



## ASK AMANDA JAYNE

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# A perfect Christmas letter

This Christmas your words could make a big difference to a friend or loved one. West Norfolk-based psychotherapist and counsellor Amanda Jayne explains how.

**M**any people come into therapy to address issues of low self-esteem, low self-confidence and a feeling that they add no value to the world.

Feeling rubbish about yourself is particularly damaging and difficult to address. The inner critic runs riot with negative 'shoulds' and 'should not's'. It's a fear that nobody really likes you; that you don't really deserve this job/partner/friendship. No amount of reassurance from anyone can easily shift the feeling of worthlessness.

Usually it's a deeply rooted and well-established belief. It means that you miss out on opportunities and moving forward in life because you are too scared, or too unsure of yourself to think that you will ever be able to achieve results. It's a panicky dread of making a fool of yourself, or being disliked for your views or activities.

You may have been told at school (from one of those many inept and clumsy teachers from back then) that you would never amount to much.

You may have parents who have inadvertently or deliberately never praised or encouraged you; or were hyper-critical; or you may have gone through some difficult relationships which left you feeling inadequate and a failure.

Whatever the source of your lack of self-worth, the feelings are the same:

*Feeling that everyone else is more intelligent/beautiful/kind/worthy*

*Feeling useless at everything*

*Avoiding new pursuits or situations through fear of failure*

*Feeling overlooked, under-valued, put-upon*

*Resentful depression or anxiety*

*Eager to please at any cost.*



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Sometimes I may ask a client to try to write a 'list of good stuff about yourself'. This list must include positive things about their personality; the things they are particularly good at; their achievements; any daily achievement even if it is 'I ironed that shirt particularly well'. The list is on-going, to be added to and stuck on the fridge.

Then they ask family members or best friends to write a list for them. The results of this task are astounding. The best bit is reading the lists from other people, detailing all the things they are loved for, the situations where they have been particularly helpful to that person, how valued they are, and disbelief slowly turns to belief in themselves and their very many good qualities that people appreciate.

A client of mine received a very long letter from a friend one Christmas. She had been feeling particularly down after a difficult year. This friend wrote to thank her for her friendship and all the times she had been there for her. She described what she admired about my client's personality and character. She outlined all the things that she was good at, and all her life achievements, telling her

that she was an inspiration and how proud and thankful she was to be her friend. It was this letter that finally lifted my client out of her cycle of beating herself up and berating herself for not being good enough. It made her Christmas and she described it as the most perfect Christmas present she had ever been given.

Times are hard. Life is difficult. We don't all have a lot of money to spend. What a lovely idea for a present. To let the most important people in your life know how much you need them, admire them, love them and respect them. Can you imagine receiving such a letter yourself and how it would make you feel?

There is something quite special and unique these days in receiving a hand-written letter through the post. It's special. Its whole existence means that someone has taken the trouble to find nice paper and an envelope, and tried to write neatly and taken the time to put thought and feelings into its contents. Then to purchase a stamp, walk to the post box and post it.

It costs no more than a stamp and your time. I guarantee it will be treasured forever and will help to spread some joy this Christmas. I'll be starting mine very soon.