of this leaflet outlines 10 steps you can take to build and protect your identity. Check out the Life² website for more ideas and links to organisations that can help you to live a happier, wiser and more meaningful life – www.lifesquared.org.uk.

1. Get some perspective

Take some time to stand back from your life and learn about your place in the universe around you. Gaining this type of perspective can help us keep a grip on reality, put a more realistic spin on our problems and worries, make us feel part of a bigger picture (whether it is human beings, the natural world or the universe generally) and give us a more modest sense of our own self-importance.

2. Know yourself

Try to develop an honest sense of what you are really about, including what makes you happy and fulfilled, what makes you unhappy or uncomfortable, what your priorities are in life and how you really want to live. Don't judge yourself on your choices – just be honest.

3. Be happy with yourself

An important ingredient in your flourishing is learning to be happy with yourself (or at least accepting who you are). This includes accepting our natural tendencies, qualities and physical features and realising that we are neither perfect nor imperfect – we are just ourselves. It also means seeing the best in ourselves and making the best of ourselves.

4. Be kind to yourself

You have enough to deal with in life, and the last thing you need is to attack yourself with self-doubt, negative thoughts, or other self-destructive thinking, such as dwelling too much on what people think of you. If you find these self-defeating thoughts emerging, remind yourself to be a friend to yourself!

5. Be yourself

Trust yourself and be comfortable with your judgements and choices unless you have good reason not to – stay open

and minded but resist attacks to your identity. This will help you to live on your own terms, rather than feeling you have to follow others, for example in deciding the pace you want to live your life at. Don't be afraid to be yourself and to let yourself flourish.



6. Show resilience

When you encounter adversity or major challenges, see them in a wider context. Remind yourself that you are not alone in your situation or the goals you are trying to achieve, and that continued effort and a positive attitude will eventually pay off – the adversity you are going through may eventually subside and the efforts that you are putting in will make a difference.

7. Speak up for yourself

Get into the habit of speaking up when you feel the urge to. This could cover a range of scenarios, from challenging someone's opinion in a meeting through to sending back something in a

restaurant if it is not right. Speaking up like this in a polite and positive way feels good, as we feel more in control of our lives. You could try this with a small step initially, such as asking a stranger for directions. Then, once you've seen how good it feels, you'll feel able to speak up more often.

8. Think critically

When you receive any external message – whether it is someone's opinion, a newspaper report or an advertisement, think about whether you want to accept it or not. You may decide to ignore it because you don't feel the topic is important or because you feel its view of a topic is too biased. If a particular message is too biased, get a more balanced view of the topic by exploring messages from different sources with different perspectives (for example, looking at the same story in other newspapers) or by finding a source you can trust before you make a judgement.

9. Find some trusted sources of information

No source of information is completely unbiased, but it is possible to build a selection of trusted sources (such as newspapers or websites) that can summarise and filter some of the complexity in the world for you. By finding these sources and understanding their biases, you can build a useful resource to help you deal with the complexity of the world on an ongoing basis.

10. Find sources of support

When you can, spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself, who understand you and who like and respect what you're about. When you're not with them, draw support from these friendships and the positive sense of self that you get from them.