Emotionally Mature: 26 Suggestions

Signs of a kinder, steadier way of being with yourself and others

Emotional maturity grows slowly, over a lifetime, and none of us ever finish. These suggestions describe what it can look like as we grow gentler with others and kinder toward ourselves.

Every person is different, and so is every path. Read these as invitations to grow into, never as a test to pass. Some will feel like old friends. Others will point to an edge you are working on right now. Pick one that speaks to you and live with it for a week.

In Hard Conversations

1. **Look for the fear underneath.** When someone behaves badly, a frightened or overwhelmed part is usually steering, far more often than malice. Seeing this softens the world. People become less like villains and more like fellow travelers having a hard day.
2. **Put it into words.** The people who love you can’t read your mind, however much you wish they could. Saying what you feel and what you want, calmly and plainly, gives them a fair chance to meet you.
3. **Apologize, and mean it.** Everyone gets things wrong, you included. A simple, sincere apology takes courage, and it is one of the most generous gifts you can give a relationship.
4. **Mind the small things.** Hunger, tiredness, alcohol and a stressful day shape our moods more than we like to admit. Save the important conversations for a time when you are both fed and rested.
5. **Hear the longing beneath the complaint.** Nagging, criticism or a sharp tone is often a clumsy bid for connection. On a good day, you can listen for the need underneath and answer that instead.
6. **Speak up instead of sulking.** When you are hurt, tell the person kindly and directly rather than waiting for them to guess. Then let it go. Forgiveness comes more easily when hurts don’t pile up.
7. **Get curious when you’re triggered.** Before you react, pause and wonder what the other person meant. There is often a gap between what was said and what you heard.
8. **Welcome feedback.** Criticism stings, and a protective part may want to armor up. With practice you can listen, take in what is useful, and discover that you survive it.

In Close Relationships

9. **Tell people they matter.** Life is short. Say what you mean, and let the people you love hear how much they matter to you, often.
10. **See the whole person.** Our hardest traits usually travel with our gifts. The partner who fusses over details may be the one who never forgets your birthday. The friend who is always late may be the one who lights up every room. Hold the whole picture.
11. **Share your struggles as well as your wins.** Closeness grows when we let people see what weighs on us. Opening up gives others permission to do the same, and everyone feels less alone.
12. **Make room for compromise.** No relationship gives you everything. Choosing what to let go of, and accepting some friction as part of sharing a life, is a sign of maturity.
13. **Fall in love more slowly.** Instant crushes give way to a deeper appreciation of what lasts. Loyalty to the people already in your life becomes its own kind of romance.

With Yourself

14. **Remember that everyone is figuring it out.** Confidence grows when you realize nobody has it all together. We are all learning as we go, and you belong among us.
15. **Set down the impostor story.** Nobody is fully qualified to be a person. Everyone is doing their best with what they have, and that includes you.
16. **Own that you can be hard to live with.** Everyone has habits and moods that challenge the people close to them. Naming yours with humor and kindness makes it easier for others to love you.
17. **Befriend yourself.** Punishing yourself for past mistakes helps no one. Learn what there is to learn and make amends where you can, then treat yourself the way you would treat a dear friend. Your future self, the one who has grown through all of this, already looks back on you with tenderness.
18. **Welcome your younger parts.** Inside every grown-up live younger parts who never fully leave. When one shows up tired or scared, greet it with patience and give it what it needs.
19. **Know how your history colors the present.** Some moments stir up more than they deserve because they echo something old. When a reaction feels bigger than the moment, get curious before you act on it.
20. **Care less about your image.** What others think of you is mostly out of your hands, and other minds are busy places. What matters is being at peace with yourself and loved by a few people who know you well.
21. **Make peace with your parents.** Your parents were human, often in over their heads and carrying wounds of their own. Understanding that can soften old anger into compassion, in its own time. Forgiveness is a journey, and it never requires excusing harm.

With Life Itself

22. **Embrace good enough.** Perfect people and perfect lives don't exist. The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott spoke of the "good enough" parent, and the idea reaches into nearly everything. A life can be frustrating and good enough at the same time.
23. **Hold your hopes lightly.** Keeping expectations realistic makes you more patient and forgiving, with yourself and with others. Disappointment loses some of its sting.
24. **Treasure small pleasures.** Happiness tends to come in moments: a good cup of tea, a walk at dusk, the first warm day of spring, an easy afternoon with a friend. Let them count.
25. **Step back for perspective.** When a problem fills your whole view, widen the frame. Time in nature or a long look at the night sky can remind you how big the world is. Sit where you can see a long horizon. Watch a crow work patiently at a problem, or the way grass springs back after it has been stepped on. The living world has its own wisdom, and it can hold you when a problem feels too heavy.
26. **Trust that you can get through.** Calm grows from knowing that even when things go wrong, you can find your way through. There is always another path, and kind people turn up along it. So does help from sources we can't always see.

Calling on Support

You don't have to grow alone. Growth loves open air, so take your questions outside when you can. Lie in the grass and feel the earth breathe beneath you. Let a summer rain on your skin remind you that softening is natural. Ask an old tree how it grew around its wounds. Call on a beloved grandparent, a spirit animal, an angel or whatever you call the sacred, and let yourself be accompanied. The seasons have always known that growing happens one turn at a time.

A Final Word

Nobody lives all of these at once. Each time you choose curiosity over judgment, or meet a frightened part of yourself with kindness, you grow a little. Be patient with your own growing.

Free Resources

- **The School of Life's original essay:** theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/when-do-you-know-you-are-emotionally-mature-26-suggestions
- **Related handouts:** Effective Communication Guidelines and Sensation Vocabulary.

Influences and Credits

- Inspired by "When Do You Know You Are Emotionally Mature? 26 Suggestions" from The School of Life, founded by Alain de Botton. The descriptions here are written fresh.
- "Good enough" comes from the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott.

- Welcoming younger and protective parts comes from Internal Family Systems, developed by Dr. Richard Schwartz.
- Calling on the support of the living world and the unseen comes from Neoshamanic IFS (NIFS), the approach I practice and teach.