

# Acceptance

*By: Donalee Gastreich*

## How to accept things

Acceptance can be a confusing word. Some things get called “unacceptable” because they are clearly bad in some ways. And yet if you allow such events or behavior to bother you then someone wise will inevitably turn around and say something like “You need to accept it”.

How can you accept anything that might be considered “unacceptable”? I believe the answer is to look at acceptance as the ability to develop a more positive or less negative attitude towards something, even when it isn’t good for you or isn’t ethically acceptable.

I always remember the Serenity Prayer - God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference. I use to always call it to mind, but I don’t believe I really understood it. In this lesson I will share with you the most complete explanation of this prayer to aid you in full understanding.

Here are 16 ways to accept things.

### **1. Support yourself through the learning process**

Your initial reaction may be to think that acceptance is anything from difficult to impossible. It’s good to empathize with yourself by seeing that as entirely natural and understandable. It’s not a crime to find acceptance challenging so allow yourself to feel the way you do and relax about it.

Acceptance is not something that can ever be forced. You may need to approach it in several stages and it’s normal to feel overwhelmed by the initial challenge. The story of learning how to accept things always begins with not being able to accept them and then finding ways to do so.

The path to feeling very peaceful often requires moving “two steps forward, one step back” and may involve the occasional freak-out along the way. Whenever you feel stressed, you can calm yourself by having a break from thinking, allowing yourself to breathe and focusing on physical relaxation.

***“I can do this!” “I will do this!”***

You could even try to visualize how that acceptance might look. Picture yourself in the future, years from now, in a very peaceful and safe place far from your existing environment. The sun is shining, there’s a very pleasant gentle breeze in the air and you’re feeling calmer about everything.

You have moved onto a whole new phase of your life. Nothing matters anymore but you can still look back at what used to bother you and acknowledge that it was hard to accept at the time, if you chose. Now you simply shrug your shoulders, smile gently and say “That was then”.

This is now.. So for now, just be kind, patient and understanding with yourself. Let the process take as much time as it needs to but be sure that everything will gradually get easier. You will eventually see things very differently and feel much calmer about everything.

## **2. See things for what they really are**

The next step is to acknowledge what you're actually dealing with. When bad things happen a lot of people say "I just can't believe it!", "I can't understand why it's like that!" or even "This can't be happening!" This may be a sign that they are refusing to face what's really going on.

It's easy to lose touch with reality. For example, sometimes we imagine people to be so wonderful that we're then shocked to discover they also have their flaws and limitations. Or we think of them as so manageable that they surprise us with problems that we have no idea how to handle.

We invest so much hope and energy into situations that we start believing they "need to work out". We get carried away by what we imagine, idealize or expect and create a bubble of self-delusion that's just waiting to burst. That's when it helps to see things as they really are.

***"It is what it is, nothing more and nothing less"***

There's a danger of complicating the acceptance of simple facts. For example, if I show you a blue chair then it simply is blue and there's no point denying it. You can accept that it is blue without needing to understand why it is blue or asking why it cannot be some other color when blue is what it already is.

The situation you're in simply is what it already is. That's the only way it can be right now in this moment. Most situations are a mix of good, bad and weird. Sometimes, it's worth reminding yourself of anything that's still good about it as well as admitting if what you "can't believe" is true.

People sometimes lie to themselves about what's going on but it's important to see each situation for exactly for what it is rather than resisting the facts. Ask yourself precisely what you're struggling to accept rather than hanging onto the way it was or how you imagined it was meant to be.

## **3. Take things less personally**

There's often a temptation to react as if we are a victim of circumstances that could never happen to anyone else but nothing is as personal as it seems. What happens has little to do with us or how we feel about it and the way people behave has more to do with what's going on inside them.

***"I could take this personally but it's just not worth it!"***

Bad things happen to awesome people every day because life is crazy and ultimately beyond anyone's control. At some point, we all experience a run of bad luck exacerbated by people's weaknesses and limitations. It's a test of learning that sometimes involves grieving and a recovery process.

#### **4. Don't confuse acceptance with a statement of preference**

Some people wrongly believe that when you accept something you are actively supporting it over some other option of how it could be. They almost feel a "need" to become emotionally disturbed just to prove a point about what they don't prefer, even if the alternative is not a realistic option.

It's good to be clear that acceptance is not a statement of ethical endorsement or personal preference. When you accept something, you're not saying it couldn't be better or that you wouldn't change it if you had the right to choose how it was. You've simply realized the following.

***"It's not for me to decide these things"***

Acceptance doesn't indicate a "for", "against" or even a "neutral" position about how something would be in an ideal world. You're simply allowing it to be as it already is without imagining that you have a right or responsibility to change it, control it or insist on how it might be otherwise.

#### **5. Get used to the way things actually are**

Imagine if you talked to some trusted people who said "Come on, we've all had to deal with that kind of thing before!" You'd be more likely to say "Okay then, I can probably deal with it somehow". Eventually, you may say "I'm over the shock of it" and to view your situation as manageable.

If you get annoyed, angry, anxious or depressed every time you come across a reminder of the same fact then there's a good chance that you haven't got used to it being that way or fully accepted the way it is as a "fact of life" or necessary aspect of living in the real world.

***"Many things stop being awful once you get used to them and learn how to handle them"***

People have a proven ability to gradually desensitize themselves and rise to all kinds of challenges. A bomb disposal expert might see a ticking grenade on a weekly basis and consider it a non-event. So even how "out of the ordinary" something seems is always a point of view rather than a fact.

You can't force yourself to normalize what may have freaked you out. But you might start thinking of it as "less weird" or "less crazy" than you initially thought. You can get

more comfortable with the fact that “these things happen” or that “stranger things have been known to happen”.

## **6. See acceptance as the ability to relax around things**

Acceptance “of” something really means calmness “towards and regardless of” the way it is. In order to be happy, you may need to achieve a peaceful state of harmonious coexistence with everything despite some things being flawed or different from what you might expect. You could say:

*“Well, it’s not great but I can still be okay”*

It’s possible to remain totally at peace with something even when you’re able to acknowledge that it’s bad for you in some ways.

Accepting it means:

- Not punishing yourself over how bad it is
- Letting go of the habit of reacting to it
- Not being that interested in how bad it is
- Not expecting or needing anything from it
- Not focusing on agreeing or disagreeing with it
- Feeling very calm and comfortable around it
- Simply allowing it to be the way it already is
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It can take a lot of practice to relax around things that are not good for you but it’s worth doing that because it’s a form of self-control that allows you to deal with everything calmly. In the long term you are learning to say “I can be happy not with this or because of this but in spite of this”.

It may even help to identify particular psychological “allergies” or “triggers” that challenge your peace of mind so that you can work on becoming a more accepting person. For example, if I panic whenever anyone gets angry then it might help me to get used to increasingly seeing that as “no big deal”.

## **7. See acceptance as something you do for yourself**

When you accept something, you simply allow yourself to feel okay rather than having some pointless allergic reaction to what’s bad about it. Your acceptance is a commitment to your own well-being and to the avoidance of self-punishment in response to the way anything is.

This is why it’s well worth learning how to accept things. What you’re doing has very little to do with the specific thing you’re actually accepting. When something gets annoying you might even say:

*“I’m going to do myself a massive favor and not care about this too much”*

All you're doing there is refusing to beat yourself up about it. You're avoiding some unnecessary state of internal resistance that drains your energy by creating stress and negative emotions that are only going to make your life more unpleasant. Acceptance is the ability to be as relaxed and happy as possible by minimizing any anger about what can't be changed anyway. It's something you do for your own peace of mind. It's something you can practice even if you're also interested in trying to positively influence the world around you.

## **8. Recognize that something good comes out of acceptance**

When you stop fighting the way things are and start being more relaxed about everything, you will often experience some positive surprises, such as learning how things work or having an improved ability to respond constructively. And so it's worth embracing the old slogan:

***“Every cloud has a silver lining”***

For example, a person may struggle for months about being harshly rejected by their friend. But one day they wake up and stop resisting the fact that it happened. They start thinking “Maybe it doesn't need to be such a bad thing that this ‘bad thing’ happened?”

And suddenly, boom! They realize

that a kind friend would never have treated them so harshly. They're actually better off without them so it doesn't have to be a tragedy at all. They learn that losing false friends is like losing weight: nothing to be sad about unless you're a sumo wrestler. A lot of people who accept what's difficult come to say something like: “In a strange way, I needed to have that experience in order to learn the positive lessons I've now gained from life”. The more you accept things the more you learn about yourself and about life's mysteries.

## **9. See your perceived challenges as part of a story that is super cool in some ways**

Imagine if you were half-way through watching a movie and someone in the cinema stood up and shouted out “Hey that's so unfair! I can't believe that just happened!” Anger and despair are a bit like that response. They involve having an unnecessary problem with the story you've been given.

***“It's supposed to be like that! I'm willing to handle it”***

You can learn how to accept things, even though they're “bad” or “wrong”, by looking at them as part of the fascinating story of your life. Your role in the story could be that of a soldier, survivor, student of life, amused onlooker, detached observer or hero rather than the eternally helpless victim.

When things go wrong we often think of a story coming to a sad ending. But a better way to look at such situations is as the preceding chapter to a new and very different story that is yet to be written. What we thought of as “the story” was merely a prelude to another story that does not have to be sad.

### **10. Recognize that flaws belong to the nature of things**

If a poodle jumps up and bites your hand you may get angry for a minute but the little dog probably won't have to get down on its knees and beg your forgiveness. You already know how to accept its behavior because you see it as being in the dog's nature to do things like that.

A lot of people's behavior can also be accepted as part of their limited nature. There's no point wanting them to do things that are “out of character” for them so it's often better to allow them to be the way they are and do what they tend to do, even though some of it may be bad in some ways.

A lot of people are like dogs in the sense that they bark but rarely bite. A dog cannot help barking and that may be a little unpleasant to hear. But it is only an annoying sound and it will only harm you if you refuse to accept that barking is a normal part of that dog's behavior. You learn to say:

*“Ah that's okay, that's just [insert name]!”*

Accepting someone's flaws, weaknesses and limitations as part of their nature is more realistic than hoping for some miraculous transformation of personality. Every character from the movie is supposed to be the way they are. That's what makes the story of your life so interesting.

The challenge is figuring out what kind of character they are and dealing with it. Rather than demanding anything, you can learn about a person's “nature” by observing how they react, what they're good at and hopeless at, what you probably can't expect and how to bring out the best in them.

The same is true of circumstances. You can often accept what happens as belonging to the nature of a particular situation you're in. What may be wrong nevertheless “makes sense” when viewed as “the kind of thing that can happen” in that type of scenario.

### **11. See flaws as the price for an overall package you can accept**

Consider what happens when you pay the bill for your dinner. In isolation, it might seem hard to accept: some rich, arrogant restaurant owner comes up to you and takes your money. But of course you can accept it because it is the price that you pay for enjoying a delicious meal.

Some people ruin their dining experience by complaining about how much they paid for it instead of allowing themselves to savor the taste of every mouthful. It is more

satisfying to enjoy a meal as if it were your last than to focus on what you paid or on anything else that might not be perfect.

When you're struggling to accept anything there's a chance you're suffering from a kind of "tunnel vision" that focuses on what you don't like about it. You may need to zoom out and see it as part of a much bigger package or wider experience that you can broadly accept in spite of that particular flaw.

### ***"Everything comes at a price"***

You can often accept bad experiences in life as the price you pay in order to enjoy the good experiences it has to offer as well as the price for learning profound lessons. And you can often accept a person's flaws as the price you pay for their good points or for some other benefit.

No matter how good a person may be, they're always going to have some areas in which they perform hopelessly and where it's not realistic to expect much from them. No matter how bad someone is, they may still "have their uses" or something in their nature that is also good.

### **12. Imagine how much worse some things could have been**

We live in a culture where people are constantly comparing themselves with others, showing off on social media and being exposed to advertising that makes them believe they "need" to have something new to feel good. Life could be a lot simpler than our minds sometimes tell us it has to be.

It's always easy to think about what you don't have, what you could have, what you "should" have and so on. But people tend to find it less interesting to consider how much worse their situation could have been and to thank their lucky stars for the kind of difficulties they haven't had to experience.

### ***"Focusing on what you don't have makes you feel needy"***

Imagine having to survive a world war, seek dental help in the Middle Ages or put up with "eighteenth century style" racism. All these things really happened to some people. Some would have loved to switch places with you in this moment and to have the chance to seize your future opportunities.

That doesn't mean your problems don't exist. But it does mean that how much you mind those challenges is itself likely to be a result of a mentality that involves taking more for granted than you may have realized. It's worth remembering that people have made the best of worse situations.

### **13. Start to laugh at things more often**

The more foolishly people behave or the worse situations get the more it can help to secretly laugh at these things. What happens can be sad in a way but that doesn't

mean you always have to be sad about it. At some point, you may even come to see it in the light of the following perspective.

***“Life is a comedy misinterpreted as a tragedy”***

Secretly laughing at things is really a way to avoid being afraid of them or letting them have power over you. A good way to take anything lightly is to change the language you use when describing it. The aim is not to imagine yourself to be above everything but to avoid taking anything too seriously.

You may think of someone’s behavior as “rude”, “nasty”, “awful” or “evil” but I prefer words like naughty, cheeky, clueless, pathetic or desperate. And if someone behaves like a bully then rather than thinking of them as an “enemy” or “A-hole” I prefer words like fool, clown, maggot or child.

This kind of thinking transforms you from a helpless victim to an amused onlooker who is able to stay detached and in control of how they feel. The more you can laugh at things the easier it is to deal with the way they already are rather than causing yourself frustration by needing them to change.

**14. Practice detachment from thoughts**

Part of learning to have a calmer relationship with your mind is to practice viewing each thought as little more than an interesting way of looking at things. This allows you to avoid getting so drawn into any thought that it engulfs you, swallows you up and seems to become your entire reality.

In a way, the mind is like a movie director whose job is to come up with different ideas. Some of those ideas are a lot like movies because you can get “sucked in” by their narrative or atmosphere. But when a thought resembles a horror movie then it’s good to remind yourself that it’s “just a thought”.

This is similar to reminding yourself when what you’re watching is “just a movie”. A thought may depict what is true but like in film it is nevertheless merely a representation that involves an element of artistry. It usually does more than tell the truth: it paints a picture that plays with your emotions.

***“Distressing thoughts are often propagandized versions of some truth”***

For example, it’s easy to get “lost in a thought” that involves an unnecessarily tragic depiction and projection of your life story. But then you “wake up” from that nightmarish daydream and notice that your present reality simply involves you sitting in a chair, which does not have to be inherently tragic.

A break from thinking can often help you detach and become more “grounded”, such as:

- Focusing only on things that are happening around you in the present
- Entering into an alert state of physical focus and observation

- Attempting a simple task without your mind drifting away from it
- Distracting your focus by going for a brisk walk or having a shower
- Breathing calmly and deeply, focusing on all the air in your belly
- Focusing on physically feeling the ground beneath your feet
- Sensing each major area of your body, one after the other

However, detaching from thoughts does not mean dismissing them as they often point to valid concerns that are worth addressing. For example, if your mind tells you “I will be alone forever” then you don’t entirely have to believe that “story” but it’s still worth finding new people to connect with.

## **15. Practice simple contentment with the present moment**

You can survive any journey as long as you’re willing to take it one step at a time. You don’t have to solve everything at once and only ever have to deal with the moment you’re presently in. It’s often better to calm yourself than to focus on the mind’s never-ending “to do” list.

There is a certain, undeniable peace in gradually giving all things less and less overall weight and significance. Thinking too much about “my life”, “what I want in future”, “what’s it’s all about” or “what needs to change” can all be seen as distractions from the experience of the present moment.

It is often possible to calmly experience only the moment you are presently in without judging it or even thinking of it as part of your life story. Slightly letting go of the meaning of things helps you to appreciate life in a more spontaneous way. In the words of Thích Nhất Hạnh:

***“I have arrived, I am home”<sup>1</sup>***

It’s a way of perceiving reality that is much more raw and unfiltered by what our minds keep telling us everything is about. Sometimes, you can experience the moment as a purely physical sensation and get comfortable with that rather than focusing on the mind’s associations.

Practicing a way of life that is less “mentally reactive” and more grounded in the calm experience of each moment is a good way to become more accepting. Living in the present is a vital part of any healthy and balanced approach to living. The challenge is letting go of habitual, internal reactions.

You can often watch life like a movie, alertly focusing on what is going on and also being mindful of your thoughts about that but without being swept away by those thoughts. When you no longer feel trapped by old reactions then you are creating a space for something new to grow.

## **16. Remember that nothing lasts forever**

If you're struggling to cope with any situation it's good to remind yourself that it's only temporary. As painful as it may be, what you are going through now is only a fleeting sensation. As impossible as it may seem, it will one day become a distant memory to which you will attach little significance.

***"This too shall pass"***

Everything comes and goes and whatever we think of as important eventually passes away. Consider for a moment that even entire civilizations have crumbled to dust. This is a reminder that whatever we experience in reality or construct in our own minds ultimately has no permanence. Any pain will always eventually pass. Any pleasures are also temporary, which is a reason to savor them while we can, rather than taking anything for granted.

One day, you'll arrive at a place where you no longer need anything from your current situation. You'll hardly remember the person you used to be and may even forget why something you found hard to accept mattered so much. It's worth moving on to allow that day to come sooner rather than later.

## **Practice Ho-oponopono**

"Ho'oponopono" is defined in the *Hawaiian Dictionary* as:

(a) "To put to rights; to put in order or shape, correct, revise, adjust, amend, regulate, arrange, rectify, tidy up make orderly or neat, administer, superintend, supervise, manage, edit, work carefully or neatly; to make ready

(b) "Mental cleansing: family conferences in which relationships were set right (*ho'oponopono*) through prayer, discussion, confession, repentance, and mutual restitution and [forgiveness](#)

I Love You

I am sorry

Please forgive me

Thank you

I love you for presenting before me the pain and suffering I am creating

I am sorry for what ever is happening in me and causing this problem or thinking

Please forgive me for I am ready to release it now

Thank you for clearing and cleansing me of this issue.