



ASK ANDREW W.K.

**What Do You Do if You Suspect Your Man is Cheating?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

January 8, 2014

Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear Andrew,

I think my boyfriend may be cheating on me. I’m very close to looking through his computer to see if there are any clues. Should I or is that just THE WORST?

*Help Me,*

*Curious*

***Dear Curious****,*

That could be getting close to the realm of the worst. The absolute worst would probably be cutting off his dick or just killing him outright without even knowing if he really was cheating or not.

When I had a hunch that a girl I was with was cheating on me, I was right. I actually never snooped around or even confronted her to find out, but just had a feeling that something about her was “off.” She eventually ended up telling me and I broke up with her immediately and was really sad and hurt. But I didn’t let myself change my ideals about trusting girlfriends.

I think cheating and trust is sort of an all-or-nothing situation. I recommend going into all relationships with a completely blind, undeserved sense of trust. People shouldn’t have to earn our trust. They should only earn our distrust.

No matter what’s happened to us before, we might as well just go into a new relationship with renewed faith that our partner is going to be as loyal as we are (assuming we are loyal . . . . If not, you reap what you sow). Otherwise, what’s the point of having relationships of any kind? If we don’t trust anyone, we never get to enjoy the feeling of being able to count on anyone, and that’s probably one of the greatest feelings a human can have. And that is what we want, right? To be able to never even have to think that someone would ever betray us in that way — that’s humanity at its best.

Some might say that’s naïve and living in a fantasy, but I want to live in a world where fantasy and reality are blurred and blended. If you really feel like he is cheating, just ask him and look into his eyes as intensely as you can. It just seems way too draining and painful to always be wondering, or to look around his computer, or question him forever. This might be a good time to promise each other that you’ll never cheat, period. And really understand the weight of the word “promise.”

It’s easy to lie about stuff if you haven’t promised something to someone. A promise is our word and the most sacred aspect of our character and sense of worth. When someone breaks a promise, they’re more easily aware of the damage they’ve done, not only to the other person, but also to themselves and their own integrity. And if you can keep the promises you’ve made in life, that’s pretty much the best you can do as a human being.

In the end, even if someone cheats on you, promise yourself you won’t let their low-level dealing damage your own integrity and belief that people can be trustworthy and that you can be, too. You deserve to trust people. And you deserve to be trusted. And you deserve to party.

*AWK*

**Hi Andrew**,

If you had a five-step plan to help someone make their life more party, what would those steps be?

*XOXO,*

*Party Hard Forever*

***Dear Party Hard Forever****,*

Thanks for asking about this. While there are no definitive steps to anything (except walking), I suggest trying the following. It’s always worked for me:

1. Party

2. Party Hard

3. Party Even Harder

4. Don’t Die

5. Giggle

*AWK*

**Andrew**,

I’ve been with the same woman just over six years. I love her, but things aren’t as spicy as they once were, if you know what I mean. I know you’re a happily married man. How do you keep things interesting?

*Thanks,*

*Bored*

***Dear Bored****,*

First suggestion: Eat habanero peppers three times a day. Other than that . . . There seem to be many schools of thought when it comes to long-term physical relationships. Overall, I think that sexuality is the most important, and most unimportant, aspect of a long-lasting relationship and life in general, despite it being the root of all life.

Pleasure in a relationship can come from many aspects, both physical and non-physical. Oftentimes we can get confused by relationship standards set by outside examples in culture and entertainment, or by the ideals we’ve formed based on relatively abstract ideas of what a “good” relationship is. I also think it’s unrealistic and unnecessary to compare the physical aspects of the early days of your relationship to the way it is now. Those first nights, weeks, and months are where we get to really go for it and see if we’re compatible with someone. But it would be exhausting and maybe even harmful to maintain that level of courtship for an entire lifetime.

Those primal energies get rightfully directed toward other necessary aspects of being with someone and living your own life as well. This is something best discussed in an open and loving way with your partner. It seems like there’s a pretty much infinite amount of stuff you can try, with everything from toys to swinging, to swings, to videos, to everything in between. If you are feeling urges, they must be heard, but they can also be told where to go. The reproductive drive is extremely powerful and one of the greatest energy sources we have. For the long run, learning to direct that drive to where it can truly do the most good can give birth to orgasmic life pleasures and dreams coming true on many planes.

*AWK*

**How Do I Keep the Demons in My Mind at Bay?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

January 16, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew W.K.**

Thank you for spreading your power of positive partying. I am ready for a move in my career and know that I will not be able to go any higher at my current company. If I were to follow my passion, it would mean leaving my current city, but I am in love with where I am living and with my friends and family here. I’m worried that if I DO follow my passion for my career, I might end up very unhappy being so far away from the life I’ve built, but I also know that if I stay, a big part of me will never be satisfied. I feel like my heart is invested in both sides of this dilemma equally. In your infinite party wisdom, what would you suggest I do? Follow my dreams and leave town or stay close to my friends in a job that is not good for me?

Indecisive Over-thinker

***Dear Indecisive Over-thinker***,

Thank you for your question! First, I’m not sure there really is such a thing as “over-thinking.” How can you tell if you’ve over-thought? What if you start thinking about over-thinking and end up thinking too much? Why does hardcore thinking have to have such a bad reputation anyway? It seems we’re proud to be hardcore and extreme in all sorts of other ways, why not in thinking? “Hey! Don’t over-think it, man!” Why not?

Moments of deep contemplation are crucial. Sure, we don’t want to immobilize ourselves by obsessing to a standstill, but don’t certain moments deserve deep consideration? When we’re at a crossroads, shouldn’t we look at where we stand in a self-conscious and thoughtful way?

When you’re thinking about how much you love your family, or how thankful you are for your friends–those are the kinds of thoughts that make life feel good; they make life worth living. Our attachment to those feelings is proof of their importance. You built a life you care about, and through your examination of it, you’ve realized that the time has come to move on from it.

Change is inevitable and painful. And life will throw change at you no matter how hard you cling to familiarity and security. But here, you have the choice for change. You get to choose to follow your dream, and that’s the best kind of choice you’ll ever get to make. Big life choices make us pause and take stock of our entire landscape–just don’t gaze around for too long.

It’s not the over-thinking that will paralyze you, it’s the indecision. You’ve already climbed up the high dive–debating whether or not to jump will only freeze you at the end of the board. It’s time to jump. Could following your dream be worth risking the dreams you’ve already achieved? You must be willing to bet on it, or what is any of it worth? Whatever happens, at least you’re playing the game and playing to win. It’s going to be intense, but it’s going to be amazing. Even if it’s not the easiest or the safest choice, it’s the choice where you decided to follow your dreams. Destiny has given you this opportunity.

Your loved ones have given you the courage to take it. Now go. You owe it to them and you owe it to yourself. Just be sure to have a huge going-away party!

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

<https://youtu.be/WccfbPQNMbg>

Dear Andrew,

I’m in tenth grade. Like almost everyone else, I like parties. There’s always one near me, but no one ever tells me about it. See, I have a group of friends, but they hardly ever have parties. My question is, how do I get more people to like me so I can get informed of these parties and stuff?

Sincerely,Feeling Hated

***Dear Feeling Hated***,

I don’t hate you! Please write me back with your full name and contact info and I’ll start telling everyone to invite you to all the parties they can! And anytime I’m in your area and having a party, please consider yourself officially invited! As far as how to get more people to like you, I think it’s already working! After all, just reading your letter made me like you. That’s one new friend already!

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: What Do You Do if You Suspect Your Man is Cheating?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/08/ask-andrew-w-k-what-do-you-do-if-you-suspect-your-man-is-cheating/).

Hey Andrew,
I write to you as a fan desperately seeking advice. It’d really mean a lot coming from you, because I truly look to you as a role model. I’m almost 19 years old and have had to deal with inner demons for as long as I can remember. It seems to be the more I grow up, the more depressed I get. Do you have any advice on how to stay positive through this weird, awkward transition into the grown up life?

Party hard,Brad

***Dear Brad***,

Life is an overwhelming experience. I think everyone feels this way. It comes with the territory of not being dead. Being alive is very, very intense, and the longer we stay alive, the more intense it gets.

I’ve struggled with bad feelings and demons too, and when talking about depression, it was often overlooked that those feelings were part of the core of being alive. It’s a feeling that’s easy to mistake for depression, when in fact it’s just being completely blown-away by how intense it feels to exist. The “feeling of being alive” isn’t supposed to be cured or avoided, it’s supposed to be reckoned with and respected. It’s supposed to be marveled at and mastered. It’s supposed to be experienced.

I’ve always felt an underlying sensation that something was wrong–like a flavor in the back of your mouth when you wake up every day. But the feeling that something is wrong is also what’s right. The feeling of being alive is beyond wrong and right–that’s what makes it so intense. The more we can focus on this contradiction, and the space between opposites, the more OK we’ll feel about not feeling OK all the time.

Some people have pushed the feeling of life so far back it no longer feels like anything at all. I don’t want to feel the feeling of no feeling. I think you’re like me. We’ve chosen to recognize this feeling of being alive. We’re not going to cover it up or pretend it isn’t there. Life is supposed to be lived fully–in all its pain, pleasure, and stupefying glory. It’s meant to be intense. Life – is – meant – to – be – intense. Beyond that, if you really feel the need for help, please talk to a professional doctor. After all, I’m only a professional partier.

Yours in chaos,Andrew W.K.

**How Do I Overcome the Guilt of Unwittingly Taking Someone’s Virginity**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

January 22, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear King of Party,

Like many female Angelenos, I like to frequent dating websites. That’s where I met this banging Anarcho-Punk dude–let’s call him Ted. We hit it off and went on a few dates. He’s in his late twenties, has a job, and seems like a total babe. We ended up going back to my place one night, and before you know it, we were in the sack and having the most mundane sex anyone’s ever had. Afterwards, he rolled over and became visibly upset. I asked him what’s wrong, and what came out of his mouth sent me careening into a black hole of immediate anxiety. “I’m a virgin,” he said. Maybe that’s not as big of a deal as I thought it was. He spent the night and the next morning I told him I had work. I’ve been casually blowing him off ever since. Now he’s Snapchatting me 24/7 in a desperate attempt to get my attention. What do I do!?

The Virginity Taker

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: What Do You Do if You Suspect Your Man is Cheating?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/08/ask-andrew-w-k-what-do-you-do-if-you-suspect-your-man-is-cheating/).

***Dear Virginity Taker***,

You owe it to this guy to stop blowing him off and to at least talk to him. You don’t have to date him again, but at least tell him that you appreciate his honesty, and feel for his situation, but don’t want a relationship. It’ll suck for him to be turned away, but he’ll get over it and move on. And it will suck how uncomfortable it might get, but you’ll also get over it and feel better that you dealt with it instead of putting it off.

I’m not sure how you lost your virginity, but I’m guessing you can remember how intense the first time is–whether it’s “good” or “bad” sex, it’s a defining moment for everyone. Please be nice to this guy out of respect for the fact that he actually told you he was a virgin. That’s impressive in itself. A lot of guys wouldn’t have had the courage to open up about this very vulnerable part of their masculinity.

Imagine if the roles were reversed and it had been your first time with some dude you met on the computer who then got freaked out when you revealed to him that you were a virgin–how would it feel if he had decided just to ignore you? Being blown off after an intimate and sensitive encounter would crush anyone. Muster up the courage to follow through with this–it’s an unpleasant but noble course of action.

You can decide what to say and how to say it–even if you just tell him that you don’t want to see him again, do it in the nicest and most straight forward way you can. I’m not sure how many guy’s virginity you’ve taken – but maybe this is a first-time experience for you in that regard. As his first, you have a chance to make the losing of his virginity a positive experience, or at least not a terribly discouraging mess of confusion. Moments like this are awkward, but they are also transformative. As the more experienced lover, you can ease his pain and stop this feeling hanging over your heads. Be gentle, sensitive, and straight forward. Be a human being.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: How Do I Keep the Demons in My Mind at Bay?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/16/ask-andrew-w-k-how-do-i-keep-the-demons-in-my-mind-at-bay/)

**Dear Andrew**,

I am a recent grad with student loans working hard to start my career. I am very grateful for my good job, but I still can get very stressed about debt and finances. What is a good strategy to combat financial fear?

Sincerely,Broke As a Joke 2014

***Dear Broke As a Joke***,

Money is funny–it seems to hover between the “best thing in the world” and “the root of all evil.” It’s time to take control of money instead of it taking control of you. With just a little reflection, we can study our own feelings and ideas about money. Do we think of it as good or bad? How did we develop those thoughts? Have our attitudes about money helped us or held us back?

I used to think money was bad. I’m not sure why I started thinking that. I had a lot of friends who lived without much money, and they seemed to think making money wasn’t cool. They didn’t like having jobs, so they did everything they could to get by without needing much money–they probably put more effort into not making money than they did into just working and earning a living.

A few years ago, a very wise person explained to me that money is just “magic paper,” and this magic paper allows you to do amazing things. Money itself is neither good nor bad–it’s just a tool. Just like a hammer can build a house or smash someone’s face, it all depends on how you use the tool, but the tool itself is neutral.

When you have money to spend on friends, family, and making your dreams come true, it suddenly becomes one of the greatest and most powerful things in the world. It’s true that the best parts of being alive don’t require money, but that doesn’t mean money can’t improve life. Everytime you start feel stressed out about money, take notice of the emotions, distance yourself from them, and study them objectively. Tell yourself, “I’m taking care of it! I’m kicking ass!” and then refocus on working hard and not taking the whole “money thing” too seriously.

There’s absolutely nothing wrong with letting that fear help motivate you. Fear is what alerts us to the important parts of our life. Working hard and making ends meet is important to you and there’s nothing wrong with that. But don’t mistake that fear for something more than motivation, and never allow money to get the better of you, and drain your energy. You don’t have to be greedy or a scumbag to appreciate money and feel OK about it. Earn money, spend money, and enjoy the whole strangeness of the process. You ARE making money and you will continue to! Say that to yourself and believe it! You will pay off your debt! It’s OK! And money is OK too, especially when you spend it on partying.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**Should I Experiment With the Same Sex?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

January 29, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Mister Double You Kay**,

For most of my life I’ve identified as a straight male, but for some reason, I’ve been wanting to experiment with the same sex. I still find women attractive, but I’ve always had that “what if” question in the back of my mind about men. Do you offer any advice on this?

– Anonymous

***Dear Anonymous***,

It seems like there’s a spectrum of personal sexual preference that goes from extremely heterosexual on one end, all the way to extremely homosexual on the other end. But I imagine most people don’t fall all the way to one side or another, even if they choose to live that way. For lots of people, it’s a big spiral of feelings and ideas–not just a simple “this” or “that.”

The good thing is, only you can tell what interests you, and you don’t have to put a label on those feelings. You don’t have to identify as a “straight male” or “gay” or “bisexual.” You can just be yourself and move through this world in a way that celebrates it. That’s partying.

Also, you don’t have to jump right into any new experience head-on (pun intended), you can follow this new interest in a low-pressure and fun way. Start with exploring your fantasies alone before launching into a full-blown encounter with another person. Having a “what if” question in the back of your mind doesn’t mean much if a vivid fantasy doesn’t actually end up turning you on, so play out situations using your imagination.

If those ideas do turn you on, then follow that fantasy to the next step and try watching pornography that relates to your fantasies. And if that also turns you on, then start looking for an actual encounter. People who allow themselves to enjoy different ideas about sex are courageous. In addition to your own sexuality, I’d recommend applying this same adventurous self-awareness to other parts of your life.

What other “what ifs” are in the back of your mind, beyond sex? Use this as a jumping-off point to start following all your dreams with the same intensity, bravery, and honesty that you’re applying to your sexuality. And then you’ll really be partying hard.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

What advice do you have for someone facing homelessness and struggling to have a job, water, food, and other bare essentials to survive?

– Tim

***Dear Tim***,

First of all, don’t give up. Second, work your ass off. Third, stay strong and do everything you can to hold your feeling of life together. There are moments when many of us get close to the edge in different ways, and there can be almost a magnetic pull to go off the edge–kind of like riding your bike near a cliff and for some reason your whole body seems to pull towards where you don’t want to go.

This is the time to surround yourself with your own power. Even if there aren’t others around you to comfort you and cheer you on, there’s still you. And you can always care for yourself. That’s the most important person right now: You. Always be able to count on yourself and find strength in your own presence.

While you’re with yourself, you might as well take an extremely honest look at your life and what caused you to wind up here. Be brutal with yourself. Even if it’s painful, try to take as much responsibility for your situation as you can. Even if others deserve blame, don’t blame them–and don’t blame bad luck or anything outside of your immediate self.

Why? Because you want to give yourself and only yourself the power to make or break your own life. The same power that got your here, also can get you out. And as you go through this experience, try to learn from the entire adventure. What’s so great about “regular life” anyway? A lot of people are miserable and they’ve got all the bare essentials covered and lots more. Comfort, security, and happiness come from inside you.

You have found yourself here and you must embrace it. Fight for what you want and what you love, not against what you hate and don’t want. You will make it through this. And please write back with a mailing address so I can send you some cash. Stay positive.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: What Do You Do if You Suspect Your Man is Cheating?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/08/ask-andrew-w-k-what-do-you-do-if-you-suspect-your-man-is-cheating/)

**Dear Andrew W.K.,**

I am 20 years old, and I have no idea what I want to do with my life. I’m being pressured about joining the military or taking up a trade in construction.The problem here is, neither interest me, and I’m not cut out for the military. My problem is that I know what I don’t want to do, instead of what I do want to do. I’m not sure if you’ve lived this, but what advice would you offer someone in my shoes?

Thanks,Confused

Dear Confused,

Confusion is natural. We don’t need to always understand our life or know what we want to do. But in this case, being certain that you don’t want to go to the military or do construction is at least a start. Some people don’t even know what they don’t want!

I have a feeling that somewhere, deep inside, you probably do have interests, or had some dreams at some point. A lot of times, people get taught they can’t do what they really want in life. They can only do what they should do. That can be true sometimes, but it’s absolutely false as an overall rule.

The entire point of life is to do what you were born to. And how do you figure out what you were born to do? By listening very closely to the feelings deep inside yourself. Ask yourself this: If you could be doing anything 10 years from now, what would it be? If money was no object, what would your ideal day-to-day existence consist of? What would make you excited to get up in the morning, even on only a couple hours of sleep?

Even if it’s not what seems like a “job,” it’s a starting point. It’s a place where you can begin to familiarize yourself with what you really love about life. Someone might say, “I just want to eat chocolate all day.” There’s a profession for that. Someone might say, “I just want to have sex all day.” There’s a profession for that too.

Finding out what you love isn’t hard. The hard part is believing it’s possible for you to do every day. And it is possible! For now, don’t be too hard on yourself about your confusion and feeling of no direction. This was all meant to happen too because it’s brought you to this turning point. Now you get to have fun and dream about anything you want your life to be.

Pay very close attention to the ideas that make your heart beat faster, your stomach get butterflies, and your spine get chills. That’s your soul telling you what you’re meant for. It can be extremely surprising to realize your destiny, but it’s the greatest part about being a human being. I never would’ve dreamed I was born to be a professional partier, but I followed my instincts and against all odds, it happened. If I can do this for a living, than certainly you can do what you want.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

[*Ten Metal Albums to Hear Before You Die*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/06/ten_metal_albums_to_hear_before_you_die.php)[*The Top 20 New York Hardcore and Metal Albums of All Time*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/07/top_20_nyhc_metal_albums_all_time.php)[*The Oral History of NYC’s Metal/Hardcore Crossover*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/05/nyc_metal_hardcore_crossover.php)

**Any Tips For Coping With Post-Traumatic Stress?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 5, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hey, Andrew!**

My name is Charlie. I’m a car salesman. Back in November I was involved in a car wreck during a test drive with a customer. No fatalities, thank goodness, but I did break some vertebrae in my neck. I had to take a leave of absence to recover. Good news is, I still have mobility and will make a full recovery. My problem is, the thought of going back to work scares me. I’m worried I won’t be a good car salesman anymore, and that I won’t keep my composure during test drives. What should I do?

— Nervous

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Experiment With the Same Sex?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/29/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-experiment-with-the-same-sex/)

***Dear Nervous***,

It’s entirely OK to feel exactly as you’re feeling. Of course you’re going to feel nervous about getting into a car again. That’s more than understandable. Don’t be too hard on yourself. All your emotions and reactions to this intense experience are OK.

Say that to yourself: “It’s OK.” Never feel bad about having feelings of fear, nervousness, or worry. Feelings and sensations make life come alive. Without them, we’re just numb and not really living. You’re allowed to feel any way you want. Embrace those feelings and fully feel them–that’s how to get in touch with your inner self and instincts.

I think allowing yourself to feel how you feel will take a lot of the extra unnecessary pressure off your shoulders. It’s going to take time to fully understand and absorb what happened to you. So give yourself a break. Even if other people you work with don’t understand, screw ’em. Allow yourself to go back into work and the test drives and let the feelings come as they will. Putting it off for too long will only build more fear and painful anticipation.It’s going to be intense, but it’s going to be OK.

The ideal situation is to harness the best that your feelings have to offer, and use those feelings directly to better yourself. Transform the feeling of fear into a physical energy that moves you ahead. Intense events will happen in life. But you’re strong enough to keep going and absorb whatever good they have to offer. Stay strong and allow yourself to feel how you feel. You’re going to make it through this and be stronger and braver as a result.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: How Do I Keep the Demons in My Mind at Bay?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/16/ask-andrew-w-k-how-do-i-keep-the-demons-in-my-mind-at-bay/)

**Dear Andrew,**

I’ve always dreamed of living in New York City. I’m currently living in Auckland, New Zealand, and have never left the southern hemisphere. A lot of my friends are moving to London this year, and I’ve been saving up to move somewhere too. I feel like I should go with them to London because it would be helpful to have friends in a foreign city. I’m worried if I don’t go with them, I’ll never leave New Zealand at all. (I have a habit of making plans and not following through with them.) I entered the United States green card lottery and won. So, do I move to London where it’s easier and I’ll have friends, or do I move to New York and live out my dream?

— Hamish

***Dear Hamish***,

You have to follow your dream. Come to New York City. The other options basically add up to taking the easy way out and playing it safe. You could go to London, and I’m sure you’d have a great time, but you would forever be aware that you weren’t true to yourself or your dream. If you’ve had this strong dream about moving to New York City for so long, it’s for a reason–it’s because it’s what you’re meant to do.

A lot of times, dreams can seem like fun ideas or just something cool to think about from time to time. But when a dream is very strong and persistent, it’s not just a dream anymore–it’s your destiny. As a human being, you’re obligated to follow your destiny. New York City is pulling you towards your destiny, and you might try and avoid it or put it off or go somewhere else, but your destiny won’t stop calling to you.

In fact, its voice will only get louder and stronger. The pain of not following your dream will be much more than any pain you experience in going for it–it’ll ultimately be more challenging to not move to New York. You have this chance and you must take it. You owe it to everyone out there who wishes they had a chance you have now. Following your dream isn’t always easy–but it’s always worth it.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**Can I Turn a Dog Into a Gentleman?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 12, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

In my younger years, I struggled with mental illness. My extreme energy would manifest in bizarre physical rituals, such as jogging backwards while reading, or doing robot dances in the street at all hours of the night. Now I’m much better and have a stable existence working for myself and keeping an even keel. While I got my life together, I developed a great workout routine, but because of too much exercise or too many robot dances, I had to have back surgery and now I can’t even run across the street. My passion for being alive has always been about jumping around, playing the drums, and doing silly dances. Now that I can’t do that anymore, I find it hard to find inspiration in the more cerebral world I’ve been forced into. What would YOU do if you had an injury and couldn’t party as hard as you wanted to?

— Active

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: How Do I Keep the Demons in My Mind at Bay?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/16/ask-andrew-w-k-how-do-i-keep-the-demons-in-my-mind-at-bay/)

Dear Active,

I would party even harder.

If I were you, I would do absolutely everything I could to heal and recover as much of my strength as I can. Nothing is impossible, and even if you never regain the exact same level of mobility you had before, you can certainly make constant improvements and dedicate yourself to your recovery and finding new and equally powerful ways to use your energy. I’ve seen many people who were told they’d “never recover,” who decided to work their asses off on building up new levels of strength, against the odds and against their doctors “written in stone” pronouncements.

There are many ways to go about healing — from extreme stretching, to advanced meditation and tons of experimental techniques — but the point is, whatever way you decided to rebuild yourself, there are countless cases of people being told, “it’s hopeless,” only for them to use the power of their will to overcome their situation and prove everyone wrong.

Remember, you are in charge of your body and your existence, and no matter what someone else says, even if they’re in a position of authority, they don’t know everything and they don’t know you. I believe you’ve got even more energy now than you did before — it’s just a different kind of energy, and it’s building up inside you. You can direct that energy and craving for movement into a relentless dedication to building your strength and exploring this new era of your life. You were a unique individual before this event, and you’re still as unique as ever — maybe even more so.

Your undiminished passion for life will see you through these tough times into more spectacular adventures. It might not be what it was, but why repeat yourself anyway? Move on and use this experience to reach new levels of living and find new realms of joy and excitement. Stop thinking about how you used to be, and start living all out right now. Never give up, and never stop advancing through the struggles. It’s all part of the party anyway.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: How Do I Overcome the Guilt of Unwittingly Taking Someone’s Virginity*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/22/ask-andrew-w-k-how-do-i-overcome-the-guilt-of-unwittingly-taking-someones-virginity/)

**Dear Andrew**,

I’ve started messing around with a guy, but I’m not sleeping with him. He’s the type of guy who likes being single because he enjoys picking up girls. He says it’s a confidence booster. But when we’re together, he calls me gorgeous and keeps grabbing for my hand to hold it. His friends tell me he’s had a crush on me for years. Can I make him change his ways and possibly get a relationship out of this guy? What can I do to help him see that a relationship with me is worth giving up being single?

— Head Over Heels For the Unattainable

Dear Head Over Heels,

Please don’t try and “make him change his ways.” It’s not right and it usually only succeeds at pushing others away. People have to change because they want to change for their own reasons, not for yours. They have to arrive at those big decisions themselves and not through manipulation or pressure.

I’d also suggest examining why you’re specifically interested in someone who seems to have made it clear that he doesn’t want a relationship and likes being with other women. Why would you go after someone that doesn’t fit what you’re looking for? Is it because it’s fun to have a challenge? Someone to try and change? Is it a project to occupy yourself with so you don’t have to think about other issues in your own life?

People are not projects–they’re human beings. Leave him alone and go party with some other guy. Or just yourself.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# My Friends Resent My Success

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 19, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I’m having a really hard time after losing what I thought was my life. I’m in a place now where I’ve lost my marriage, my business, and my day-to-day existence. I’m unemployed and struggling with two children on my own. I’m having a midlife crisis and don’t know which way to go. I’m primarily a floral designer and a landscape gardener, and I love music. Do I focus on what I love to do? Or do I try to bust into a new career?

*— Laura*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: Can I Turn a Dog Into a Gentleman?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/02/12/ask-andrew-w-k-can-i-turn-a-dog-into-a-gentleman/)

*Dear Laura,*

This is a moment of reckoning. When radical events unhinge your life, do you abandon everything and give up, or do you double down and press on with a deeper appreciation for what makes your life truly worth living?

Now’s the time to treasure what you love more than ever. Now is not the time to doubt what you love or abandon it. Stay true to your passion and to yourself. Besides, you’ll never be able to muster the energy and enthusiasm necessary for success in doing something you don’t absolutely love to do. Why put all the time and effort into learning some “new career” when you already have one that you enjoy and have invested so much of yourself into?

Just because a particular business didn’t work out doesn’t mean your passion for it was wrong. Just because I went to a party that was shut down by the cops doesn’t mean I’m going to give up on partying completely. You do what you love *because* you love, not because it’s easy or it always goes smoothly. This is a judgement day for you. It’s a day for you to take inventory of your soul and find out what really matters.

Recommit yourself more than ever to your passions and see them through with determination and joy. Celebrate the ups and downs in your life. When the going gets tough, the tough get a party going.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

Hey, Andrew!

No matter how hard I try to have an upbeat attitude and enjoy life to it’s fullest, I can’t seem to make that feeling last for more than a few days. Maybe it’s just me being young and not understanding life yet. Any advice?

*— Party Hard*

*Dear Party Hard,*

It has nothing to do with you being young. No one really understands life. And often, the older someone gets, the less they understand and more they realize how little anyone understands.

We’re all basically awash in a sea of confusion, grasping at beliefs, concepts, and grids of meaning, hoping something will “once and for all” put an end to the confusion of being alive and give us an endless upbeat feeling. But the best we can hope to do is understand that we don’t understand and that we don’t need to feel “good” all the time.

In that way, you’re right on track! In addition, having brief moments of revelation and extreme inspiration are wonderful, but explosions are designed to be brief. You can’t really have a prolonged explosion–it’s meant to be a dramatic burst of energy. It’s part of the process of blowing your mind–you have a mental or spiritual explosion, and then it dies down so you can study it, appreciate it, and absorb it into your soul.

If you always felt on top of the world, then you would lose appreciation for the climb. Once it feels like we’re at the top, we realize there are a whole bunch more tops to get to. At first, it can be discouraging and even exhausting, but try and appreciate the moments of revelation and the moments of contemplation. Look forward to the next break through and just keep on going.

Life is full of contrast, and those dynamics make it more thrilling. Appreciate all the moments as much as you appreciate the upbeat ones, and realize they’re all part of your individual path. Besides, what’s a great life–or a great movie–without some ups and downs, challenges and victories, friends and foes? We don’t want an easy life, we want an incredible life, one worth living and re-living, watching and re-watching.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

Dear Andrew,

How do I handle sharing my goals with my friends? I’m not trying to brag, but I’m a guy with ambitions. I want to do cool things and I want to talk about them, but I feel like it makes my friends resent me. How do I tell people my dreams without them thinking I’m an asshole?

*— Anyway*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: Any Tips For Coping With Post-Traumatic Stress?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/02/05/ask-andrew-w-k-any-tips-for-coping-with-post-traumatic-stress/)

*Dear Anyway,*

Quit talking about what you’re going to do, and just focus on doing it instead.

If your “friends” try to bring you down, stop hanging out with them. I had a few friends that often tried to discourage me, and when I shared my dreams and plans, they usually found a way to bash them. I eventually had to either stop hanging out or stop sharing with them.

I noticed that when I told most people around me what I was working on, they either didn’t believe me or just said I should “grow up.” They thought my goal of becoming a Professional Partier was impossible. In their minds, they honestly thought they were being nice, talking “sense” into me, and helping me realize that the world doesn’t “work that way,” that you “don’t get to do what really you want to do in life.”

They weren’t mean people. They really thought they were helping “wake me up to the real world,” a world they honestly believed was made up of constant frustration, dismay, and failure. It was painful to share and listen to them, so I decided to spend more time on my own and in my own head. A few years later, all my dreams came true. Now those same people don’t have much to say to me at all, and that’s fine, because I’m too busy partying to talk to them anyway.

The world is a mysterious place. Dreams and goals work out better when they’re kept inside you and allowed to manifest from within your own soul. For some reason, sharing your desires with other people has a way of making them not come true as easily. I don’t know why it is, but it just usually works that way.

It may seem contrary to our instincts–it’s natural to want to share your excitement and express your desires, but when it comes to making your deepest and truest dreams into reality, it’s best to swallow them into your subconscious mind and let them blossom out of your inner self. I don’t know how the world makes it happen this way, but if you try this approach I guarantee you’ll see better results. Even when you’re very anxious to tell someone about an idea or dream, try to contradict that impulse and instead swallow the dream deeper into your soul with a satisfying and calm sense of confidence that it’s already on the way to becoming a reality.

Many people will disagree with this method, and of course sometimes you have a very special and trusted team or family that it’s helpful and necessary to share with. But most of the time, don’t talk about what you want to do, and just do what you want to do instead. Put all the energy you would usually spend telling other people about your dreams into making them happen. A dream is precious and fragile. Keep it safe. Keep it secret. Keep it alive.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

#  “How Do I Find a Best Friend?”

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 26, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Hello, Andrew!

I wish I had a best friend. I do have friends, but I want a best friend. You are my number one inspiration for happiness. How do I get a best friend?

*– One Man Wolf Pack*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Experiment With the Same Sex?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/29/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-experiment-with-the-same-sex/)

*Dear One Man Wolf Pack,*

You already have a best friend, and he cares about you more than anyone else ever could–yourself!

You’re already your own best friend! Realizing this, and truly getting closer to yourself, is one of the most important and endlessly valuable efforts you can make. Of course, it’s great to have other friends who aren’t yourself, but as you’ve already seen, friends can come and go, and it’s hard to find someone that you can truly call your “best” friend for life.

That’s where being friends with yourself comes in! Most people only ever have a few very, very close friends that remain with them for their whole lives anyway. It seems as we move through life, we move through friendships and other relationships. That doesn’t mean these various people aren’t important to us, just means we shouldn’t put too much stress on having to always have a “best friend.”

We don’t need to force our relationships into being very close friendships forever–just take them as they come. Besides, you’ll often find the harder you push someone to be your friend, the more likely they’ll be pushed away. The comfort and companionship you’re looking for is already inside of you. Everything that exists and ever could exist–including friendship–is already inside of you.

Some people call this feeling God or spirituality, and some people believe it’s found on the outside. But even in those cases where we look beyond ourselves for answers, the ability we have to “look” anywhere starts from within our own self. Be excited that you exist at all, and learn to love this thing that is called you! It’s the greatest part of being alive, and once you team up with yourself and really become best buddies with the person that you already are, you’ll probably find yourself with all the friendships you could ever need. And no matter what, you should never feel alone.

You’ve got you.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# “How Do I Overcome Being Self-Conscious About My Body?”

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 27, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Hey, Andrew!

Here’s the problem: I’m losing my hair. I’m really self-conscious about it. I tried shaving my head but it doesn’t look good and I’m tired of wearing a hat everywhere. I don’t have beautiful, long flowing hair like you. What should I do?

*– Hair Envy*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: My Friends Resent My Success*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/02/19/ask-andrew-w-k-my-friends-resent-my-success/)

*Dear Hair Envy,*

First of all, losing your hair isn’t really a “problem” – it’s a situation.

It seems like you have three options in dealing with the situation, since it can’t really be “solved” like a math problem… 1. Wear a wig, 2. Get hair transplants, or 3., Embrace this aspect of your body and move on to more exciting and important parts of your life.

I can understand how losing one’s hair can be traumatic. It’s associated with aging and change, and it’s often connected to ideas about what traditionally “looks good” and is sexually attractive in many cultures. But perhaps it’s also completely meaningless. How you look is simultaneously the most important and least important thing about you. I can think of dozens of people that are balding who look fantastic and have made it an integral part of who they are, or rather, haven’t allowed something like “hair” to define them, let alone to take away from their appeal otherwise.

I’m sure you can think of people who are bald and awesome, and as we admire them it’s hard to even imagine them having a full head of hair. But regardless, there’s a bigger opportunity here — a way to challenge yourself and embrace this cosmetic shifting for all it’s worth. It’s similar to someone wishing they were taller. Or someone wishing their skin was a different color. Or someone wishing they had different eyes.

There are steps that can be taken to alter one’s appearance to fall in line with one’s personal desires — make-up, high-heels, contact lenses, or in this case, wigs — but perhaps it’s worth examining the underlying aspects of what your appearance means to you and the world. The body is a vehicle within which we get to experience what it’s like to be alive. It’s not you who’s losing his hair, it’s your body that’s losing its hair. This is a challenging and often painful realization, but each of us is not really our body at all. It’s just a place-holder — a point of entry.

Often times, we get so caught up in how we relate to our appearance, that we forget almost every other aspect of what it is to be ourselves. Usually what we value about other people has ultimate very little to do with how they look — it has much more to do with how they are. Caring too much about our looks — and that includes our weight, our height, our hair, our face, etc — becomes an easy surface game to play and to keep us occupied so we don’t have to dig deeper into life’s more challenging and important games.

It’s like you’re on the Olympic basketball team, but choose instead to sit in the locker room playing video game basketball. It’s easier and is still somewhat engaging, but it’s not what’s really going on. What’s really going on is that you’re alive and you should be glad to have a body at all. Do whatever you want about your hair, or lack thereof, and be done with it. Your life is waiting on the court and wants all your attention back in the game.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# “How Do I Stop Obsessing Over Little Things?”

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 28, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I have serious trouble letting things go. For instance, I sold my first truck over two years ago and I still can’t stop thinking about it and wondering if I should’ve kept it. And today, someone threw a bottle at my girlfriend’s car, so I reacted by chucking some orange drink at them. Now, hours later, it’s still bothering me. What advice can you give me on clearing my mind and letting things go?

*– Cluttered Mind*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: My Friends Resent My Success*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/02/19/ask-andrew-w-k-my-friends-resent-my-success/)

*Dear Cluttered Mind,*

Nearly everyone wakes up everyday with a sense that something is wrong. And oftentimes, the something that feels wrong is hard to place. It could feel like something’s missing inside of them or in their life, or that they did something wrong or messed up in some way. Or, most often of all, that there’s just an indefinable sense of uneasiness about life in general.

This feeling that something is wrong can be quite strong in some people and can generate strong reactions. In other people, the feeling is very, very subtle. But it seems just about everyone has some version of this feeling, and many of us stick with the idea that this feeling is a sign of something being not-right with us specifically. In actuality, this feeling that something is wrong is actually the one and only thing that’s actually right.

That feeling is the feeling of being alive itself.

It’s a physical, emotional, and mental sensation — like a flavor of thought or a color of feeling and it’s very, very, very hard to identify and pin this feeling down enough to study. It’s so intense to feel, that it usually is easier to chalk up to being part of some sort of “problem,” rather than realizing it’s not a problem at all — it’s just the intensity of existence. So, many of us chose to associate this feeling with some “real-life” problem that we can identify, obsess over, and in some ways try to deal with. This is sometimes called “free-floating anxiety” or even more broadly, “the human condition.”

It’s the pain of existence — which is often interpreted negatively, but can also be a stimulating and extremely pleasurable pain — much like a sexual orgasm, or scratching an itch, or drinking water when you’re thirsty. It gives us some momentary relief when we can find something to worry about and try to solve — like that truck you sold, or your orange drink confrontation — just so that we can give an identifiable name and event to this otherwise baffling feeling of being alive.

Just about everyone does this in one way or another — it’s pretty much the root motivation for doing anything at all. The human experience is the act of wrestling with, reacting to, and engaging with this feeling, and it’s hard to say which is the best way for anyone to go about managing their own experience of this sensation of being alive. In many ways, finding somewhat trivial problems or pursuits is a perfectly healthy and therapeutic release for what can otherwise be a maddening and seemingly unsolvable puzzle. A lot of what we fill our days and heads with are distractions, so we don’t have to confront the reality of our own existence head on.

However, it sounds like you’ve gotten to the point where you can tell that obsessing over these trivial distractions is holding you back. You’ve already taken the first step. Now see if you can start to tune in to what these “problems” have been distracting you from. You’ll probably find that you can dive in pretty quickly to what’s really going on. How deep you want to go is up to you, but once you decide to go past the surface of your own existence, it’s pretty much impossible to turn back. Get ready and have a fun and very intense time — it’s the ultimate party!

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# Why It’s Perfectly OK to be Shy

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 5, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Party God,

I’m shy. For example, I’ve never been able to ask out a girl on a date. I can’t seem to find out why, but I push girls away. This isn’t just a stupid teenager “forever alone” excuse; I really can’t break this cycle of social anxiety. Please Andrew: help me break out of my shell and stop being shy!

*– Awkward Teenage Blues*

*See also:*[*Come Hear Andrew W.K. and Wu Tang Clan’s Masta Killa Tell Outrageous Tour Stories*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/03/03/come-hear-andrew-w-k-and-wu-tang-clans-masta-killa-tell-outrageous-tour-stories/)

*Dear Awkward Teenage Blues,*

For some reason, shyness has gotten a really bad reputation. This is unfortunate. What is negatively defined as “shy” is actually just a different, and often more thoughtful personality. Someone who may be more quiet, or who prefers solitude over constant social stimulation isn’t a lesser person. Society has put far too much pressure on those with so-called “social anxiety” and urged them to believe that something is wrong with their mind, and they should take medications and go to therapy so they can fit in and be comfortable and relaxed all the time. Well, guess what? Being alive is very intense, and for some people who are more sensitive, it’s perfectly acceptable to not be comfortable all the time. The point of life isn’t effortless comfort and a blurry sense of relaxation in all situations, social or otherwise. The anxiety of “social anxiety” comes from society telling us we shouldn’t feel the intensity of life, and the stress we feel often comes from trying “fix” ourselves to fit in.

Even though human beings are social creatures, it’s not necessary for all of us to constantly be surrounded by others, nor is it a sign of a well adjusted or successful person that constantly craves social interaction. In fact, I’m sure we can all think of people who are too outgoing, too social, too *not-shy*.

Picture the kind of person who goes around slapping everybody on the back a little too hard, pushing themselves into every conversation with a little too much enthusiasm, making the rounds at every gathering with interjections of forced laughter about not necessarily funny topics; the person who always has an opinion about everything and makes sure everyone is aware that they’re in the room, that they’re “well-adjusted,” and that they’re “very comfortable and confident.” Some people could use a good strong dose of shyness. In fact, a lot of the people that seem to be the least shy are probably even more shy than you — and they’re forcing themselves to “break out of their shell” with a little too much force.

If a turtle breaks out of its shell, it will die quite quickly. Sometimes we have a shell for a reason — and not just to protect us from the outside world or our fears, but to actually incubate us and allow us to grow and strengthen. Be patient with yourself. If a chicken breaks out of its shell too early, it will not have developed enough and will die. If a baby breaks out of its mother’s womb too soon, it can be too fragile to survive the harsh outside world.

If we break our arm and don’t wear the cast long enough, the bone will not heal and can break again. Our culture has put forward the idea — especially for men — that to be successful and likable, you must be an aggressively out-going social butterfly. This is absolutely not the case. There are different flavors of personality, and some people do best keeping to themselves and choosing to spend their time with their own thoughts.

Being able to keep yourself company is a great skill that many more “out-going” people never learn. There are people who experience extreme anxiety if they have to be alone for any period of time. They need constant interaction, and oftentimes the interaction is specifically there to distract them from interacting with the contents of their own mind — the person they least want to spend time with is themselves. This is not a helpful trait. So don’t be too hard on yourself for being shy. Besides, asking out a girl is usually pretty intense for everyone anyway — even the guy who seems the most brave. And always remember that some of the best girls like shy guys specifically. And I should know — I’m shy too.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**Understanding Our Parents**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 6, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I love my parents, but I feel like they’ve filled me with a lot of self-doubt. Often when it’s time to make big life decisions, I talk with them and they try steer me towards some other direction rather than the direction my heart has told me to go. Do I need to stop asking their advice, or is there a way to respect my parents while developing the independence I’ve struggled to find?

*– Self-Doubt Dude*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: “How Do I Overcome Being Self-Conscious About My Body?”*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/02/27/ask-andrew-w-k-how-do-i-overcome-being-self-conscious-about-my-body/)

*Dear Self-Doubt Dude,*

There are all different kinds of parents, including the kind that aren’t even around. So for starters, be glad you’re parents are alive and part of your life. In addition to their general presence, parents can also have an unbelievably deep impact — or lack of impact — on their offspring’s choices.

Some people’s entire identity is formed by reacting against their parents and defying them. Some people specifically look at how their parents live, and then try to do the opposite. Others seem to follow in their parent’s footsteps exactly and — consciously or subconsciously — recreate their parent’s life. The fact that you have a good enough basic relationship with your parents to tell them about your hopes and dreams is valuable and I think it’s definitely worth maintaining that foundation.

But as far as turning to your parents for life advice about your dreams, maybe you’re better off asking me (or as we discussed before in this column, not asking anyone about the dreams of your heart). Parents don’t know everything, and as surprising as it may seem, they often especially don’t know “what’s best” for their children. Parents tend to want their children to be safe, and this impulse has positive and negative outcomes. The parental desire to protect their child lasts beyond the earliest stages when the child still lives at home and relies on the parents for every aspect of their survival.

After a child moves away and begins their own life, parents can have an increased amount of anxiety and concern over the child’s well-being precisely because they have less physical control over their day-to-day survival. Because of this lessened direct control, it can become confusing as to what exactly the parents role is at this stage, and for some parents, their confusion manifests as perpetual nitpicking, worry, and concern that the child’s life isn’t “going in the right direction”. This “right direction” can often mean a copy of the parent’s own direction in life, or a version of a societal and cultural standards that “most people” choose to follow.

Parents want to be able to understand and grapple with their child’s life choices, and what easier choices to understand than the same choices they or the general public have already made? It’s more common to find a parent pushing their child to recreate their own life than to venture out into some uncharted waters. This impulse isn’t always purely based on a belief that the parent’s own way is the best way, but simply because it’s familiar and predictable.

A parent’s own life is their area of expertise, and an area from which they can offer wisdom. It’s what they know, and when you create your own child, the idea of them drifting into the unknown is especially distressing. In the worst cases, the parent expects to maintain some sort of control and influence indefinitely — even if it means holding the child back from its full potential and passion — just because it’s easier and less frightening than having the child brave the raging waters of the unknown.

So, with all this in mind, do your best to try and understand where your parents are coming from. Try to develop some sympathy for their point of view, and how they’re probably just longing for your safety and security, even if it seems like they’re discouraging you. Even though they love you, their love can take shape in uninspiring feedback. Some parents are just jerks, but most are just afraid.

It can be hard for us to imagine that this superhuman parent who created us and brought us into existence can be just as full of fear and terror about the world as we are, but they’re just people — and they’re not as powerful as we sometimes believed them to be. This in itself can be an intense and upsetting realization for a child, but it’s part of ultimately becoming your own independent person. Respecting your parents as individual human beings means also respecting yourself and your own individual identity that sometimes might have nothing to do with your parent’s identity.

For now, I’d recommend not turning to your parents for any more advice, at least when it comes to following your heart. Turn to yourself and listen more deeply to what your heart is telling you. Ultimately, only you can hear your inner voice accurately. And consider this: Perhaps you’ve been telling your parents your dreams precisely *because you want them to discourage you*. Maybe it’s not your parents who are afraid of you following your heart, maybe *it’s you who’s afraid*.

Be courageous, take big risks, and break away from everything holding you back, including your parents, yourself, and your own need to ask others about following your dreams. If you can hear what your heart is saying to you, you already have the answers. And then you can have a nice relationship with your parents that’s mostly based on eating food.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# I’m Not Ready For a Baby

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 12, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

My wife is keen to have a child. She often asks me, “Do you want to have a baby?” and I tell her yes, but then I quickly change the subject. The truth is, I’ve never imagined myself as a father, and if I was to answer the question honestly, my answer would be no. I love my wife. What should I do?

*– Indecision Personified*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: Understanding Our Parents*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/03/06/ask-andrew-w-k-understanding-our-parents/)

*Dear Indecision Personified,*

You don’t have to make a baby if you don’t want to. Just like the other notches on the traditional life-belt, “go to college, get a job, get married, buy a house,” having a baby is a choice many people take for granted without deeply considering all it entails. It’s good you’re thinking honestly about what you want, rather than just blindly following what society does or what your wife thinks you should do. It’s always helpful to deeply consider big life choices, and there are few bigger moves you can make than forming another human being.

Making a person is probably the most intense and mind-blowing act a human being can participate in. The fact that we’re all a result of the magic of birth actually makes it harder to appreciate — it’s so commonplace that the miraculous aspects of forming new life can be difficult to appreciate. It’s actually so intense that we tend to water it down into something less incredible. People are having children every day, but ideally it should never be reduced to an “every-day” experience. Each and every person we see around us was just a baby formed by two other people. It’s so incredibly pervasive that it’s often hard to zoom out and consider the miracle of life with proper perspective — getting distance is hard when we’re immersed in something.

And just like death, forming a human is mysterious and otherworldly. Making a life and taking a life are the two most mind-boggling things we can do as humans — it’s only right to be intimidated by the weight of either experience. Let’s really think about it — we’re literally making another human being from scratch, or we’re ending that life in an instant. Because these two extreme poles of creation and obliteration are so overwhelming, it’s pretty much impossible to fully prepare for having a baby, just like there’s no way to fully prepare for death. You can imagine what it will be like, but until it happens, all you can do is speculate.

Some people’s main interest in life is having a baby. The act of forming and raising a child becomes their life’s work and passion. This is wonderful, but somewhat rare. Other people have a personal passion that consumes all their energy and time, such as pursuing a particular dream or career — this leaves them without much inclination to build a human being and make it their primary effort. Remember that, in a very real way, your own dream or passion is a type of child. Your own life and interests can count as your baby. And in turn, someone’s baby and family can be their life’s dream and primary project.

Some people fall into both categories or neither. No matter what, there’s usually a hierarchy to one’s life — with one’s “self, family, work, hobbies, entertainment, etc” getting ordered in some way to make them manageable and comprehensible. It’s good to consider how your life is stacked-up at the present. How do you want to keep it ordered, and how will other events re-order it? Sometimes cataclysmic life occurrences like illness, disaster, or a baby, can forcibly reorder your life’s hierarchy, and it takes an exceptionally strong person to give themselves over to a higher calling when they’re time and energy has been previously dedicated elsewhere.

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: Why It’s Perfectly OK to be Shy*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/03/05/ask-andrew-w-k-why-its-perfectly-ok-to-be-shy/)

These days it seems more couples are not having kids, or at least waiting to do so later in life. In the old days, couples usually had kids as quickly as possible, 1) because life expectancy in general was short (you were lucky to live past 40 so you better get a move on), and 2) because kids could really help a family survive thanks to the children’s ability to work, bring in money, and support the family in general. But that’s not really true in Western civilization today. Having a child nowadays can be a choice based purely on the joy (or torment) of being a parent. In some ways, this is a great step forward, but as with many types of increased freedom and prosperity, it can also make the decision more complex and puzzling.

Despite all this, you shouldn’t have a baby only because your wife wants to, nor should you have a baby just because it’s part of the “normal” life trajectory. You should have a baby because it’s something you want to do, deep down inside. Just remember, there will never be any other experience in your life that can compare to forming a new human. And there’s not really any other prior experience that will help prepare you for it — so you may never feel “ready” in the same way as you do with other life experiences, like moving to a new place or getting a new job. The best you can hope for is a feeling of readiness for what you’ll never be ready for — a readiness for the unimaginable.

If you do go through with it, I’m sure it’ll not only be beyond anything you could have imagined, but it will constantly be changing and blowing your mind for the rest of your life. You’re creating a new living being and it will rely on you 100% for everything — its life is literally made of you. Despite the fact that it’ll be harder and more challenging than just about anything else you’ll ever do, it’ll probably be the most rewarding as well — “the toughest job you’ll ever love.” Whatever you decide to do, don’t stress about it. Plenty of people don’t have kids, and billions and billions of people do – and if they can manage it, I’m sure you’ll be fine too.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# My Friend’s Taste in Pop Culture Is Killing Me

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 13, 2014

*[Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]*

Andrew,

I’ve got a friend who I love dearly, but certain things about her just drive me insane. I can’t stand her taste in music, movies, clothes, and I really don’t like her views on politics. Sometimes I get so frustrated and upset by the stuff she likes, I have hard time being around her at all. But when it comes to spending time together, we usually get along great and have tons of laughs just hanging out. We’ve been friends for over 10 years, but I find it harder and harder to relate to her tastes. Am I being shallow? Can we still be friends?

– *Love Hate*

*See also:*[*Come Hear Andrew W.K. and Wu Tang Clan’s Masta Killa Tell Outrageous Tour Stories*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/03/03/come-hear-andrew-w-k-and-wu-tang-clans-masta-killa-tell-outrageous-tour-stories/)

*Dear Love Hate*,

You don’t have to like everything about someone in order to love them as a person. And you don’t have to relate to every single aspect of your friend’s life in order to have a meaningful friendship. In some social relationships, you can enjoy someone’s company simply through a shared interest in things like music and movies. But with other friendships, the bonds go deeper and have little to do with style or taste. The beauty of humanity is in finding common ground. Anyone can look for a reason not to like someone — but it’s when we go beyond our differences and look for ways to understand each other that we truly experience the spirit of unconditional love and togetherness. That’s why we can develop very close bonds with very unlikely people – someone much older than us, or from a different background, or in this case, with much different tastes in culture. It’s great when you can agree with someone on everything, but it’s unrealistic and uncommon, and also potentially boring. What’s to be learned when you’re only hanging out with mirror versions of yourself all the time?

Even if you don’t like your friend’s tastes in all the areas you listed, people’s tastes change — both your friend’s and your own. So who’s to say you won’t end up liking some of the same stuff someday anyhow? And maybe your friend will turn you on to some cool things you wouldn’t have found out about otherwise.Try to be easy going and keep an open mind. Most of all, don’t be too hard on your friend about what gives her happiness. It’s draining and painful for both of you to focus in on what you don’t like, and there’s absolutely no shame in avoiding topics that cause arguments and anguish. If she’s a super left-wing Democrat and you’re a staunch Republican, then it’s probably best to not discuss politics, unless you want your friendship to feel like a TV news debate and you like getting all worked up.

And some people do like friendships based on arguments — just like some people love constant drama and emotional back and forth. It depends on what you truly value about this friend, and from what you’ve said, it sounds like you just enjoy her, pure and simple. Sometimes the best friendships are solely based on being with each other. You don’t need to say or do anything to enjoy someone’s company or be very close friends. After all, you have the most important thing in common already — you’re both human beings living in the world. Focus on that, and let the rest of the stuff go for now. Oh, and don’t forget to party! That always helps too.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**Look at These Professional Headshots of a Young Andrew W.K., Model**

by [BRIAN MCMANUS](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/brianmcmanus/)

March 19, 2014

Via a friend who used to work at a modeling and acting agency in New York, some really rare and hilarious early photos of the rock musician / Party God / [advice columnist](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/ask_andrew_wk/) Andrew W.K. have surfaced.

We asked Andrew for an explanation (and permission to publish) of the photos, and he tells us that back in the late ’90s, long before he became the the World’s Undisputed Party King, he tried his hand modeling and acting. These early headshots are a result. Andrew tells us the modeling and acting career never quite took off, but one assumes he did get ample working cutting different types of materials with that sharp jaw line. Hubba hubba.

See also: [*Andrew W.K.’s Village Voice advice column*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/ask_andrew_wk/)

*(8 photos followed in the original article, which have been since redacted n the online resource these were taken from- SAVAGE)*

[*Ten Metal Albums to Hear Before You Die*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/06/ten_metal_albums_to_hear_before_you_die.php)[*The Top 20 New York Hardcore and Metal Albums of All Time*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/07/top_20_nyhc_metal_albums_all_time.php)[*The Oral History of NYC’s Metal/Hardcore Crossover*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/05/nyc_metal_hardcore_crossover.php)

# I Have a New Crush – Should I Dump My Old Flame?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 14, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I’ve fallen in love with my new co-worker. She’s the girl of my dreams and also has feelings for me. The problem is, I’m already in a committed relationship with another girl and we’ve been living together for three years.The consistency and normalcy of that relationship is comforting, but I miss the excitement we had in our first days now that I’ve found it again in my new co-worker crush. How do I end it with someone I care about and pursue this new girl of my dreams?

*– Lost and Confused*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: I’m Not Ready For a Baby*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/03/12/ask-andrew-w-k-im-not-ready-for-a-baby/)

*Dear Lost and Confused,*

Leaving a relationship you don’t enjoy is important whether or not you’ve found someone to leave it for. But it seems like the new feelings you have for your co-worker have motivated you and made it clear to you that you want out of your current relationship. I say go for it and break up so you can pursue your new romance, but I have one question for you first: What happens when the “new girl of your dreams” turns into another committed relationship of consistency and normalcy?

The thrill of infatuation and the initial overwhelming excitement of attraction is not meant to be sustained the exact same way forever. Be careful not to get hooked on the rush of a new crush if you ultimately want to share your life with someone for the long term. For your sake, and hers, I hope this new lady is someone you can have a crush on forever. Otherwise, you’ll always be looking to replace what you already have.

The grass isn’t always greener on the other side — sometimes it just appears greener because it’s brand new fresh grass straight from the nursery and hasn’t really been planted or taken roots yet. Or it might even have some green spray paint on it, making it appear better than it is. Either way, all lawns require time and care — tending and nurturing. Make sure you’re devoting your energy into the right gardening tasks and not getting swept off your feet by the latest and greatest green grass when you already have a fantastic yard to work with.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# How Do I Get My Girlfriend to Play With My Butt?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 21, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I love my girlfriend, but she’s a bore in the bedroom. My previous girlfriend had crazy sex with me. She introduced me to a lot of stuff, like playing with my ass. I couldn’t even begin to ask my new conservative girlfriend about ass play. Or can I? To put it bluntly, how do I get my new girlfriend to play with my ass?

– Ass Play

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Experiment With the Same Sex?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/29/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-experiment-with-the-same-sex-2/)

*Dear Ass Play*,

I think it’s pretty rare that your best sex is with your best girlfriend. This is where the term “hate fuck” comes from. This is also why pornography exists. Some people claim the best sex they’ve had is with their current partner. And if that’s true, then awesome! But more often, the people we want to spend our time with don’t necessarily deliver in every single area, including sex. It’s like dating Michael Jordan and expecting him to be as good at baking cakes as he is at dunking basketballs.

Sex and love are related and intertwined, but they’re also very different and separate phenomena. That’s why you can have a genuine love for your sister, but not want to have sexual intercourse with her. Similarly, you can have a fantastic physical experience with someone you don’t like very much as a person, and wonder “Why do I love fucking this person when they’re so annoying?”

It’s confusing.

For some reason, difficult and complicated people often provide passionate and thrilling sexual experiences. It seems that, for them, the sexual experience is often a way to escape the anguish of an otherwise stressful life — it’s a massive release. I’ve had a lot of friends who have remained in toxic relationships because the sex was good, yet they complained constantly about how irritating their partner was. It’s hard to argue with that logic to an extent, because orgasms are great. But at some point, your heart and soul want more.

I think everyone has an “ultimate” sexual experience with another person, or even themselves. That experience is so intense and overwhelming you kind of end up reckoning with it for the rest of your life. You compare it with every other experience that comes after, and with every person you interact with. And as you compare those experiences, you realize it’s unrealistic to expect your experiences to “measure up” to previous ones — it’s also unnecessary and tiring.

Be glad you had any experiences at all. Be glad you had great sex at all. Be glad you can remember it. Be glad you can store it in the Rolodex of your mind and refer to it, especially in moments of self pleasure. Be glad you’re not dead. Be glad you can be glad.

In addition, remember that time and your brain can exaggerate your memory. Thinking back to your earlier life can add an incredible sheen of excitement and unattainable quality to the experiences you had before. If you were suddenly having sex with the “ass play” girl again, it might fall short of what you remembered. Or it might even be better than the sex you had before.

The point is, there will always be a higher high, a sexier sex, a fancier fancy, etc… Despite the fact that sexuality is a fundamental aspect of our very being, it is also a sensational experience that should be treated with respect, doubt, and humor.

You’ll never be able to have “the best sex you ever had,” because you can always imagine a few more adjustments and modifications that would make it even better. And next thing you know, you’re spending all your time and effort trying to achieve the best sex ever. It’s a noble effort, but do you really want to spend your time doing this?

You have to ask yourself, is having the most mindblowing sex that anyone’s ever had important to you? Or is it just another distraction amidst the crushing intensity of being alive in general? Talk to your girlfriend about playing with your ass, but also cherish what experiences you’ve already had with her and others. Use whatever mental images you have for moments of self-pleasure. Cherish your life and all that you’ve experienced. Keep on moving forward and keep on accumulating life-material. Don’t just to fuel your orgasm — fuel you. And have some fun!

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**Andrew W.K. Remembers GWAR’s Oderus Urungus**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 27, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Andrew is on tour in Canada. In lieu of a column this week, he sent us this heartfelt remembrance of his recently-passed friend Dave Brockie aka Oderus Urungus of GWAR. Ask Andrew W.K. returns next week.*]

I first met Dave Brockie when he and some other members of GWAR invited me to participate in a very unusual show they were doing in Brooklyn. It wasn’t quite clear what we would be doing, but Dave basically said I was allowed to do anything I wanted. They had a keyboard for me to play, a mic to sing into, and said we could just play some songs and have fun together. Naturally, I accepted.

I first found out about GWAR when I was around 13-years old. I was just completely blown away by everything about them. I’d never seen — not only a band like them — but I’d never really seen *anything* like them. I’d never seen creatures that looked like them, let alone ones that played music. From that moment on, I really looked at GWAR as an arbiter of excitement and a living example of the idea that anything was possible in this amazing thing called “the living arts.” If this group of people could become rock and roll monsters and travel the earth, then maybe I could do whatever I dreamed of in life.

Not only was what they were doing so amazing, but they were pulling it off at a phenomenal level of quality and creativity, and with such energy, passion, commitment and perseverance.

Many years later, in the taxi on my way to our show in Brooklyn, I couldn’t believe I was actually going to meet these guys and, on top of that, play with them. It was the same “Anything Is Possible” moment I’d experienced when first discovering them, but in a whole different way. Thinking back to when I first discovered GWAR, I never would’ve had the nerve to ever think I’d be able to meet them, let alone perform with them. It was a feeling of destiny, and sometimes when you respond really intensely to a person or a song or a band, maybe it’s the universe preparing you for what will eventually come to pass. With that in mind, I was as excited as I could possibly be as I pulled up to the venue.

But I was also very, very nervous because 1) I wasn’t quite sure what I was expected to do. (Dave told me I could do anything I wanted, but sometimes too much freedom can be a curse as much as it can be a blessing.) And 2) I was truly scared and intimidated. Would they be nice or try to eat me? They looked so huge and scary, it was hard to imagine how they would behave, not only during the show, but backstage too. I’d certainly seen enough of their material to know their outfits are basically giant weapons — even if they’re made out of foam rubber it could still hurt — but they also had a very aggressive tone to their work that was fun but also frightening. As much as I was excited, I was also worried. What was going to happen?

I got there and they were already in the midst of their show — it was a huge marathon event of many, many hours of them performing with special guests in a small gallery space that was sweltering hot. Even just sitting there in the audience for one minute I was dripping with sweat. The amount of heat contained within GWAR’s outfits must have been hallucinogenic. After I had been there for only five minutes, they called me up on stage. I thought we would have more time to meet and talk and plan things out. But there wasn’t even time for a “Hello.”

We ended up playing some songs, one of which [was “Candle in the Wind” by Elton John](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tvj_tn9-vko). I played it the best I could. I don’t really know it that well. Oderus sang bits of it and it was awkward. I felt very embarrassed in some ways for not knowing the song better, but I did my best and just tried to follow their lead. I finished my part of the marathon, and went back stage. Eventually GWAR came back to take a short break, get some oxygen, and take off their outfits and drain out buckets of sweat.

They were the nicest people I’d ever met. Especially Dave, who was so warm I almost thought he was messing with me at times. “Is he really being this nice?” The kindness and warmth and compliments he had for me — it was one of the biggest thrills of my life. To have this person that I had respected for so long and in so many ways — in terms of longevity and the amount of effort he put into what he did — it just all meant so much.

I’d never met anyone like Dave Brockie. He treated me with the most genuine warmth and inspired me to want to treat people with that level of kindness. Over the following years, my band and I got to play quite a few shows with GWAR. I did some very fun dual interviews with Dave. We talked. We had fun. I was always in awe of him — whether his Oderus outfit was on or not, I couldn’t help feeling star struck. All I hope is that people remember not just his incredible visionary work and contributions to rock music and culture in general, but also the amazing vibe he had as a person. One of the nicest people ever.

Dave Brockie taught me this: Never doubt your vision, because with enough energy and belief and kindness you can see it through.

I’m very upset about his passing. It really is important that we work as hard as we we can, pursuing our passion with all the energy we have to give. Our dreams, desires, and visions are what make us who we are.

Let’s keep the party going for Dave.

**My Religious Family Thinks I Drink Too Much**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 2, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

My entire family are teetotaling religious types who never tasted a drop of liquor or tried a single drug. They even find dancing offensive. Well, I drink, and just last week they had an intervention on my behalf. Now they’ve got me thinking I may have a problem. I’ve never missed a day of work due to drinking. I pay my bills and keep up with all my responsibilities. But I do drink at least a six pack or more every day. Do I drink too much, or can I just do what I like since I’ve never run into any problems with it?

– *Poppin’ a Top*

*Dear Poppin’ a Top,*

You can always do what you like, even if you do run into problems with it. The question is, what do you really want to do?

When it comes to personal pleasure, whether harmful to you or not, it should ultimately be up to you to decide how you live your life. As you’ve seen with your family, there are lots of people who get off on telling other people what to do. It’s not enough for them to think for themselves — they want to think for other people too. It’s probably because it helps them feel more secure in their choices if they can inflict their ideas and standards on others. We see this not just with family and friends, but also in institutions, workplace dynamics, and most of all, the government. Some people just really think they know better, and they think they’re helping us when they try to outlaw or control certain stuff — everything from large sodas to what kind of sex people can have.

You must be able to think and choose for yourself. But with that freedom comes responsibility, and it’s up to you to be honest with yourself and not get lost in a tangled web of self-deception. Be brutal with the deepest truths lying somewhere in the back of your mind, and dive deep into your soul. Ask yourself the questions you don’t really want ask, like…

Why do you drink?

Are you just trying to rebel?

I can imagine being raised by a very strict family would cause most people to strike out and go against the family grain, as a form of vengeance and to find their own identity. But was that just reactionary and is it no longer necessary? Did you start pursuing interests like drinking just to upset them? Also, what do you really like about drinking? If it’s an escape, what are you trying to escape from? And has it really been working?

When the method of escape becomes its own form of prison, we must find another way out. What would happen if you just stopped drinking for a while, just to change it up? Habitual behavior of any kind — even “good” behavior — can eventually have a soul crushing effect. Don’t become a slave to your own routine, even when you enjoy it. Changing things up adds contrast and variety to life and helps the days from blending into a blur of repetitive boredom. You get more perspective and appreciation for how big life is when you pull it apart and switch it around. Next time you feel like starting a regular beer session, what if you just try something else instead? Like bourbon! Or riding a bike, cleaning your room, making a painting, anything different.

Your family’s concern for you is real. You should be glad they care about you. And their concern has at least given you a chance to think for yourself about what you really want. But only you can decide how you really want to live. You have the power to think and act for yourself, even when it’s not easy. The power to change is inside of you, not outside you or in other people or in anything else.

It’s also not in the beer. Even if you turn outward for help, whether to a system of therapy, an individual, or a substance, it is ultimately only putting you in touch with the powers you already have inside yourself.

There are lots of people who can function highly despite incredibly intense behavior and potentially damaging choices. What can be too much for one person can be totally manageable for another. The main point is simple: If drinking beer is fun for you, keep it fun and don’t let it become the opposite. There are an infinite number of ways to party, but never let any of those ways kill the party. Know your limits, and sometimes push past them to set new ones. But always respect them and the power of your self and what you love. Life itself is the ultimate party — and if you love getting wasted, just don’t let it waste your chance to party.
 *Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# “Looking Different Is Pretty Common These Days”

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 9, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I’ve had long hair since I was very young. I’ve only cut it once so I could play high school baseball. Since then, I’ve let go of my baseball dreams and started back down the path of growing my hair out again. It’s almost at its perfect length. The only thing is, my parents aren’t the biggest fans of long hair, and it can be hard to find a part time job with long flowing locks. Still, I feel like it’s part of me, and I don’t feel comfortable without it — I don’t look like myself with short hair. Andrew, as someone who’s also had long hair for a long time, do you have any advice on how I can keep my long hair from affecting my life?

*Your friend,
Chris*

Dear Chris,
Having long hair will always affect your life, no matter what. It can be in small ways, like clogging the drain with clumpy slime after just one shower, or having to make sure you don’t zip your own hair into your coat. Or it can be in bigger ways, like with the job difficulties you mentioned, or just dealing with people’s perceptions and snap judgments about long haired dudes.

It’s interesting to note how strongly hair styles can impact our appearance and how people interpret us. If someone has a shaved head, that “look” has such a strong set of vibes that come along with it, compared with someone who has long hair, or medium length hair, or a bald spot. And then there are hair styles — spiked up, perfectly combed, crazy colors, dreadlocks, super clean, super greasy, and so on. Perhaps even more than our style of dress, our hairstyle seems to define us and send a message to the world about who we are and what we do. I can’t tell you how many times people have asked me if I’m a musician, just because I’ve had long hair.

I actually don’t really like having long hair. I don’t like the attention or the “going against the grain” attitude it seems to imply. At this point, I’d prefer to blend in and not look too different than most people. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to stand out from the crowd, but “looking different” is pretty common these days. How can you look different when looking different isn’t different anymore? Besides, everyone is naturally different simply by the power of their own inherent individuality – we’re all snowflakes. So, if we need to remind people that we’re unique just by amplifying our appearance, some might say “you’re trying too hard.”

Then again, some people just like certain styles of dress and hair and physical presentation, regardless if they attract attention or not. Based on what you said, it sounds like you just really prefer the way long hair looks on you. You’re not doing it to rebel or lash out, you just like it. For me, I also think I look best with long hair (and long hair also works best for head banging), but the main reason I keep my hair long is because Andrew W.K. has long hair, just like Santa has a beard and Pee-Wee has a bow tie. I’m meant to have long hair, so I oblige and follow my calling.

All in all, I think physical and emotional comfort is overrated, and I especially think that aesthetic comfort is too highly prized. I’d encourage you to occasionally embrace the way it feels to wear clothes you don’t like and hairstyles you don’t prefer, just to remind yourself that your appearance and stylistic preferences ultimately don’t have that much impact on who you really are. At the same time, you should have long hair if you want to. Fuck what your parents think about it, and I’m sure you can find some job that doesn’t hire solely based on hair length. Ultimately, life’s too short for us to get bogged down by things like hairstyle and appearance. We have better things to do with our precious time and energy… like partying!

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# Should I Buy a Gun?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 16, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I’ve always been a staunch opponent of guns, but my home has been broken into twice in the last six weeks. Now I’m thinking about purchasing a gun to protect my family and home. My wife is very much against this idea, and we fight about it often. I completely understand where she’s coming from, as her views on the dangers of owning a gun used to be my own. But now I just don’t know what to do. What do you think? Should I get a gun?

– *One Shot*

Dear One Shot,

Guns are intense. Not only as a powerful extension of a man’s hand, but also as an extension of his will and ability to kill.

I had a dream a few nights ago where I had acquired two hand guns illegally and was trying to sell them on the street to some underground gun dealer. I was stressed out and fumbling with these black crumbling pistols. In the end, I realized that both of the guns were toys and didn’t really work, much to my relief (and to the dealer’s irritation). As the old saying goes, “guns don’t kill people, I do”, and just having the guns in my dream seemed to bring me one step closer to actually killing someone.

Firearms may be just another weapon made to cause significant harm with significant ease, but they themselves aren’t able to cause harm without someone deliberately using them to do it. We’ve all seen the damage people can cause with knives, cars, and a myriad of other implements (including teeth and fists), but no weapon seems to combine lethal force and efficiency quite like guns.

In your situation, it’s perfectly natural to want and protect your family and your property, and a gun is one way to do it. But just go through the possible scenarios that could play out: If someone breaks into your home while you’re actually there, are you going to confront them with the gun? Are you going to shoot them if they don’t leave? What if you miss? What if you actually kill them? What if they weren’t actually an intruder, but a family member you mistook for an intruder? What if they grabbed the gun and shot you?

At first it seems like it might be easier to put a sign on your front door that says, “This Home Is Protected By A Gun,” but then that might actually attract more attention from a gun thief. Maybe just get a security system installed?

On all sides, it seems we can agree that guns are just super intense objects. But what is even more intense is man’s willingness to harm others for fun or profit. The problem isn’t guns, the problem is our violent nature, and if someone wants to hurt someone badly enough, they’re going to find a way to do it, gun or not. In your case, you don’t want to shoot someone, you just don’t want your home to get broken into. If you do get a gun, I suggest having everyone in your family take lessons on how to use it. It should be treated with an incredible amount of respect and maybe even a little fear.

The idea would be never to use it, or have to use it. I don’t believe that having a gun in your house somehow “attracts” bad vibes into your home, but it does suddenly allow for a whole range of possibilities to occur that simply wouldn’t be possible if a gun wasn’t there. Fathom those possibilities, and weigh your options heavily. Everyone has the right to protect themselves and to feel safe, but there will never be total security or safety — life is precarious and fragile without burglars or guns. Each situation is different, and no matter what, guns and other weapons will always exist. If we put less energy into fighting about weapons, and more energy into figuring out why we’re fighting in the first place, we’d probably save a lot more lives. We must value each other’s life as if it was our own. A gun can’t love someone or have compassion, but you can. Whatever you decide to do, just take great care. I hope you never shoot anyone.

*Party hard,
Andrew W.K.*

# Should I Stop Eating Meat?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 23, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

My girlfriend is a vegetarian, and we’ve been dating for a year now. I love her a lot, but she hates that I eat meat. Like most Americans, roughly 100% of the plates I put in front of me have a dead animal somewhere on them. Over the course of our relationship, my girl has pretty much convinced me it’s unhealthy, both for my body and the environment. The proof is pretty irrefutable, but I can’t picture cutting out meat completely, even if I’d like to. A life of not eating tacos, pepperoni pizzas, and cheese burgers is no life for me (yes, I’ve tried meat substitutes as alternatives, and I hate them). So my question is basic: how do I give up something I know is bad for me and my relationship if I love it so much?

– *Meat Eater*

Dear Meat Eater,

I don’t like people telling me what to do, but sometimes it’s good to hear people out, especially if they’re turning me on to ideas I haven’t fully contemplated before. For example, when I was 13, I started dating my first serious long-term girlfriend, and her family introduced me to all sorts of new experiences — everything from the music of George Clinton to the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. One day, her parents gave me a paperback copy of Dick Gregory’s Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat: Cookin’ With Mother Nature. The book was a revelation. It completely dazzled me as an amazing piece of writing from a unique man, and it was the first time I’d been presented with deeply coherent ethical and biological reasons for not eating animals.

I read the whole book in one day, and by the next morning, I had become a vegan. Dick Gregory’s book was the first time I really fathomed the idea that when I ate steak, I was eating cow’s body. And that a grilled chicken sandwich was bird’s flesh. And that bacon was pig’s meat. Even a glass of cow’s milk suddenly seemed completely bizarre and grotesque — why would I, a human, drink the mother’s milk of a totally different beast?

Five years later, I moved to New York City, and due to laziness and cheapness, my daily vegan meals began to decline in quality. On certain days, I’d just three whole containers of plain tofu. Other days might consist spaghetti sauce over cold lentils. Occasionally I’d splurge and eat black bean tacos from the Chinese owned Tex-Mex “Fresco Tortilla” place, or Middle Eastern falafel and hummus from the place next to my work. The food wasn’t bad, but I realized if I put in more effort, I wouldn’t have had such a boring menu. By that time, I had really forgotten about meat and cheese and eggs to the point where I didn’t crave them anymore, but I wasn’t exactly having a great time with my food.

After a while, I broke up with my girlfriend and she moved back to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where we were from, and I stayed in New York City. I clearly remember the day I decided to break my vegan diet. At the time, I hadn’t really associated it with the end of our relationship, but looking back, that must’ve been part of my subconscious reasoning — I guess I wanted to reclaim a version of myself that had existed before her and her family came into my life. So, I went with a friend to a Thai food restaurant and nervously ordered a swordfish steak. I was excited, but also afraid that eating fish flesh would make me sick.

Turned out that the meal was one of the best and most memorable of my life. I gradually began the process of becoming a full blown omnivore once again and haven’t stopped since. I had really enjoyed my vegetarian and vegan diets, but I also was amazed to discover that I still loved every single animal product I came across. In fact, I seemed to love it even more.

What was most interesting was that even though I had seen lots of brutal slaughter house video footage, and had researched all the damage that animal products can do to the human body and the environment, it didn’t really make me feel bad about eating it — I actually felt I enjoyed it more passionately. Why didn’t I feel guilty? Part of me is still disturbed and mystified that I can engage in something that I once thought was pure evil, and do it with an awareness and sense of glee. I suppose I had accepted and actively embraced my preferences, and since I had more respect for the intensity of what I was actually engaged in, it brought me pleasure.

Even though I didn’t raise and kill and prepare the meat myself, I was aware that it didn’t magically appear on my plate, and not having that “bad-faith” actually added a level of value and plain awe to the entire meat-eating experience. Eating meat was more intense than ever, especially when I fully fathomed that it’s dead animal’s flesh that went through all sorts of cruel and unusual steps to reach my mouth as food. As a society, we must embrace our choices if we’re going to honestly engage in them. If we love eating meat so much, we must take full responsibility and be willing to deal with all the horrifying and sinister aspects of its production. Even if an animal is raised “ethically” and treated to the finest “free-range” lifestyle before it’s slaughtered, we’re still engaged in a cycle of death and abuse and waste and damage to ourselves and the planet. It’s an undeniable fact that the cattle industry is responsible for more damage to the ozone than just about any other single source. And yet, we must think its worth it if we’re still demanding our beef.

We should be honest with ourselves. When we pretend we don’t realize that we’re eating a dead animal, or we ignore the brutality of the whole process and put it out of mind, that’s when we commit our biggest sin. We should take full ownership of what we’re doing, not so that we stop enjoying what we consume, but so that we’re fully aware and accountable for the repercussions of our actions.

When someone gets an abortion, we don’t think, “Oh, the fetus just magically disappeared.” When someone is executed on death row, we don’t think, “Oh, that inmate just passed away somehow.” We realize the violence and the severity of what’s really going on. Killing other beings is painful and heavy for everyone, even when it’s for a good reason. And killing other beings is painful and spiritually troubling when that “good reason” is hard to pin down. We must wrestle and struggle with these uncomfortable and unnerving thoughts and be brave enough to confront them head on.

In the end, it seems nearly impossible to exist in the world without doing it damage. To create is to destroy, to live is to cause death, to experience pleasure is to cause pain. It becomes a slippery slope — we live in a world full of rotting darkness and crushing confusion — just to carve out a moment of happiness and security is a tremendous and fleeting triumph. To think we can live without “doing wrong” is wrong. But we can always strive to do better. Most of all, we must strive to be aware of what we’ve already done and continue to do.

Your girlfriend shouldn’t try to force a particular diet on you, but she has the right to leave you if this no-meat concept is really important to her — she actually has the right to leave you for any reason she wants. You also have the right to leave her if she tries to tell you what to do and you don’t like it. From what you said, you already tried not eating meat and didn’t enjoy it. So, now you must face the fact that you might have to choose between your girlfriend and meat. If you do choose meat, and she does leave you, I’ll bet you’ll end up savoring every bite of that bacon cheese burger even more than before. You better.
 *Party in good faith,
Andrew W.K.*

P.S. Eating meat is bad for you. Smoking is bad for you. Having unprotected sex is bad for you. Doing drugs is bad for you. Using a cell phone is bad for you. Living in a city is bad for you. Being alive is bad for you. *But it’s worth it*.

[*Top 10 Douchiest Guitarists of All Time*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/02/06/top-10-douchiest-guitarists-of-all-time/)[*The 10 Douchiest Drummers of All Time*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/03/13/the-10-douchiest-drummers-of-all-time/)[*The Top 15 Things That Annoy the Crap Out of Your Local Sound Guy*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/02/20/the-top-15-things-that-annoy-the-crap-out-of-your-local-sound-guy/)

# How Do I Deal With Negativity on the Internet?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 30, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every week New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

About a year ago, I started using more social media on the Internet. At first I found it somewhat intoxicating — a new way of connecting with people and finding out quickly about breaking news. But now I’ve grown tired of the negativity. It’s a constant stream of fighting, name calling, shaming, and just overall vile behavior. You’re very active on social media (one of the reasons I started using it, actually) and I’m sure people send you negative shit all day just because they can. How do you not drown in it? Is it possible to be on the Internet and not start to hate humanity?

— *Hope Fading*

 *See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Stop Eating Meat?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/04/23/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-stop-eating-meat/)

Dear Hope Fading,

The computer is a mysterious extension of the human spirit. The development and ongoing advancement of computer technology has allowed humans to achieve a truly magical breakthrough. We now have the ability to manipulate and customize just about every aspect of day-to-day life. And while computer power can be applied to a seemingly endless array of human experiences, it seems that this technology has most obviously impacted the nature of human interaction.

Despite how far the computer, Internet, and social media have come, they’re still in the relatively early stages of development — maybe even the infantile, pre-adolescent stages. Just like with human toddlers, one of the most exciting and empowering developments for a young person is the discovery of the word “no.” When a child first learns that they have the ability to say no, they usually get hooked on negating just about everything around them. “Do you want to take a bath?” “NO!” “It’s time eat dinner now.” “NO!” “Give your grandma a kiss.” “NO!” “Do you like this game?” “NO!” In a world that’s truly overwhelming for all of us, especially a young child, having the ability to say no — to cancel out, defy, and deny — is an extremely helpful and comforting tool. We can all agree that there’s simply too much in the world to process and experience, so we do have to pick and choose what we say yes to, and no to.

So, like a very young person first experiencing the excitement of saying no, we’re also enthralled by the new powers of the computer and how we can interact using it. But just like the “outside” world, there is way too much information being offered to us “inside” the computer. Saying no and lashing out at the overload is a natural, if not understandably immature, reaction. It’s also fun and thrilling. The combination of anonymity and physical distance allows us to behave in ways we wouldn’t in other situations, like face-to-face interactions. It reminds me of how we behave when we’re driving, and how we interact with other cars and drivers as though they’re not entirely real.

It’s a less-than-human state of mind due to the bizarre nature of being enclosed and detached from another person. And computers share a similar detachment combined with extraordinary power, just like the automobile gives us. I’ve definitely done and said things to other cars while driving that I never would’ve thought to say to someone walking down the street. And the same goes for the Internet. When my friend first got an Internet connection, we spent hours going to chat rooms and saying crazy and often times negative stuff to other users. We would laugh until we cried, and it all felt very natural, even if it was a little mean. But we couldn’t imagine that the other people we were chatting with would take it personally. How could they? None of us knew each other personally or had any idea who we were talking with. That was part of the fun.

As these new technologies mature, so will the ways we use them. now find it boring to go to chat rooms just to mess with people. And just think — most current versions of social media are still only a few years old. Eventually, people will grow tired of using computer power for petty teasing, and will use it for more practical and useful applications. That’s already happening all over the Internet.

Remember that all feelings and behaviors and interactions count as energy. It could be good energy directed towards an object, a situation, or a person, or it could be bad energy. But either way, it’s energy. You can harness and use negative vibes just as easily as positive vibes. That’s the key to transforming bad things into good things — just like a wizard using alchemy to transform lead into gold. The stronger your resolve, the more you can take all kinds of feelings and experiences and use them to further your own dreams and desires. This is why politicians try to get issues split into two sides, so that people can argue and generate even more energy and power towards the issue and the politician.

When people hate something, it doesn’t necessarily bring it down — it often times makes it grow stronger by giving it more attention, more energy, and more power. The time we spend thinking about something, criticizing something, and talking about something — especially with passionate emotions involved — the more energy and power we feed that thing, and whether we like it or not, that sustains it. How many times have we found ourselves engaging in the same arguments about the same two-sided issues? How many times have we found ourselves obsessing over how much we hate a certain celebrity, cultural issue, or political situation? We’re giving our sacred and precious energy to that thing we hate, and many of those things are counting on your hatred to further their own dreams and desires. Who are you giving your power to? Most of the time, it’s better to fight for what you love, and not waste energy fighting against what you hate.

Look for the good stuff going on, and don’t get too focused on the bad stuff. In any area of life, you can easily find negative bullshit to fixate on, and the more you look for it, the more you’ll see it. Bad vibes can suck you in and give you tunnel vision, where all you see is darkness, cruelty, and suffering. But it’s just as easy to look for things to be happy about — things to make you smile and feel good about being alive.

Ideally, life shouldn’t be an ongoing struggle to see the glass half-full, but rather an appreciation that there’s a glass at all. Life itself is a positive experience, and all that comes with it — including haters and teasing and bad vibes — is what adds texture and dynamics to this absurd adventure. Without a full range of emotions, feelings, and experiences, life would be boring and flat. That doesn’t mean you have to put yourself through a bunch of negativity just for the sake of it, but it means that when you inherently come across bad stuff, you don’t take it to heart, don’t take it too seriously, and don’t let it ruin your day. Having a positive mindset isn’t about feeling happy all the time, it’s about having the strength to keep living life as best you can, even during sad or negative times.

Most of all, don’t get bogged down by bullshit. See beyond the nonsense and realize you don’t have to have engage or have an opinion about everything. Sometimes we just don’t have to care so much. hat’s not being ignorant, it’s being focused on what matters more to us. Keep your energy and valuable time focused on what you want, not on what you’re bummed out about. The people you don’t like shouldn’t have the power to make you feel bad. Don’t let bullies and haters have the satisfaction of getting under your skin. And if they do, take that pain and anger and harness it — use it to strengthen you and to push you forward. Work so hard on what you love that you don’t even notice the assholes anymore. We won’t let anyone stop our party.

[*Top 10 Douchiest Guitarists of All Time*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/02/06/top-10-douchiest-guitarists-of-all-time/)[*The 10 Douchiest Drummers of All Time*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/03/13/the-10-douchiest-drummers-of-all-time/)[*The Top 15 Things That Annoy the Crap Out of Your Local Sound Guy*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/02/20/the-top-15-things-that-annoy-the-crap-out-of-your-local-sound-guy/)

# Learning to Love NYC

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

May 7, 2014

[*Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I’ve been living in NYC for a couple years now, and my small-town country-living parents are coming to visit me. They hate the big city — they say it’s too crowded, too loud, too expensive, too EVERYTHING. But I love it here and want them to see what I see in it. Any idea what I can do make them love this city as much as I do?

– *Big City Bull*

*See also:*[*Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Experiment With the Same Sex?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/01/29/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-experiment-with-the-same-sex-2/)

Dear Big City Bull,

One of my best friends is from a small town in Texas. He travels constantly and has been all over the world, including spending lots of time in big cities like New York. Recently, he was staying in Manhattan and invited his parents to come stay with him for a few days. It was a perfect opportunity for his mom and dad to see the Big Apple for the first time. Reluctantly, his parents agreed, but insisted on getting a hotel room near Times Square, rather than staying with him at his friend’s house in Queens.

Even though my friend doesn’t live in NYC full time, he’s familiar with the different neighborhoods and really wanted to give his parents a taste of what New York has to offer. On the first night, my friend made dinner reservations at a legendary one-of-a-kind Italian place in Greenwich Village. He figured they could walk from the hotel and see all sights as they built up their appetites on the way. After about three blocks, his parents started asking, “How much further?” and “Why are we walking so far?”, only to gasp when he said it was over 40 more blocks. They refused to walk any longer, so my friend suggested they take the subway, for the speed and the experience. They refused, citing filth and danger and insisted on a taxi instead.

They hailed a cab and began to drive downtown. As my friend pointed to landmarks and funny stuff out of the window, his parents were more interested in the touchscreen TV in the taxi’s back seat, and avidly discussed the news items and entertainment tidbits on display. When my friend encouraged them to take advantage of the convenient city tour the taxi’s view was providing, they shushed him and said, “We’re trying to watch this show!”

They finally made it to Greenwich Village, and had some time to spare before their reservation. My friend suggested they walk around the neighborhood a little, but his parents said they were exhausted from the cab ride and would rather just find a place to sit down. They went to a Starbucks and proceeded to make phone calls to their friends and family back in Texas — checking in and asking about the latest local happenings, despite the fact they had been away from home for less than a day. Finally, dinner time rolled around and the three of them proceeded to the Italian restaurant. The restaurant’s candlelit charm was “too dark,” the waiters Italian accents were “too thick,” and the food was “too spicy.” They rushed through the meal, in a hurry to get back to the hotel by 10 p.m., in time to catch a TV show — I think it was the nightly news. My friend was pretty dejected by this point, and more or less gave up trying to further interest them in the city.

As they took the taxi back uptown — during a rare look away from the TV and out the window — they noticed an Olive Garden restaurant a few blocks from their hotel. They became enraged: “Son, why on earth did you drive us to some no-name Italian restaurant when there’s an Olive Garden literally next to where we’re staying!?” They spent the rest of the weekend in the hotel.

I’ve had similar experiences to this, and I no longer try to “make” people like New York City. In fact, I don’t really try to make people like anything. I just like what I like, and if they like me, maybe they’ll get into it too. Or maybe they’ll just appreciate that I’m passionate about something and we can bond over other stuff. I’ve had plenty of people try to convince me as to why Paris is the greatest city in the world, but it just never really clicked with me. To each their own. I can respect and understand all sorts of stuff that people love and feel strongly about, and that can be enough to get along with someone. I actually like being around people with much different interests and tastes than me — it seems to make life feel less claustrophobic and the world feel larger.

Personally, I agree with your parents about New York. It is “too everything,” and that’s what I love about it. Living in a city isn’t supposed to be easy. It’s supposed to be amazing. I live in Midtown, near Times Square, because I love the “too everything” feelings from this area. I feel most out of place and lost in this part of town, and after all these years living in New York, I feel warmly stimulated by its chaos. I’m at home in the discomfort of it all. I didn’t move to New York City to have a quiet and reasonable life — I came here to have an unreasonably awesome life. I remember when I first visited NYC — it felt more than overwhelming, it felt painful. But it was the kind of pain that I could tell makes you a bigger and stronger person. I could tell that even though it was hard to deal with this place, I was supposed to be here, and be in the throws of it all. I wanted to be around every kind of person, including people I couldn’t relate to at all. I still want to be around the kinds of people who look at the world with a sense of awe and mind-blown dizziness. Tourists, business commuters, street vendors, chain stores, everything — none of it makes any sense, except that it’s happening here, and that’s how it’s always been.

Rather than try and make your parents like NYC, instead allow them to make you experience the world through their eyes for a little while. Perhaps their distaste for the city will give you a whole new perspective and appreciation for how incredibly intense it really is. It’s an absolute miracle that New York — or any city — can exist at all. It’s a team effort of humanity. Every day, millions of people get together — whether they realize it or not — and make this world exist, and your parents are part of that phenomenon. They made you exist in the first place. Everyone counts, and everyone here adds to the sum total of experience. Besides, your parents don’t need to love where you live, they just need to love you.

*Party hard,
Andrew W.K.*

**Should I Start Doing Heroin?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

May 14, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I scored a big batch of Oxycontin not too long ago, and I have to say, I liked it a lot. It soothed me, and for the first time in my entire life, I truly felt pain free — physically and emotionally. Even though I know it can be dangerous, I’ve honestly not seen any drawbacks so far — I just finally felt good. The thing is, now I don’t have anymore pills, and all I can think about is taking the next step: heroin. I’ve just lost my job and don’t have a girlfriend or any close family, so I don’t really have any responsibilities. But I’ve got enough money saved up to survive and just want the world fade away for a while. I want to go away from everything. Should I?

– High Right Now

**Dear High Right Now**,

Why do some people go all the way into oblivion and give up on “regular” life? Why do other people never seem to even consider giving up? I think wanting to find a way out of life is a completely understandable desire. And in many ways, the entire human struggle is centered around finding a way out of suffering. Why do we keep on striving every day forever? What are we hoping to find? Why is it so hard just to get by, let alone to thrive? It takes an untiring commitment to the belief that if we keep trying to succeed, someday everything will be perfect and we’ll finally be truly happy.

Does that perfect happiness exist? And even if it does, what’s the point of getting to that state if 99% of our time is spent struggling to find it? There might not be any point to anything at all, so why not remove oneself from the entire process and just focus on feeling as good as possible right now? Why do we feel we must participate in this version of life, with all its efforts, jobs, drama, and social interaction? Who invented this version of the world? And is it really the best way to live? Did we really agree to it? Or were we forced into it? Who taught us how to live like this? And who taught them? Why bother trying to be a good person? Why not just opt out of the whole system and embrace the oblivion that we’ll all face eventually?

Becoming a drug addict can be a perfectly reasonable reaction to the incredibly exhausting project called “being alive.” We must do our best to remember how close each of us is to the edge of oblivion at any moment, and not be too quick to judge the person who chooses to take another path to get there. The easy way out is often the hardest way, and there is something strangely heroic about the person who chooses to venture into the no-man’s-land beyond the trappings of “day-to-day life.” Who are these people who fling themselves into the abyss, and then try to exist there?

The drug addict, the homeless person, the hermit, the ascetic — the deviants both frighten us and fascinate us. As easy as it can be to see them as weak or crazy, we also sense some sort of courage in their decision to not live like the rest of us. Most frightening of all, perhaps we can relate to it — perhaps we fantasize about it only to shove the thought back into the darkest parts of our mind. The amount of effort it takes to live is undeniable. We must have more compassion for those people who choose to live in another way. Their life choices shouldn’t necessarily be interpreted as a negative judgement of our own lifestyle. Society doesn’t like people who don’t participate in society because it makes us think of jumping ship too. We should never feel that we’re “better than” people who use drugs. The terrifying truth is that no one is ever really better than anyone, just different.

So, should you become a heroin user? I don’t know. But I wouldn’t think less of you if you did. And that scares me, and I hope it scares you too. One of my best friends who did heroin said he realized “humans aren’t meant to feel that good.” There are many paths that lead to many outcomes, and it all depends on what your ultimate goals are. If your goal is to achieve a bunch of “accomplishments” and “succeed,” then becoming a full-blown drug addict might not be the best path. If your goal is to avoid pain by whatever means necessary, then becoming a full-blown drug addict might be the right path, at least for a while.

But always remember: the pain that comes from being alive is also what makes pleasure feel good, so we need that contrast in order to feel either. If all we felt was pleasure, then that pleasure would soon become pain. It’s a law of nature that one can’t exist without the other. The true scam is believing that there ever will be a perfect way to live. So you have to be careful which version of the scam you choose to believe. It’s like someone always looking for the perfect way to win at roulette. The odds are always the same, no matter how many times the ball lands on black. And despite what many people believe, it’s OK to not feel good all the time. No one knows what’s really going on. Everything is neither true nor false, except that everything is neither true nor false… or maybe not. Try to stay in that state of mind, and the pain and pleasure will just be another aspect of this absurd and perplexing party called “life” — it’s the best party we can have — it’s the party of not being dead.

Stay strong and live it up, my friend.

– Andrew W.K.

P.S. I think all drugs should be legal.

P.P.S. About a month ago, I had the most vivid and lucid dream I’ve ever experienced. It was more detailed and believable than any other dream I’ve had. In this dream, I woke up to find myself living in some kind of shared squat, anarchist flop house. The more deeply I entered this dream-state awareness, the more extreme my feeling of horror. I slowly looked around in the dream and noticed an unsettling familiarity with my surroundings. It felt like I was actually emerging from another dream and I couldn’t tell which was real.

I groggily tried to pull myself together and make sense of where I was. What was I doing here? And why did it seem so familiar? The feeling I had during the dream was that I was emerging from amnesia. A deep sense of dread began to set in. I was in a dumpy living room with extremely grainy stucco walls painted mustard yellow with a single bare light bulb hung overhead, exaggerating the sandpaper texture of everything. It was low-lit, hazy, damp, and cold. The air smelled like dead skin cells and old oil.

I had been slumped in a bean-bag type chair, and as I tried to stand up and clear my head, I noticed other people hanging around the room. Some were asleep on shredded couches, others were looking at me from the corner of the room, and some were moving about in adjacent rooms. As I explored the space, it seemed we were in an old rectory attached to a small abandoned church. I figured that I was part of this group of crust punks who had converted the space into a crude music venue and communal living space. It became clear that I had been living here for a long time.I started to panic and desperately began asking people, “Where am I? What the fuck is going on? What happened?”

A young woman, half passed out in a ratty recliner, responded lazily, “Dude, what the hell are you talking about? Are you on acid or something?” I became more frustrated, like I couldn’t snap out of it or remember how I got to this place. It felt like I had been asleep for years and was finally waking up and trying to piece my brain back together. A guy hunched over a table said, “Come on, Andrew. You’re just freaking out. You’ve been here all along. You’re just waking up from some nightmare. Stop freaking out.”

It began to dawn on me that this place was my real life, and that my other “real” life had all been a fantasy — just a dream I had. What I remembered as my real life was just a vision I experienced while I had nodded off in my bean bag in this flop house. It all came crashing back at once: I was a full blown drug addict, alternating between heroin and speed, and living in this house with a bunch of other addicts. I had never moved to New York City. I had never toured the world. I had never experienced so many awesome fun times.

It had all been a dream in the midst of this true nightmare reality. The sadness was overwhelming — the most crushing sense of despair washed over my entire soul. I staggered around the rest of the house and into the church area where a bunch of people were working on setting up a show for later that night. I remembered back to the moment when I decided to just give up on myself and life. It had been so easy to just quit caring about everything. In fact, it had been euphoric. One step at a time, I had made my way deeper into this nightmare and further away from any ambitions or interests. My “real” life faded away like a blurry memory, and I felt stupid for ever having had any enthusiasm or motivation for anything.

Towards the end of the dream, I began to have a panic attack and actually started to pry open my eye in a desperate attempt to wake up. It worked, and I came back from the junkie nightmare to find myself rejoined with my actual life here in New York, where I still have friends and a family, and still play music and have fun doing all the stuff I’ve always loved to do.

Words cannot express how glad I was to be back. It was by far the happiest I’ve ever been upon waking from a nightmare. The closest comparison I have is the feeling that Scrooge must’ve had when he awoke from his night of ordeals and visions in A Christmas Carol. But the most frightening part of all was how close that other reality felt, even after I woke up. It seemed like maybe I actually was living a version of that life in some parallel universe, and that if I wasn’t careful, I could slip into it again and never come back.

# Should I Bother With College?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

May 21, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I’ll be graduating from high school in a few weeks, so naturally I’ve been thinking about college. Mainly, about how it seems like a giant waste of time. My two older siblings have graduated from good universities already, but now they can’t find jobs and are up to their eyeballs in debt. I’ve been reading a lot about how college is just a giant scam — perhaps best encapsulated by this [great parody video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T24DPU-hkJM) — just the next bubble that’s going to burst when we all realize the cost has well outpaced the value. I’m thinking about breaking my parents hearts by not going. Is college worth it?

— Higher Learning

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Start Doing Heroin?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/05/14/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-start-doing-heroin/)

**Dear Higher Learning**,

When I think back to all my school years now, it all seems so bizarre. School is weird. College seems even weirder. It’s like a job, where your main work is studying, but instead of getting paid for the work you do, you have to pay to do the work. Of course, the idea is that you gain wisdom and ability that far outweigh the cost of attending, but as you mentioned, sometimes what was gained doesn’t necessarily equal greater opportunity or income.

I never went to college myself. I enjoyed almost all of my early school years, but by the time I hit high school it seemed like more of my life interests were outside of the school curriculum, and the two schedules couldn’t coexist. By my junior year, I was determined to get out of school as quickly as possible, so I began taking a bunch of extra credit classes to graduate early. Most of my friends were older and already out of high school at that point, so most of my social life didn’t revolve around school. And I was doing lots of music and paintings and sculptures and stuff which school just took time away from working on. Again, it wasn’t that I didn’t like high school, I just liked doing other things more.

It really began to feel strange to be forced to sit in classrooms when I had a million other things I could be doing that I found much more exciting and important. I did manage to graduate a year early, and even was accepted to the Art Institute of Chicago, but after visiting and touring that school, it just seemed like going back into another regimented environment, the same type I had just worked so hard to get out of. I moved to New York and even went to an NYU open house for about 15 minutes before I finally decided that I was not meant to go to college.

At first, my parents were concerned I wasn’t following the path they had imagined I would. But it was more their friends and neighbors who gave them a hard time, and said, “Aren’t you worried about Andrew not getting a proper education?” My dad, who’s a law professor at the University of Michigan said, “Look, I teach college — trust me, it’s no big deal.”

I think it all depends on what you really want to do. College can really help some people find their true passion in life, and then give them a comprehensive knowledge to work with. Then again, I’ve talked with plenty of college graduates who still don’t know what they want to do with their lives, even after eight years of college. In some ways, I think college can confuse one’s sense of purpose. When I decided I wanted to be a Professional Partier, I would’ve had a hard time finding classes that taught me how to do that. I probably would’ve been discouraged and wound up doubting my dream, however unlikely it seemed.

And as much as there seems to be lots of awesome partying at most colleges, it also seems like you could attend just as many awesome parties — if not more — by not enrolling in classes. In fact, I’ve ended up performing, lecturing, and partying at more colleges from my work as a Professional Partier than I ever would’ve had I been a Professional Student. My point is, you can still participate in the college experience without ever having to really go. Some people just love college itself, for exactly what it is. These people often become academics and never really stop going to college for the rest of their lives.

At the end of the day, you must follow your instincts. This college decision, just like any other major life choice, is based on many factors, but deep down inside, there is one clear answer, and if you can tune in to yourself and really listen to your soul, I’m sure your destiny will tell you what to do. Some people are meant to go to college and then quit after a year. Some people are meant to go to college and find the love of their life. Some people are meant to not go to college but educate themselves through adventure. Everyone’s path is different and you must listen closely to where your path is calling you. I would recommend not making this choice based on things like money or convenience or anything except what you really feel like you’re supposed to do at this point in your life. If it just doesn’t feel right, then don’t go. But if it feels like you’re meant to go, then you must go regardless of any difficulty or expense.

Doing anything worthwhile in life takes effort, and usually extreme amounts of it. Don’t let the easiness of not going to college be the reason you don’t go. In fact, don’t let anything be a reason not to go except your undeniable personal sense of fate. Learning to trust your instincts and developing the courage to tirelessly follow your dreams is the most important and valuable skill any of us can develop. You don’t have to go to college to learn that.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

P.S. But if you do go to college, please invite me to party!

**On School Shootings and Hatred**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

May 28, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

In this week’s column, a bit of a departure. Given the terrible massacre that took place this weekend at UCSB and the many troubling and hate-filled letters from disturbed young men Andrew gets at the email address above, he felt the need to address how to best deal with overwhelming feelings of rage, and how to suppress them rather than be consumed by them. – Brian McManus

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Bother With College?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/05/21/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-bother-with-college/)

**From Andrew**:

Hate is such a strong word. It’s easy to use and most of us say it all the time. We “hate that movie.” Or we “hate that song.” Or we “hate that food,” etc. Just thinking about all this hate makes me hate the word hate. A good exercise is to try and catch ourselves whenever we want to use the word “hate” and think twice — is it really necessary? What does all this hating really add up to?

When it comes to hating other people, we’ve really got to be careful. Hating someone we’ve never met usually doesn’t make much sense. Yet it seems most of us do this on a daily basis. There are definitely people who deserve our scorn, but most of the time, it’s hard to justify feeling extreme animosity towards a common stranger. We “hate” some performer on TV. We “hate” a team of athletes. We “hate” a politician and his party. In all these situations, hate isn’t really what’s going on inside us.

We might be mistaking our different cultural style for hate, or our competitive spirit for hate. We might be mistaking different moral points of view for hate. Even if you’re a genuine misanthropist, and someone who honestly despises the entire concept of the human race, it still doesn’t really justify hating all the individual people you come across.

Hatred usually stems from a deep fear or hurt rather than a deep dislike. If you’re very honest with yourself, perhaps you can recall times when you thought you “hated” someone when actually it was just someone you were intimidated or hurt by. And then once you had an interaction with them, you realized they weren’t so bad after all. It probably feels more empowering to say that you “hate” someone, rather than say you’re “afraid” of someone. Strangers represent the unknown, and that uncertainty breeds anxiety and fear. Remember that you hating a random person is no different than a random person hating you.

Perhaps you’ve had a lot of bad experiences with people you actually knew well, where they’ve abused you or let you down. In those cases, we must rise above the hurt rather than feed into it. The people who are mean to us are actually giving us a chance to become stronger and more resilient. They want to lash out, to help justify their own hatred and taunting, but we must be more focused than that. We must take a deep breath and move on to other things. We can help each other to look beyond the cruelty surrounding us and see that the goodness in life is still there.

We must try and humble ourselves. We must comfort each other and help rescue each other from the brink of madness and despair. We must see ourselves as equals — no more or less special than anyone else. We must work to put ourselves in other’s situations and have compassion for their pain and frustrations. These are the foundations of humanity, and we aren’t fully human if we can’t experience and fathom the concept of another person’s existence and inherent worth. No matter how different or foreign someone else’s life may seem to us, they’re still a person with just as much value, whether we like them or not.

We don’t have to like everyone, but we do have to try and love everyone. We must focus on love even when it’s hard, even when we feel someone doesn’t deserve it. We must find a way to relate to everyone, or we’ll end up ultimately destroying ourselves and adding more pain to the world. Being a human isn’t an easy task — it takes constant effort and dedication and patience. Being alive and being human are two different things. In order to truly experience life for all it can be, we must search for common ground and live with humility. Every person is different, yet the fact that each of us is unique is the one thing we all have in common.

That’s the miracle of humanity — that we can work to get along even when we stand apart. War, violence, and inhumanity occur when we force ourselves to stop thinking of the other person as equal and start thinking only of ourselves. We may not always be able to peacefully co-exist, but we must strive for it. That must remain our ultimate goal, as difficult as it may be to achieve.

So the next time you feel hatred welling up inside you, stop and examine it. Where is it really coming from, what is it really accomplishing, and how can we better direct all that emotion and energy?

Maybe the person you were hating was actually just a friend you hadn’t made yet?

Our hearts are strong enough and big enough to love everyone. It’s not easy but it’s crucial to our mutual survival, now more than ever.

– Andrew W.K.

P.S. No matter how angry or full of hate you’re feel, there’s someone out there who can relate to you, who will listen to you, and who cares about you. Stay strong. It’s never as bad as it seems. Don’t hurt others, and don’t hurt yourself.

# How to Get Andrew W.K. to Answer Your Question

## by [BRIAN MCMANUS](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/brianmcmanus/)

May 29, 2014

It’s hard to believe, but Andrew W.K.’s advice column turns six months old this week. It’s been quite a hit. And quite the experience. Already he’s helped so, so many with problems ranging from how to ask your [partner to fiddle with your asshole](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/01/ask_andrew_wk_same_sex.php) to whether or not [college is worth the time and expense](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/05/ask_andrew_wk_college.php). It’s the only advice column we know of that has wrestled with issues as far-ranging as [internet bullying](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/04/ask_andrew_wk_internet_negativity.php)and [heroin abuse](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/05/ask_andrew_wk_try_heroin.php). That’s perhaps why, this year, several members of the Pulitzer committee resigned in shame when it failed to take ALL THE PRIZES. It’s just that good. Now, let’s talk about how we can make it better.

See also:[*Andrew W.K.: On Hatred*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/05/ask_andrew_wk_on_hatred_ucsb.php)

Because a lot of that starts with you. Each week hundreds of our fine readers write to Andrew W.K. with questions both personal and absurd, twisted and enlightening. We really, from the bottom of our hearts, thank you for that. We (read: an intern) pare those hundreds down to a respectable number and send a few to Andrew. He picks the one that resonates most with him that week. We can’t possibly get to all of them, and there are some we know from the outset won’t make it in front of Andrew. Want your question answered? Try sticking to the following…

**Don’t Be Vague**
Naturally, a lot of the letters Andrew receives are of the “How do I obtain my life goals?” variety. Andrew is a shining beacon of positivity and wish fulfillment (the man is a multi-instrumentalist, an author, a motivational speaker, and professional partier), and so many people think “If he can live his dream, maybe he has some insight into how I can live mine!” The problem with this kind of open-ended and very broad question is two fold: 1) He’s already answered it. In various ways. Several times. ([Check back through his archives, and you’ll see](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/ask_andrew_wk/).) 2) Your letter is exactly like a majority of the ones he’s already getting. Nothing about it stands out.

**Be Specific**
When we got a letter from a reader asking Andrew if he [should try heroin](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/05/ask_andrew_wk_try_heroin.php), it shook us. Not only is it incredibly specific, it’s incredibly interesting. We definitely wanted to know how Andrew would answer such a question beyond the pat (and cop-out easy) “Umm, no. Don’t do that. You’ll die.” Specificity is good.

**Ask Something Challenging**
The question about heroin is also challenging for the reasons we mentioned above. Ask something that’s a challenge to answer. (Save the HOW DO I PARTY BETTER I LOVE TO PARTY LOL!) If you’ve been reading the column, you already know this: Andrew is a deep thinker. He likes to problem solve. He enjoys meditating on these questions and answering them with a clear mind and a pure heart. Ask him something you don’t think he can answer. He gets off on it. Consider him your Rock ‘n’ Roll Ethicist.

**Don’t Be Abusive or Creepy**
In [this week’s column](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/05/ask_andrew_wk_on_hatred_ucsb.php) we briefly (and perhaps too vaguely) mentioned that a number of the emails we’ve been receiving in Andrew’s inbox have been “troubling and hate-filled letters from disturbed young men.” Letters that, no joke, ask how to best go about “fucking” a “bitch” the reader is “obsessed” with or something similarly bro-y. In short, have some respect. You can ask [questions of a sexual nature](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/03/ask_andrew_wk_ass_play.php) in a way that doesn’t make our skin crawl. If not, don’t write. You don’t need Andrew, you need help. We won’t pass them along to him, so don’t bother, bruh.

**Keep It Brief**
It’s true, there’s no such thing as a word count on the internet, but we can tell you: If your letter begins with a long-winded and meandering anecdote before you even get to your question, no one will read it. And that first no one will be us. Try being pithy. We run Andrew’s column every week online, but also in print every other week, so please be mindful before you drone on. When writing your question, ask yourself one first: What is my point?

**Read the**[Ask Andrew W.K. Archive](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/ask_andrew_wk/)
We can’t stress this enough. It’s easily the most important guideline. It will help you learn a few important things. 1) The types of questions Andrew likes answering — [provocative](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/05/ask_andrew_wk_try_heroin.php), [hard](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/04/ask_andrew_wk_internet_negativity.php), [fun](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/05/ask_andrew_wk_loving_nyc.php), [funny](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/03/ask_andrew_wk_good_friend_tastes.php). 2) The types of questions he’s already answered. (Want to know if you should stop eating meat? Great. [There’s a column for that](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/04/ask_andrew_wk_stop_eating_meat.php).) By reading through the archive, you’ll notice a pattern emerge.(Namely, all the questions Andrew answers are specific, pithy, challenging, not vague, and not creepy.) As we said, Andrew gets tons of email, and a good majority of it is from people asking questions he’s already answered. Don’t be that person. Read the back columns.

And that’s it! Stick to this, and you’ve improved your odds of Andrew answering your burning question dramatically. Now, signing off like Andrew does in every email he sends us…

PARTY HARD FOREVER!

Brian McManus totally wrote that question about butt play.

[***The 10 Douchiest Drummers of All Time***](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/03/the_10_douchiest_drummers.php)
[***The 10 Douchiest Guitarists of All Time***](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/02/top_10_douchiest_guitarists.php)
[***The Top 15 Things That Annoy Your Local Sound Guy***](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/02/top_15_sound_guy_annoyances.php)

**“I’m Contemplating Suicide”**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 4, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

For the first time in my life, I’ve found myself contemplating suicide. I feel like I’m disappearing without hope or interest in living anymore. I’ve tried therapy, venting, medication, self-help, sleeping — nothing has brought me relief. I don’t know how to pull out of this depression. How can I stop this feeling? How can I find meaning in life?

— Suicidal Tendencies

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Start Doing Heroin?*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/05/14/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-start-doing-heroin/)

**Dear Suicidal Tendencies**,

I think every person, at one time or another, has found themselves imagining what it might be like to stop living. Sometimes this can be out of desperation, but other times it’s just a way to get back in touch with not being dead. As the saying goes, “Being alive is alright, especially when we consider the alternative.” It’s healthy to think about life and death, even when we’re feeling hopeless. Or perhaps especially then. We shouldn’t be afraid to try and imagine what it would be like to kill ourselves. Often times, it can help us get a refreshed perspective and appreciation for the astounding adventure we’re part of, and how truly frightening and challenging it would be to really end it all.

As far as we’re aware, being dead is an impossibly unimaginable experience anyway. It might not even be an experience at all, but rather the total void of non-experience. When I’ve been in pain, sometimes non-experience sounded pretty good. Whatever it is to be dead, almost all of us have tried to fathom it, and in times of great anguish, we’ve probably wondered if it might be preferable to the discomfort of daily living. Only the most brazen of believers would unquestioningly assume that the afterlife — if there is one — is something we can comprehend and prepare for. And if there is an existence after this one, it would be pretty bold to think we could have the foggiest idea about what it consists of or feels like.

The mystery of the afterlife is part of the fun or terror of what lies beyond death. Death really is — for better or worse — the ultimate example of “who knows?” Someone who claims to know what happens after death is probably someone we should be suspicious of — they might be a ghost. So I say, contemplate suicide all you want, but don’t take those thoughts too seriously. Allow yourself to explore your inner thoughts and ideas without fear or commitment. You can think about things and not do them. You can always change your mind about anything you feel.

I don’t think you should kill yourself, but it’s not my decision to make. Being born wasn’t really your choice either, and in most cases, when and how you die is often out of your control. But it seems that if someone wants to end their life, they should absolutely be allowed to do it on their terms. After all, the only thing that each of us truly has ownership of is our body, and if we want to eradicate it, we can — even if it’s against other people’s beliefs.

As far as dealing with depression, I have a simple suggestion that I think could work like magic to heal your soul and lift your spirits. It’s a very simple thing called… Helping other people. Sometimes setting aside your own troubles and focusing on someone else’s in their time of need can have an incredibly powerful effect on relieving you of your own despair. This is especially true when you help someone you don’t know. Of course it’s good to help family and friends, but connecting with someone unknown to you, and being able to simply exercise your good will, can provide a unique and uplifting energy that almost nothing else compares to.

Andrew’s answer continues on the next page.

[Ed. note: With the goal of helping people in distress and preventing suicide, [*Samaritans free, confidential, 24-hour emotional support*](http://samaritansnyc.org/24-hour-crisis-hotline/) and crisis response hotline service is available on an immediate and ongoing basis to help people who are dealing with every kind of problem, illness, trauma or loss as they try to cope with their difficulties. More info [*here*](http://samaritansnyc.org/24-hour-crisis-hotline/). They can be reached at 212.673.3000.]

Some might say that helping other people just to make yourself feel good is selfish and not true generosity. But I think the fact that it benefits you is exactly the point. We are all bound together. No matter how much we like to think of ourselves as unrelated and apart from others and their plight, we are, in fact, all in the same boat. God or evolution or both have specifically wired our brains to feel pleasure when we help other people. Our health responds positively to acts of human kindness, whether we perform them or receive them. This reward is meant to be tangible. It’s supposed to feel good to do good for others — we’re then motivated to do even more good. To be able to relate to someone else whom you never met before is to be able to relate more deeply to yourself. We’re meant to see ourselves reflected in other people — people we would never imagine we’d have anything in common with. But we all share one thing in common: we’re human beings, trying to make the best of this intense thing called life.

So maybe it’s time to turn away from yourself and towards your neighbor. Help people in need. It doesn’t have to be traditional charity — it can be anything that shows your fellow man that someone’s there and someone cares. Participate in society to make it a more humane and compassionate place for everyone, including you. You’ll be astounded at how powerful it feels to engage in “others-help” instead of just “self-help.”

The experience of connecting with someone through shared understanding can put you in direct contact with the miracle of life. It’s truly the sensation of love — not just an idea or an emotion — but the very feeling and expression of what it is to be a person alongside another person. It is the feeling of God. And if you’re someone who doesn’t believe in God as an entity, you can experience God as this unbelievably simple yet infinite thing called “love.” God is love. And you don’t have to be religious to still think of God as just the word that best describes that indescribable and infinite feeling of total love. Love is the most fundamental part of being a living, breathing, and caring person. Give your love to the world and you’ll get more purpose and meaning back in your life than you ever imagined possible.

Love,Andrew W.K.

[Ed. note: With the goal of helping people in distress and preventing suicide, Samaritans free, confidential, 24-hour emotional support and crisis response hotline service is available on an immediate and ongoing basis to help people who are dealing with every kind of problem, illness, trauma or loss as they try to cope with their difficulties. More info [*here*](http://samaritansnyc.org/24-hour-crisis-hotline/). They can be reached at 212.673.3000.]

# How to Get Over a Devastating Breakup

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 11, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

My girlfriend of four years just broke up with me last night. I’m totally devastated. Even though we’ve had our ups and downs, she just dropped me from out of nowhere. She also told me she cheated on me, which just makes this all worse. We had been dating since high school and I thought we’d be together forever. She said she wants to stay friends and to help each other through the breakup by staying in contact. My heart is shattered and I still love her, even though I’m also angry and so hurt. I can’t imagine how I can continue living a regular life without her. How do I stop all these feelings and forget about her?
Sincerely,Devastated Dumped Dude

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: “I’m Contemplating Suicide”*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/06/04/ask-andrew-w-k-im-contemplating-suicide/)

**Dear Devastated Dumped Dude**,

You don’t stop all these feelings. You should feel devastated. Your heart should feel shattered. That’s how you can tell you were really in love, that you’re really alive, and you’re really a human being. It’s also how you can tell that you really allowed yourself to be truly open and intimate with someone else. Many people can’t handle the pain of really loving and caring about someone else, so they avoid intense relationships and the vulnerability that comes with them. You should take pride in the fact that you’ve been strong enough to be weak. The strongest people have the capacity to really let themselves feel. Sure, it hurts. But it’s also how you got to experience all those wonderful feelings too. Don’t let the pain trick you into closing your heart to the world and the future.

And don’t try and forget about her. Odds are you’ll remember her for the rest of your life and think about her constantly, even years and years after you’ve recovered from this initial onslaught of painful emotion. When you’re in a relationship with someone for a significant amount of time, they become part of you forever. You’ve exposed your soul to them, and whether you like it or not, they’ll retain their place in the story of your life for the rest of your time here on earth. But you’ll find that your memories and thoughts of them won’t always be painful. They won’t necessarily be enjoyable either. They’ll just be thoughts. Like remembering a dream. Don’t be afraid of your thoughts or your dreams or your nightmares. You can think about things without always having to feel emotions connected to the thoughts.

As far as “staying friends” and “helping each other work through the breakup,” I think that’s a bad idea. Many people I’ve met somehow stay friends with their exes, but I’ve never really done it and don’t understand how it works. No offense to those who pull it off, but my advice is to never feel it necessary to talk to your ex again, especially if they cheated on you. It’s something that has ended, like high school.

You don’t go back to high school after it ended and start taking freshman classes again just to keep in touch. You’ve moved on to a new part of your life. If you get fired from a job, you don’t go back and do some shifts just for fun to help your boss out. It’s over. You step forward into the next adventure that awaits. Have the courage to make a clean break. If you keep picking at the wound, it won’t heal as effectively and will keep re-opening. Be done with this and keep moving.

Most of all, stay strong. You will make it through this time. You will be stronger because of it. You will be OK again. In fact, you’ll be better than ever. You will meet a woman that’s the one. Probably when you least expect it. You will hurt and you will also feel excitement. Your attachment to the past will morph into curiosity about the future. Whatever you do, keep your heart open. Do not let this relationship be the end of your life. Let it be only the end of that time in your life. Now is the only time that matters. Your time with her wasn’t wasted. Every moment is precious, even the moments that suck. I’m thinking of you and sending you strength.

Your party will continue. In fact, it’s only just begun.

Love,Andrew

# Letting Go of Stress

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 18, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I’m literally drowning in stress. Anxiety has taken over my life and I’m exhausted from worrying. It’s gotten to the point where my mind has become a whirlwind of tension and spazzing-out. Money problems have been a major cause of my fretting, but I’m also sick of feeling like I never have enough hours in the day to do the work that would solve the money issues. It’s a catch 22 and I’m past my breaking point. I can’t get the necessary work done, let alone have time for any fun. I always feel rushed, running late, and short on energy. Those feelings, added to all my other daily stress, have me acting like an insane person. I feel like simplifying everything and making my life care-free, risk-free, and responsibility-free. But is that really the only way to get rid of my stress and have the time to enjoy life? Other people can’t possibly be living like this.
Thanks,Super Stressed

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: How to Get Over a Devastating Breakup*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/06/11/ask-andrew-w-k-how-to-get-over-a-devastating-breakup/)

**Dear Super Stessed**,

I can actually relate to everything you described. In fact, I think just about every single person has felt this way at some point, if not all the time. Stress is part of life — learning to manage it is the trick. Sure, like you, maybe I’ve fantasized about some perfect situation where I’m a dude just chilling in a hammock on a tropical island without a care in the world. But when I really think about it, that kind of life would probably get boring, and the “Don’t worry, be happy” attitude is not only unrealistic and forced, but also spiritless and bland.

It’s true that a lot of the times I’ve felt stressed, it’s lead to all sorts of other really problematic feelings – mood swings full of anger and rage, severe insomnia and paranoia, feelings of hopelessness and dread, and just waves of pure unrestrained depression. I actually think many of the worst emotional states are brought on purely by chronic worry.

But feeling overwhelmed is a natural reaction to being alive, so the key must be to change the way respond to it. We can be overwhelmed with joy and excitement as much as we can be overwhelmed with worry and dread. Stressful situations don’t always have to manifest as stressful feelings. Anxiety is really draining, but I think it’s basically just a distorted type of excitement. It’s mistaking our energy and enthusiasm for worry and nervousness. Just like you can be nervous before getting on a roller coaster, but that nervousness is actually part of the thrill — it’s your body and mind getting ready for an intense and exciting experience! We can reinterpret stress and end its negative impact on our state of mind. There’s an easy way out and the answer is simple… Just don’t care about feeling stressed out anymore!

I realize that might sound easier said than done, but I swear that’s the beauty of this in almost all cases. In your letter above, the thing you sounded most stressed out about was being stressed out. Try this: the next time you feel that unmistakable feeling of anxiety and panic wash over you, just let it be and continue going on about your day. You don’t have to respond to it or make it go away. You can take note of it and just keep living. You don’t have to “try and relax” or “try and be calm,” you can just feel however you feel and just keep doing whatever you’re doing. Stress is like a bad smell. It may really color our experience the moment we notice it, but eventually the smell dies down and we realize it didn’t really have that much impact on what we were doing — it just hung in the atmosphere. Stress and worry are confused versions of excitement combined with energized fear. We can feel nervous and excited and afraid without having to stress out.

Deciding not to stress out also doesn’t mean you don’t care about things. For example, if I’m trying to get to the airport for a flight to an important event and all of a sudden there’s a huge traffic jam, I might start noticing those stress-feelings creeping in. But I’m not going to react to them. I’m not really “stressed” — instead, I’m going to think of that feeling as the excitement and anticipation I have about the event I’m trying to get to. The stress wants to distort things and make the traffic jam seem like a life or death situation. But if I think clearly, I realize that it isn’t life or death. Even the event I’m trying to get to isn’t life or death. It’s all just life. And I’ve been in that type of situation many times and didn’t die once. There really was no crisis or reason to worry at all. And if I did stress out, that stress didn’t help — it only made things more miserable.

Some people think if they let stress run their lives it will make things seem more urgent and important and dramatic. We’ve all seen people like this — they’re often movie characters in fast paced romantic comedies set in big office buildings; the person who thinks their life looks more important if they always have their hands full and are juggling tasks and talking severely to too many people at once, trying to make sure everyone notices how complicated their life is. If you like that kind of drama then go for it, but it’s almost always unnecessary and a waste of effort and energy. Just because life feels stressful doesn’t mean we need to act stressed out.

In fact, when we don’t spend all our energy acting stressed out, we actually have much more energy to put towards our cares and concerns. Stress is wasted energy — it might even be coming from a good place initially, but it ends up complicating things further and stirs up unnecessary mental and physical spiraling. If you’re panicked from thirst, you can stress out so much that you spill the last precious glass of water you have, or instead you can carefully bring that sacred water up to your lips and drink it down without spilling a drop.

Deciding not to stress-out isn’t the same as putting things off or leaving things to chance either. You can still mull over possible outcomes, both good and bad without them having to get lost in a maze of worry and nervousness. We can have faith in ourselves and our good fortune that things will work out for the best, even if it seems far-fetched — especially when it seems far-fetched.

So reinterpret your stress, nervousness, worrying, and anxiety as all just natural reactions to the excitement of having a life worth caring about. If someone asks if you’re stressing out, just say, “No, I’m just totally enthusiastic about being alive.” The whole point is to allow ourselves to feel everything, including stress, but just keep on going anyway. We don’t fight to “let go of stress”, we take the feeling and reform into something useful and empowering. We keep our eyes on the prize and don’t let fear or any other intense feelings stop us. Those feelings are there to confirm to us that our life is big and worth caring about. Removing all risk, responsibility, and care from our life isn’t the point. The point is to be hardcore enough to handle everything life can throw at us and then some. We grow stronger so that we can take on more. The stress is there to tell us we’re really going for it and challenging ourselves. And we get better and better the more we go for it, so that what once was stressful isn’t anymore, and move into yet new realms of risk and challenge.

Ask almost any wise person about their life and almost all of them will say, even as intense as their life may have been, that they wish they had taken even more risks and pushed themselves even harder. After all, it’s all a one-shot deal and it could end at anytime. Who knows what life is really all about anyway? Let’s go full-bore while we have the chance. That is what being alive is all about.

Keep on partying,Andrew W.K.

**P.S.** I actually felt really stressed out while writing this. Trying to make the deadline and having more and more trouble typing on my phone from Europe added layers of strife. But it wasn’t life or death — so no need to give into the stress. It’s just a party advice column, and I’m just feeling really enthusiastic about not being dead!

**How to Cope With the Death of a Friend**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 25, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

My best friend just died. He was killed in a car accident. I’m totally devastated; I can’t eat or sleep or even breathe. He was like a brother to me. We had been friends since we were really young and we grew up together. I feel beyond sad, and also angry. I don’t know what to do. Life feels like it has lost its meaning and I can’t bring myself to do much of anything. I’ve never had someone this close to me die before. Now that he’s gone, it’s got me afraid of the other people I love dying, too. Why does life have to work this way? Why do people have to die? Please help me. Please.

With gratitude,Missing My Friend

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: Letting Go of Stress*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/06/18/ask-andrew-w-k-letting-go-of-stress/)

**Dear Missing My Friend**,

I’m truly sorry your friend has died. My heart and thoughts go out to you and all of your friend’s family and everyone else who was close to this young man. I’m assuming he was young because the particularly painful anguish you’re describing is usually reserved for someone who leaves the earth way too soon. It’s also sad when a very old person dies, but in a different way than when we lose someone who still had so much life left to live. Even though you and I aren’t physically near each other, and even though I didn’t know your friend, I feel for you.

I’m thinking of you, and you’re reading this and thinking of me. There is a magic here, the magic of human love. It’s a genuine feeling that I hope you can sense, wherever you are and whatever else you’re feeling. I’m sending you all the thoughts and concentrated love I can muster. You never need to feel alone in your darkest moments of loss and sadness because even strangers can care about you. Even people you’ve never met, who are thousands of miles away, can really care about you — that’s the magic of humanity. And it’s by using this magic that you can still be close with your friend who died.

When anyone we care about dies, it hurts. And it’s meant to. But when a best friend dies, it hurts in a unique and mysterious way. The pain of losing your friend is severe and almost intolerable, but it should be felt for all it’s worth. You must have the courage to honor your friend by feeling all of it. You can take some comfort in knowing it won’t always hurt in the fresh, stinging way it does now, but it will linger and somewhat soften until it’s primarily a memory of the pain you feel now. I can remember how it hurt when I broke my nose — the immediate pain was unimaginably intense, and even though it’s well healed now, the suffering is easily recalled and the blinding pain can almost be felt via memory. This is important.

You never fully “move on” from the death of someone truly close to you. You never “get over it” or forget about it. You wouldn’t want to lose any part of your experience of that person, no matter how much it hurts to keep him with you. This doesn’t mean you give up on life. But you don’t have to feel like it’s required for you to move past your friend and what he meant to you. This is how he will be with you forever.

Even though now it may seem like you want the pain of losing your friend to stop, hold on to it. Become familiar with it. Get to know all the flavors and colors and textures of this pain. Explore the sound and smell of it. This aching in the depths of your soul is a stunningly beautiful and natural explosion of the sacred proof that you loved your friend truly and and very, very deeply. Do not be afraid to feel it and even fall in love with this pain. Even though it hurts, you must cherish this feeling and do all you can to not give into the urge to cancel it out.

It’s also OK to swallow all these feelings down deep inside. That’s sometimes the best place for them to be, in order to keep them protected and alive. If you don’t feel like talking about your feelings to other people, then you don’t have to. Besides, silence is an extremely powerful way to accomplish anything in life, including healing and dealing with a loved one’s death. Listen to what your instincts are telling you to do and trust your soul and the spirit of your friend — they are there and will lead you and protect you.

Also remember that you are your friend. The thoughts and ideas you had and still have about him are your creations and concepts as much as they were his. You are made of each other. The times you spent together helped shape your days and make you the person you are right now. Your friend is bound up in all of you, as much a part of you as your blood and bones.

Lastly, remember that all of our experiences in the world ultimately occur in our mind and soul. When your friend was alive, you looked at him with your eyes and heard him with your ears, and those senses formed impressions and thoughts in your mind. Now that your friend is dead, you are still using your mind to think about him and perceive him, just as you did when he was standing right in front of you. He really is still here. He still is where he always was to you: inside your mind. This is what people mean when they say someone’s spirit will always be with you. They really always are with you, it’s just a different version of their presence than when they were alive — but it’s just as real and it counts just as much. Never doubt that or let anyone try to make you think otherwise.

Most of all, remember that your friend brought you joy and laughter, understanding and comfort, inspiration and companionship. Your friend still wants those things for you, and you can respect his life by doing your best to be joyful in the life you have left. Be brave for your friend. Laugh for your friend. Provide inspiration and comfort and friendship to the people around you right now, as your friend did for you. This is the best way to keep the spirit of your friend alive: Be fully alive yourself.

Don’t be afraid. Your friend is OK. And wherever he may be, he is also still with you. Learn all you can from this experience. Be brave and keep an open heart, so that you can share these ideas and truths with others when they need it most. We will all lose people we love, and we can all help each other through it.

Stay strong,Andrew W.K.

**How to be a Man**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 2, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

A year ago, I got into my first real fist fight. I nearly pissed myself with fear, but I won, and it felt unlike anything I’ve ever experienced. It was such a high. For the first time in my life, I felt indestructible and had an outlet for all my years of pent up frustration. Now I get into fist fights all the time. Every weekend I go out looking for fights — mean and hateful. All this violence is starting to worry everyone around me, and it’s honestly starting to worry me too. It helped me blow off steam at first, but now … my biggest fear is that I’ll hit my girlfriend during an argument or get stabbed during a bar fight gone wrong. Should I become a professional fighter as a healthy outlet for this compulsion? Should I force myself to stop the fighting altogether? Do you wanna fight me?

Thanks,I’ll Fuck You Up

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: How to Cope With the Death of a Friend*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/06/25/ask-andrew-w-k-how-to-cope-with-the-death-of-a-friend/)

**Dear I’ll Fuck You Up**,

No, thanks. I don’t want to fight you. The only person I’m really interested in fighting is myself, and that’s an ongoing war I’m sometimes losing and sometimes winning, one battle at a time. I’m sure you’d beat me in this sort of fist fight, anyway. My strength is in partying, which only involves fist punching the air and head banging for fun — not fist punching someone’s face and banging their head on the concrete.

People who love fighting are very particular. I had a friend who got into fist fights constantly. He claimed he didn’t enjoy it, but he seemed unable to resist violent confrontations and went to great lengths to make things come to blows. He got in fist fights with taxi drivers about which route they took. He got into fights with strangers about how they looked at him. He got into fights just because.

He lived by a code that listed the steps you have to go through in order to to become a real man. He said you had to:

1. Punch someone in the face.
2. Get punched in the face.
3. Cheat on your girl.
4. Be cheated on by your girl.
5. Steal something from someone.
6. Have something stolen from you.
7. Know when to be an asshole.
8. Know when to beat an asshole.
9. Blow it alone.
10. Go it alone.

A lot of it didn’t make any sense to me. And while I understood what he was trying get at in some ways, I still found it bizarre that all of these were requirements for becoming a man, and not what a real man should strive not to do. Every single thing on that list is pretty much something most people work to avoid as much as possible. So, who is this kind of person that seeks out conflict? What kind of mind builds their sense of self worth purely on the pain they’ve caused others and brought upon themselves? I could never really figure it out, but guessed that maybe when they were very little kids, they felt very weak and vulnerable — as any kid does — and then were somehow taught that feeling weak was bad, so they had to “get tough.” Who knows?

I had another friend who loved to fight. He felt that he was defending his honor and the honor of his friends and family when he beat people up — like he was doing a service to the community by teaching these tough guys a lesson and ridding the town of the trouble makers. But what he failed to see was that he was a tough guy too and giving the other tough guys someone to fight with. One night, he got in a fight with a man about some t-shirt he was wearing. When he punched him, the guy fell back and hit his head on the sidewalk and died right there. My friend went to prison for 15 years and basically ruined his life and, obviously, the life of the man he punched.

I still have a lot of respect for people who are physically strong and who use their power when needed. Whether they are protecting people or meting out some street justice, there are naturally times and places where violence can be necessary and helpful. But we also understand that the concept of fighting for peace is fundamentally flawed.

The best fighter I’ve ever known was my tour bus driver. He was a Special Forces Vietnam vet and had killed lots of people, most of them in hand to hand combat. He said he preferred killing “up close and personal” with his hands or a knife rather than with a gun. He said it was more respectful to his victim and to the fight itself. But he also was truly tormented by the war and what he had done there. He saw a lot of shit and was a prisoner of war for an extended amount of time before being rescued. Every day he thinks about the faces of the people he killed. He remembers every single face and the look in their eyes when they took their last breath. He told me he prays every day that he will never have to kill someone again. Because he knows he can. He wants smiles and pleasure in his life now, not fighting and violence. He’s had enough of that for many lifetimes.

Going back to my other friend’s “to be a man” list, I was thinking about it and decided to make a new list here. Not just on how to be “a man,” but how to be a real human being. This list isn’t perfect and it’s nowhere near complete. I’m sure you can improve on it. Just like the process of becoming a full person, it’s a work in progress.

To be a real human being, you must try…

To be a real human being, you must try…

1. To care about someone and something more than yourself.

2. To accept help from someone even when you believe you don’t need anyone.

3. To cheer people up and bring them simple joy in times when it seems hardest to smile.

4. To bring loving comfort and sincere hugs in the midst of violence, pain, and suffering.

5. To recognize your own shortcomings and failings before lashing out at another’s weakness.

6. To have true compassion when someone’s in a bad mood, with the understanding that they might be going through a hardship you’re not aware of.

7. To constantly remember that life is a fragile and precious miracle which requires all our collective effort to protect.

8. To humbly work to improve our own defects and cut everyone else a little more slack.

9. To remember that being a loving and positive person isn’t always easy, but it’s always worth it.

10. And lastly, to never give up on the power of humanity and on your own potential to be a caring, loving person.

At the end of the day, just try your hardest to be nice. Fighting and arguing is usually not very nice. Not everyone deserves to be treated nicely, but those moments are there to test our commitment to our belief in loving kindness. The goal is still to live in a world of peace, liberty, and light. We cannot allow ourselves to give into our lowest urges and darkest capacities for cruelty and violence. Nor can we let ourselves grow so cynical and exhausted that we believe our human race can never get better. If we don’t cling to life and love, we go hurdling into the depths of our despair and destruction. We may not achieve perfect harmony in this lifetime, but it must remain our ultimate aspiration, for it is in believing in the best of ourselves and our highest potential that we find the necessary inspiration and strength to keep living and loving for another day. For this day. For the only thing we have — each other.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# “Getting to Spend Time With a Loving Dog Is a True Privilege”

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 9, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

My mom is a big fan of yours and told me I should write to you about this, so here it is. For as long as I can remember, our family dog Riley has been part of my life. He’s a Golden Retriever and just the nicest dog ever. He’s almost 13 now, which I realize for a dog is kind of old, but my parents told me yesterday that our vet said Riley has to be put to sleep next week. I’m really mad about this. I realize Riley’s not as strong and energetic as he used to be, but that doesn’t mean he needs to be killed! My parents said that even though Riley seems OK on the outside, he’s very sick inside and that the best thing we can do is make it painless for him to go peacefully. I know my parents are sad about it too, because when they told us it was the first time I saw my dad cry real hard. My sister and I have been begging them to not listen to the vet and to let Riley live longer, but they won’t listen to us. I know pets can’t live forever, but I can’t bring myself to end Riley’s life when he could maybe still live longer, even for just a few more days. What should I do?

Sincerely,Help Me Save My Riley

See also: [*Ask Andrew W.K.: How to be a Man*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/07/02/ask-andrew-w-k-how-to-be-a-man/)

**Dear Help Me Save My Riley**,

I’m so sorry to hear about Riley. This is one of the hardest things ever. I totally understand why you feel angry and why this seems so frustrating. When pets get old and sick, it’s hard to tell sometimes what they’re feeling. They might look OK, but because they can’t talk or communicate as easily, we have to trust the animal doctors to really understand what is happening with their health. Sometimes when an animal gets sick, it can be very painful for them.

When I was 12 years old, my parents decided to put our dog, Tavish, to sleep. Just like you, they had Tavish since even before I was born. I had grown up with him as a member of the family and never really imagined a time when he wouldn’t be there. One day, it seemed like out of nowhere, Tavish changed. The fur on his face turned grey, he didn’t like to go outside very much anymore, and he would bump into walls because he couldn’t see too well. Even though I didn’t know how sick he was, I could tell he was getting old because he laid around and slept most of the time and didn’t like to run around and play.

My mom had to start carrying him up and down our stairs because he couldn’t climb them anymore. Sometimes he would crawl under my parent’s bed and stay there all day. One time, when we let him outside to use the bathroom, he walked away and didn’t come back for a couple days. He’d never done that before. We finally found him far from the neighborhood, in a dirty parking lot behind a gas station. My dad said sometimes animals start acting different when they are getting old and they want to go away. That hurt my feelings because I didn’t understand why Tavish would want to be away from us. My dad said it didn’t mean Tavish didn’t love us anymore, and it didn’t mean he wanted to be away from us, it was just that Tavish was getting ready to be away from everything.

He was getting ready to die.

That crushed me. It was the first time I really had to think about death. And even though Tavish was a dog, and not a person, he was as much a member of our family as I was. Eventually, Tavish had to be kept in an empty room in our house. For the last couple days before we put him to sleep, he was too weak and frail to go outside to use the bathroom anymore, and he just went in the room. He would make funny sounds and would sometimes cry. But we couldn’t really do anything for him except give him water. He didn’t eat really anymore. The room was a mess and I was scared to even look inside. Tavish was so different that I was even scared of him. He snapped at my mom sometimes when she would try to clean him or comfort him. We knew it wasn’t because he didn’t like us, it was because he was scared and sick.

The day my parents took him to the vet to be put to sleep was actually a beautiful summer day, exactly the kind of day that Tavish loved. We would like to play outside with sticks, or go hunting for tennis balls on a country road by our house. My parents didn’t want us to go with them to the vet, and I was too scared to go anyway. They arranged for my brother and I to go play mini-golf with some friends of ours. It was probably the saddest game of mini-golf anyone has ever played. It all just felt otherworldly- – like I was out of my body — here, in this sunny day and fun game, and then there, wondering what my parents were doing at the vet, and if Tavish had been put to sleep yet, and dreading having to go back home after the golf because then it would actually be done and have happened.

There was this floating in-between moment where I felt like I was in a dream, or a nightmare. I didn’t even feel very much of anything, not happy nor sad. Just going through the motions of basic existence — breathe, take some steps, putt the ball, look at my watch. Looking back, that was the first time I had to cope with something — to somehow find the strength to move and live and breathe, when you feel like you can’t do anything. We finished the mini-golf and got dropped off back home. I don’t remember anything else except everyone crying for what seemed like many days after.

A good dog is the closest thing to a miracle angel from God that I can think of. Dogs are the ultimate role models. They are selfless and show unconditional love. They are noble and exhibit sincere companionship, fearless devotion, and courage. They contain within them a genuinely psychic intuition, and a tireless cheerful energy. Dogs are geniuses of loving kindness.

And perhaps their best feature: an unparalleled ability to bring out the best in us. They can change our entire state of mind with one look, one cuddle, one little jump. I’ve been in some of my most deeply depressed states, and sometimes just thinking about a dog has lifted my spirits. Getting to spend time with a loving dog is a true privilege. They say that animals experience more of reality — they hear a broader range of sounds, see a more complex view, and use all of their senses to grasp a different and perhaps richer version of the world than we have access to. Imagine what sort of intelligence they posses that we can’t even conceive of. If there ever was to be an animal we should aspire to, it is the dog. They are here to teach us how to be better animals ourselves.

Right now, all you can do is hug and comfort Riley as much as you can in his final days, and remember that it’s hard for your parents too, so try and go easy on them. Even though you’ll never feel good about Riley going away, you can feel good about helping it not be physically painful for him. The doctor will take care of Riley, so you can trust that the last moments of his life are as good as they can be. And Riley will live on — [as all loved ones do](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/06/25/ask-andrew-w-k-how-to-cope-with-the-death-of-a-friend/) — in your memories and in your soul. I think the most important thing you can do for Riley now is to try and live everyday like he did, by being an animal that brings out the best in everyone around you. Stay strong.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# Dealing With Bullies

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 16, 2014

**Dear Andrew**,

I’m writing because I’m being bullied every day and I just can’t take it anymore. I’m going to be starting my sophomore year of high school this fall, and every day I’ve just been fearing it worse and worse. I used to be a pretty happy person. I was picked on a little bit in middle school and before, but once high school started it’s just way more and I’m so depressed now that I just hate my life. There’s this one group of students, both girls and guys, and their whole hobby is making my life miserable. They go on everywhere and say lies about me, and also make fun of me in class and say I’m a slut, which isn’t even true at all. They’ve stolen my backpack a bunch of times, and one time they gave it back to me and they had dumped soda all over everything. I hated every day of my freshman year. My mom let me stay home from school as much as possible, but if I miss too many days next year, I won’t pass my classes, and the teachers were already getting mad at me about it. I just can’t win no matter what I do. My mom has tried talking to the teachers and the principal and even the parents of these kids. But the more they teach them about how bullying is wrong, the more they always find a new way to be even more mean to me. We are now considering trying to move me to a different school. My mom is hoping to move to a different town, so we can have a fresh start. Why are people so mean? They are ruining the happy person I once was.

Signed,Help Me Please

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[Ask Andrew W.K.: My Dad Is a Right-Wing Asshole](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/06/ask-andrew-w-k-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole/)

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 6, 2014

**Dear Help Me Please**,

No one can break you. You are a billion times stronger than these bullies will ever know. You are even stronger than you know. No matter how hard it may seem to keep your head up and keep going, you must hold on to your power, and not give in to their cruelty. They want you to feel bad, and your feelings are the one thing you have control over. You might not have control over what they do, but you can always control how you respond to them.

You can simply refuse to let them break your spirit. The most important and valuable possession you have in this whole world is your spirit. Your spirit is where all the best things about you reside. Your spirit is where your courage, strength, kindness, love, creativity, happiness, inspiration, care, belief, and imagination all live. The mean people of the world want to break down your spirit so they can destroy all the beautiful things that are protected inside of it. But guess what? There is only ONE person in the world that can break down your spirit, and that’s YOU. You have the one and only key to the lock that guards your spirit, and you never have to give it to anyone unless you want to.

Bullies are very tricky. They work very hard to manipulate your emotions through fear, cruelty, and brutality, until we think the only way to get them to stop is to give in to them. They trick us into giving them the key to our spirit. That’s the game they’re playing, and their delight is in seeing if they can win the game by breaking down the walls that guard your precious heart. They will tempt you in every way. Just like the wicked witch tried to tempt Snow White with that delicious apple, these bullies are tempting you with relentless and exhausting abuse.

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[Ask Andrew W.K.: ‘How Can I Talk to My Bigoted Friend?’](https://www.villagevoice.com/2015/03/19/ask-andrew-w-k-how-can-i-talk-to-my-bigoted-friend/)

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 19, 2015

Just like Snow White, you have a true beauty that they don’t think they have, so they feel the only way they can enrich their souls is by sucking the beauty out of yours. But YOU CAN STOP THEM. It takes two to play this game, and the most surefire way to never lose to a bully is to never play along with their stupid game in the first place. That’s how bullies work. They start this game with you and your mind, and if you simply don’t play along, they can never win. People often say, “Just ignore the bullies,” but that’s not the same. Ignoring them doesn’t work. You simply just don’t let them break you down.

It’s like being afraid of the dark. If I’m afraid of the dark, I can’t simply ignore that it’s dark. It’s too obvious and in my face. But I can feel afraid of the dark, and just choose to not give into the fear. You just feel your way through the dark and keep moving, instead of collapsing on the floor and cowering in fear. Some people see a problem and run away because they’re scared. But courageous people see a problem and run towards it — even though they’re scared too. We don’t ignore the problems and hardships and fears in our life. We keep living and doing the best we can, even with the problems, and the mean people, and less than ideal situations. Why? Because we have spirit. We have heart. We refuse to be beaten. And all you have to do is just – keep – on – going. Especially in those moments when it feels like you can’t take one more breath, your spirit will see you through.

**O'DOYLE RULES!**

I was bullied in junior high school and high school. For some reason, the two worst bullies were both red haired guys. The first one in junior high school was ruthless. I used to dread getting on the school bus because everyday I would have to deal with his torture. He would take my lunch and throw it out the window. He would push me off the bus seat and onto the ground. He would take my winter hat and gloves and throw them in a slush puddle. I was absolutely terrified of him. I remember his face so clearly.

A few years later, in high school, a new bully came on the scene, this one much more cruel and sinister than anyone I had ever encountered. He was mean to everyone. Even our teachers and coaches were afraid of him. The thing about him that was the most disturbing was that he truly took pleasure in abusing the people around him. He was a more physical bully — into pushing, punching, dunking, wrenching, and just rough housing students who were smaller and more timid than he was. You could see a gleaming twinkle in his eye as he tormented the people around him — even picturing that look on his face now makes my stomach turn and my fists clench with anger.

I was sometimes even frightened by my own violent revenge fantasies. I’d dream up all the ways I could get back at him, or get through to him, or just make him stop. This bully truly behaved like a sadist, and was often times rewarded and praised by the folks around him for being such a strong and assertive fellow. I found out that he later became a police officer. I’m guessing that, when he thinks back to these times, he might have a laugh at the crazy hi-jinx and monkeying around he did. Or maybe he doesn’t think about his behavior ever. But I think about him probably every day.

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[10 Times Andrew W.K. Gave the Best Advice](https://www.villagevoice.com/2015/12/23/10-times-andrew-w-k-gave-the-best-advice/)

by [VILLAGE VOICE STAFF](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/villagevoicestaff/)

December 23, 2015

These bullies had a permanent impact on my life. But my experience with bullying goes deeper. I’m ashamed to say that I myself have bullied other people. And to this day, the mean things I did to undeserving friends and classmates remains a source of sincere shame, deep regret, and severe confusion. Why did I want to hurt someone that had done no wrong to me? What was this impulse that made me take delight in someone else’s misery? Why did I want to be a source of anguish for someone when I could’ve just as easily been a source of kindness and fun? It’s one of the main reasons I later decided to devote my life to partying and cheered-up feelings.

I felt genuine disgust and fear when I fathomed my own potential for cruel and destructive behavior. Perhaps we all have the potential to be a bully, and that’s what scares us the most. Perhaps when we see other bullies and violent lunatics, it makes us ponder what it would take for us to give into those impulses and behave like a total monster. That is why we must direct all that energy into good. We must remain steadfast and continue driving those impulses towards kindness and positive actions — it’s like alchemy: turning lead into gold, turning evil into good.

It’s too easy to slip down into the lowest version of ourselves — almost like those low parts are begging us to unleash them on the world, bullying us from the inside to let them out. The worst we have to offer is always right there, right under the surface, right in the back of our minds, right on the tip of our tongue. We must stay vigilant and find ways to let those feelings out so they don’t consume us or erupt out in an explosion of hate and negativity.

Thinking now about all the various bullies I’ve encountered, I’m thankful for them. Even if I don’t feel like I forgive them, I want to find peace with those times. If I really focus and think with my highest and most noble mind, I actually am thankful for all the challenging experiences in life. They didn’t break me. They really did make me stronger. They made me do one extra push up. They made me work one extra hour. They made me do one extra headbang and high kick. And, perhaps most importantly, the bullies and bad times made me face the depths of my own potential for malice.

Those experiences helped me to realize that I could just as easily be like them. For some reason, you learn the most about life and yourself not from the good times and nice people, but from the hard times and the jerks. I don’t think anyone should be required to go through abuse like it’s some crucial rite of passage, but when you do find yourself faced with challenges — with cruelty, with darkness — just know that it does not have to break you. You will get through it. You have your spirit. And if you protect it and hold on to it, just one breath at a time, it will see you through the absolute darkest and most challenging times imaginable. Remember that no matter how bad you may have it, someone else has had it infinitely worse and has made it through. We can refuse to let the hell we go through define us. We can refuse to let the bad things other people do make a permanent stamp on us or crush our beauty.

In closing, I’m reminded of the incredible and indestructible spirit of Michelle Knight — one of the women who was held captive and tortured by convicted kidnapper, Ariel Castro, in Cleveland, Ohio. After she was rescued, she reflected on her ordeal, saying: “I may have been through hell and back, but I am strong enough to walk through hell with a smile on my face, and my head held high, and my feet firmly on the ground.” Nothing is a better testament to the power of the spirit than her unbeatable will to survive. If she could make it through that, you can make it through this. You simply DO NOT GIVE IN, no matter how intense the pain, you do not let the bad guys win.

Stay strong, keep going, and do not give up on your life or the power in your heart and in your indestructible spirit. It may be hard to imagine now, but someday you will look back on these times and be proud of yourself for never giving up.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**The 10 Most Helpful Ask Andrew W.K. Columns**

by [NICK LUCCHESI](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/nicklucchesi/)

July 22, 2014

**Here to help.**

Since we began publishing the weekly “[Ask Andrew W.K.](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/ask_andrew_wk/)” column on January 1, literally millions of readers have tuned in to learn how to better lead a #partypositive lifestyle. But that’s not all. In that time, we’ve discovered something.

We’ve found the heaviest of topics — the death of a friend, someone contemplating suicide, overcoming a devastating break-up, and how to best deal with bullies — are the most-read columns. If you missed any or them in the past half-year or so, take a spin though them here. These are the 10 most helpful Ask Andrew W.K. columns. Dig in.

10. [Should I Experiment With the Same Sex?](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/01/ask_andrew_wk_same_sex.php)

9. [How Do I Overcome the Guilt of Unwittingly Taking Someone’s Virginity?](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/01/ask_andrew_wk_virginity.php)

8. [My Friends Resent My Success](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/02/ask_andrew_wk_jealous_firends.php)

7. [Letting Go of Stress](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/06/ask_andrew_wk_letting_stress_go.php)

6. [How to be a Man](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/07/ask_andrew_wk_how_to_be_a_man.php)

5. [Dealing With Bullies](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/07/ask_andrew_wk_bully.php)

4. [How to Get Over a Devastating Breakup](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/06/ask_andrew_wk_breaking_up_is_hard_to_do.php)

3. [Should I Start Doing Heroin?](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/05/ask_andrew_wk_try_heroin.php)

2. [“I’m Contemplating Suicide”](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/06/ask_andrew_wk_contemplating_suicide.php)

1. [How to Cope With the Death of a Friend](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/06/ask_andrew_wk_when_a_loved_one_dies.php)

*Read*[*all of Andrew W.K.’s advice columns here*](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/ask_andrew_wk/)*.*

# Ask Andrew W.K.: Feeling Motivation in the Face of Discouragement

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 23, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I’ve been really discouraged lately. Without going into too much detail, a lot of my dreams just haven’t panned out the way I planned. I used to have so much hope and drive, but now every day I just feel more disillusioned. Part of me keeps telling myself to never give up, and then the other part of me is saying I’m a loser and am just fooling myself thinking I can ever accomplish anything in life. These days I’ve been feeling more unmotivated and depressed than ever. What if you’re just too frustrated with failure to bother trying anymore? How far can you push yourself?
Yours truly,Discouraged And Down

**Dear Discouraged And Down**,

You can push yourself incredibly, incredibly far. You can push yourself further than you can imagine and then realize you have only barely started pushing. You can push yourself until it feels like you have drained every bit of energy you have, and then still find a way to push yourself even further. And then further. Forever. Until you die. This is called “going for it.” This is called “being hardcore.” This is called really living your life.

It’s strange how we’ve been conditioned to think that life is supposed to be “easy” and feel fine all the time. The only way to make life easy is to not be alive. So much progress has been made in many areas of day-to-day living, but the core experience of being alive and caring about stuff will always be challenging. All the modern technological conveniences we have aren’t there to make life easier, they are there to make it better — more convenient, more efficient, and with more opportunity, but not free of effort.

Putting effort into life is what life is all about. It can seem like we have worked very hard so that we don’t have to work very hard anymore, but it’s just the opposite. We have striven and toiled for generations so that some of us are lucky enough to have the chance to follow our dreams with greater power. In the old days, we had to use almost all our power just to survive — to find water, shelter, food. Little by little, we learned to master our environment, and later, to master ourselves. And now we can dedicate as much of our energy and precious time mastering and pursuing our highest ambitions and dreams. We are benefiting from the efforts and sacrifices of previous generations. They went through hell to set things up so that we could use our time to do what we really want, beyond just the fight for survival. In comparison to what it was like to live 1,000 years ago, or even 100 years ago, we have absolutely no right to complain about how hard it may seem to follow our dream. We must realize how lucky we are in the first world to even have the luxury of pursuing any sort of desire, beyond the simple desire to not die.

So, we must push ourselves. That is the whole point. It’s not supposed to be easy to achieve your dream. Accomplishing goals and making your life the way you want it is like exercise. Just as when you push your body and it hurts but then grows stronger, pushing your soul also hurts, but then rewards you with a bigger and stronger experience of the world. Letting your body lay around your house all day is easy, but your body will grow weak as a result. Letting your soul lay around your life all day is easy, but your soul will also grow weak. We must decide to follow our dream no matter how hard it feels. We must commit!

When you commit to doing something, you make a promise to yourself. And when you break that promise out of laziness, discouragement, or fear, you are only cheating yourself. You are not “getting away with something.” You are only getting away from your own potential. When you commit to making your dream come true, that is the promise you simply decide to never, ever break. It doesn’t matter how many times you get discouraged, or exhausted, or frustrated, you just remember that you have not given yourself the option to quit. That is what commitment is — when the idea of ever stopping your efforts simply doesn’t exist. You have infinite patience and resilience because there is no other option. You have the ability to bear the pain and frustration because you must find a way to beat it. It doesn’t mean it won’t feel hard to press on — it might feel impossible, and yet you still find a way to keep going. You simply always press on. At a certain point, all your effort and energy and power is only directed towards your dream, and you no longer have to waste any energy on trying to motivate yourself to keep going.

People might tell you you’re crazy. Society at large might try and make you feel foolish or pitiful for trying over and over to reach your goals. But it doesn’t matter. You made a commitment. You just keep going. Even the experiences that appear to be failures are not. They cannot be failures as long as you don’t quit. When you don’t give up, a “failure” just becomes another moment in your ongoing quest. Just another rise and fall in the never ending roller coaster of your dreams. Each moment — even the bad ones — must be cherished, even worshiped, because it is one more sacred step on the path leading to your final success. When you don’t give up, every failure is part of your success. It is ALL success, even what otherwise would seem like a failure. It is all hurdling you forward with incredible momentum towards more and more of your dreams coming true. As long as you don’t quit.

There might even be a voice you hear in your head right now, telling you that all of this is unrealistic or magical thinking. Well, that is exactly what it is. We WANT magic. We want to take reality and make it unreal until it is reformed in the way we envisioned. The naysayer in the back of your mind is simply fear — fear that things won’t work out and you’ll feel stupid for trying, fear that it will hurt and be too tiring to work this hard. But nothing can hurt more than giving up and living with the knowledge that you abandoned hope. For what? To be reasonable? To be responsible? To make someone else happy? Those are all tricks and pitfalls and ways to justify giving up. Deep down inside, you know that’s true. None of the worst potential outcomes of following what you love could ever be more painful than the empty life lived by the quitter, the one who gave up and spent the rest of their life convincing themselves they had to.

Even if you feel like you tried before and then had to give up, it’s not too late. It’s never too late to pick up where you left off. You’ll have even more power and drive and experience under your belt, and you’ll realize that you actually never really quit or gave up in the first place. You were just at another little dip in the road. No matter how long it’s been since you gave up your dream, it’s still there waiting for you. And if you remind it how much you love it, it will raise up and charge ahead, stronger than ever! Now is the time to go for it! Hardcore! Breathe in and suck it up and plow back in full-on!

You are alive now. This is IT! Who knows what will happen tomorrow or ever? What we have is this time right now and we must give it everything we have. And if you’ve been slacking off, don’t feel bad. That was supposed to happen in order to bring you to this moment. And THIS moment is THE moment – -the one where you committed to your dream with more conviction than ever.

And what if your dream never happens and you die still trying to make it? Then you can honestly say that you lived your life as fully as you possibly could have. What’s the point of life any way? To just sit around and rest? To play it safe? To make it to your death bed having lived a calm and unremarkable life? Life is the passion that we put into our pursuits. That is what makes us who we are and makes life worth living. Achieving the dream isn’t even as important as living the dream. And all it takes to live the dream is to live each day with as much untiring and unflinching excitement as you can. Do what you love. Pursue what you love. And when you get discouraged, stand back up and dive back in.

Most of all, just don’t quit. Stay strong, push yourself, and no matter what, don’t ever abandon your dream. It’s what makes you who you are.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# My Boyfriend Treats Me Badly

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 30, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I’m a 15 year old girl in my first serious relationship and I don’t really know if I’m doing it right. I try to make my boyfriend happy, but I think I just can’t do the girlfriend role right for him. Of course I love him, and he says he loves me too, but a lot of the times I feel bad about myself and uncomfortable because of things he says to me. Sometimes he’s really mean and calls me stupid and insults the way I look. He almost always apologizes later and will try and make it up to me by buying me clothes or just being really sweet. But I just have this feeling of not being good enough and it makes me feel self conscious, like I’m not pretty enough. He asked me to dress more like the models in magazines even though I don’t look anything like them and never could. I’m not a diva or high maintenance like some other girls at my school, but I sometimes just feel stupid around him. My parents got divorced two years ago and it’s been really good to have a boyfriend to help me through these times. He will pick me up and take me to movies and I can just forget about my problems for a while. But a lot of times I wonder if I’m good enough for him. I don’t want to say anything to him because I really don’t want to be a bitch or make him mad. I don’t want to lose him. I need him right now really badly, and I love him so much. How can I make this relationship work?
Thank you!Lovesick Girl

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: How to Cope With the Death of a Friend***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/06/25/ask-andrew-w-k-how-to-cope-with-the-death-of-a-friend/)

**Dear Lovesick Girl**,

You’re a wonderful, special, and beautiful person who deserves to be treated with respect, kindness, and love. No matter how much you may care about your boyfriend, and no matter how much he says he loves you, you should never be made to feel ugly, or pressured into acting or dressing a certain way or doing anything that makes you feel bad. You should be able to be yourself. There is nothing wrong with you that you need to fix in order to be good enough for him. That’s the best thing about a true love relationship — you get to be yourself exactly as you are, in fact, you get to be yourself more than ever, and you get to be loved exactly because that’s who you are.

If your boyfriend is acting this way, it doesn’t mean he’s necessarily a bad person, especially if this is his first serious relationship too. He might not really understand how to treat anyone properly, let alone a girlfriend. You both are learning as you go, and if you really do love him and want to stay with him, then you can help each other get better at being together.

For starters, you must talk to him. Even if you’re afraid he might get mad, you should tell him how you feel and that it makes you sad when he acts a certain way or says certain things. Even though it can feel very awkward and uncomfortable, a true relationship requires you to be open and able to talk about anything and everything. It especially requires you to be able to tell him when he’s hurting you. And if he really does love you, then hurting you would be the last thing he’d ever want to do.

He might just not realize how much of a jerk he’s being. He might need to be shown. Sometimes people have to be snapped out of it, woken up to their own bad behavior. He might not have any idea how he’s acting. He will probably want to change his behavior right away once he sees how much it’s hurting you. Hopefully he will change his ways. But if he doesn’t, I want you to realize that you’re strong enough to leave him. Even if it hurts. Even if he gets mad. You don’t have to stay in a relationship just for the sake of it. You can want more. Every human deserves love and unconditional companionship — not sadness and self-doubt.

If no one else has ever told you this before, I will tell it to you one more time and hope you believe it and never forget it for the rest of your life: You deserve to be treated well.

Having high standards for love and affection and kindness is not being “a diva” or “high-maintenance,” it’s being a human with enough strength and self-respect to stand up for herself and her feelings. No one deserves to be in an abusive relationship. And just because you’re not being hit and beaten doesn’t mean you’re not being abused. No amount of love is worth any amount of abuse. You’re happiness is worth too much to tolerate someone who only tries to bring you down. It’s not your job to stay with someone just to try and make them happy with you.

You tell your boyfriend how you feel and if he doesn’t stop, you leave. It really is that simple. You don’t need to “work through it,” or “stay friends.” It doesn’t mean it will be easy to break up, but you must be strong enough and tough enough to go through these sorts of challenges in life. You have to not only protect your emotions, you have to protect your heart and soul — your very being. Subjecting yourself to too much cruelty can kill you inside, and you were born to live and be loved.

You don’t need a boyfriend to be happy. The most important companion in your life is already inside of you. And you will never be alone when you believe in yourself and your own strength. Someday, probably when you’re least expecting it or searching for it, you will find your soul mate. And everything we’ve talked about here will make sense more clearly than ever. You’ll be glad you didn’t settle for someone who wasn’t nice to you.

So be strong, don’t take any shit, and don’t let anyone make you feel bad for it. You will be OK. There is nothing wrong with you that needs to be fixed. When you accept and love the beautiful person you really truly are, the acceptance and true love of another person will find you effortlessly.

True love does exist and it starts with the love you have for yourself. Love you, and never ever stop.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# My Dad Is a Right-Wing Asshole

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 6, 2014

**Hi Andrew**,

I’m writing because I just can’t deal with my father anymore. He’s a 65-year-old super right-wing conservative who has basically turned into a total asshole intent on ruining our relationship and our planet with his politics. I’m more or less a liberal democrat with very progressive values and I know that people like my dad are going to destroy us all. I don’t have any good times with him anymore. All we do is argue. When I try to spend time with him without talking politics or discussing any current events, there’s still an underlying tension that makes it really uncomfortable. Don’t get me wrong, I love him no matter what, but how do I explain to him that his politics are turning him into a monster, destroying the environment, and pushing away the people who care about him?

Thanks for your help,Son of A Right-Winger

**Dear Son of A Right-Winger**,

Go back and read the opening sentences of your letter. Read them again. Then read the rest of your letter. Then read it again. Try to find a single instance where you referred to your dad as a human being, a person, or a man. There isn’t one. You’ve reduced your father — the person who created you — to a set of beliefs and political views and how it relates to you. And you don’t consider your dad a person of his own standing — he’s just “your dad.” You’ve also reduced yourself to a set of opposing views, and reduced your relationship with him to a fight between the two. The humanity has been reduced to nothingness and all that’s left in its place is an argument that can never really be won. And even if one side did win, it probably wouldn’t satisfy the deeper desire to be in a state of inflamed passionate conflict.

The world isn’t being destroyed by democrats or republicans, red or blue, liberal or conservative, religious or atheist — the world is being destroyed by one side believing the other side is destroying the world. The world is being hurt and damaged by one group of people believing they’re truly better people than the others who think differently. The world officially ends when we let our beliefs conquer love. We must not let this happen.

## RELATED

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[How a Young Donald Trump Forced His Way From Avenue Z to Manhattan](https://www.villagevoice.com/2015/07/20/how-a-young-donald-trump-forced-his-way-from-avenue-z-to-manhattan/)

by [WAYNE BARRETT](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/waynebarrett/)

Originally published January 15, 1979

When we lump people into groups, quickly label them, and assume we know everything about them and their life based on a perceived world view, how they look, where they come from, etc., we are not behaving as full human beings. When we truly believe that some people are monsters, that they fundamentally are less human than we are, and that they deserve to have less than we do, we ourselves become the monsters. When we allow our emotions to be hypnotized by the excitement of petty bickering about seemingly important topics, we drift further and further away from the fragile and crucial human bond holding everything together. When we anticipate with ferocious glee the next chance we have to prove someone “wrong” and ourselves “right,” all the while disregarding the vast complexity of almost every subject — not to mention the universe as a whole — we are reducing the beauty and magic of life to a “side” or a “type,” or worst of all, an “answer.” This is the power of politics at it’s most sinister.

At its best, politics is able to organize extremely complex world views into manageable and communicable systems so they can be grappled with and studied abstractly. But even the most noble efforts to organize the world are essentially futile. The best we can usually achieve is a crude and messy map of life from one particular vantage point, featuring a few grids, bullet points, and sketches of its various aspects and landmarks. Anything as infinitely complex as life, reality, and the human experience can never be summed up or organized in a definitive system, especially one based on “left or right,” “A or B,” “us or them.” This is the fatal flaw of binary thinking in general. However, this flaw isn’t just ignored, it’s also embraced, amplified, and deliberately used as a weapon on the very people who think it’s benefiting their way of thinking.

Human beings crave order and simplicity. We cling to the hope that some day, if we really refine our world view and beliefs, we can actually find the fully correct way to think — the absolute truth and final side to stand on. People and systems craving power take advantage of this desire and pit us against each other using a “this or that” mentality. The point is to create unrest, disagreement, resentment, and anger — a population constantly at war with itself, each side deeply believing that the other is not just wrong, but also a sincere threat to their very way of life and survival. This creates constant anxiety and distraction — the perfect conditions for oppression. The goal of this sort of politics is to keep people held down and mesmerized by a persistent parade of seemingly life-or-death debates, each one worth all of our emotional energy and primal passion.

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by [STACEY D’ERASMO](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/staceyderasmo/)

August 14, 2019

But the truth is, the world has always been and always will be on the brink of destruction. And what keeps it from actually imploding is our love for life and our deep-seeded desire not to die. Our love for our own life is inextricably connected to our love of all life and the miracle of this phenomenon we call “the world.” We must give all of ourselves credit every day for keeping things going. It’s an incredible achievement to exist at all.

So we must protect and respect each other, no matter how hard it feels. No matter how wrong someone else may seem to us, they are still human. No matter how bad someone may appear, they are truly no worse than us. Our beliefs and behavior don’t make us fundamentally better than others, no matter how satisfying it is to believe otherwise. We must be tireless in our efforts to see things from the point of view we most disagree with. We must make endless efforts to try and understand the people we least relate to. And we must at all times force ourselves to love the people we dislike the most. Not because it’s nice or because they deserve it, but because our own sanity and survival depends on it. And if we do find ourselves pushed into a corner where we must kill others in order to survive, we must fully accept that we are killing people just as fully human as ourselves, and not some evil abstract creatures.

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by [VILLAGE VOICE STAFF](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/villagevoicestaff/)

December 23, 2015

Love your dad because he’s your father, because he made you, because he thinks for himself, and most of all because he is a person. Have the strength to doubt and question what you believe as easily as you’re so quick to doubt his beliefs. Live with a truly open mind — the kind of open mind that even questions the idea of an open mind. Don’t feel the need to always pick a side. And if you do pick a side, pick the side of love. It remains our only real hope for survival and has more power to save us than any other belief we could ever cling to.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# “What’s This Partying Thing?”

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 13, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hello Andrew**,

I must admit, I’ve only recently discovered you and your writing, but I read your column on the [dehumanizing effects of our political divide](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/06/ask-andrew-w-k-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole/) and I found it quite poignant. I was intrigued enough to look further into you and your work, and I must say, with all due respect, I just don’t understand your obsession with “partying.” The juvenile antics, unkempt image, and “partying” themes cheapen the quality of your ideas and, to be frank, make it very hard to take you seriously. I guess I just don’t get it.

Sincerely,Intelligent Observer

**Dear Intelligent Observer**,

The very nature of partying is to provide a life-saving release from the constant pressure to “take things seriously.” Seriousness of the sort you’re describing is precisely why things like partying are crucial to our mental and spiritual health. I take joy very seriously, and partying is the formal pursuit and celebration of joy itself. I’m having a party to celebrate life. I’m having a party to celebrate partying itself.

It seems to me that people often equate intelligence with seriousness, and stupidity with playfulness. These people also tend to overvalue a sort of stoic distance and lack of excitement and enthusiasm as somehow being a sign of wisdom and advanced thinking. An austere and somber attitude doesn’t make someone smarter or more intellectual. Sometimes people are overly serious because they’re afraid of looking unkempt, unimportant, uneducated — they fear they’ll “make a fool out of themselves” if they don’t remain dour and stiff. In my opinion, if more people aspired to the level of life-mastery and self-actualization that a true fool has attained, there’d be much less conflict in the world. Fools realize that the most ignorant people are usually the ones most violently accusing others of being ignorant. Fools realize that in most cases, understanding is overrated. Most importantly, fools realize that no one really knows what’s going on, starting first and foremost with themselves.

You can enjoy something without having to comprehend it. You can appreciate a melody without knowing what notes it consists of. You don’t need to “get” me or what I do. I’m not here to be understood, I’m here to be experienced. I’m not here to impress you. I’m here to party with you.

I don’t understand why people have such a problem with partying anyway. Much like music, smiling, and laughter, partying is one of the few activities enjoyed by all people across the globe since the dawn of civilization. Despite how popular celebration is, partying still gets a bad rap for being “low” behavior. People think it’s irresponsible or somehow morally wrong to enjoy life in a pure and playful way without some “higher” purpose to it. But that is the whole purpose — the beauty of partying and joy is that it doesn’t need any additional purpose — it’s an end in itself. And that end is the experience of joy in the highest order.

Partying is fully immersing ourselves in the best and most immediate aspects of this incredible gift called “being alive.” Joy brings out the best in us. Partying allows us to experience the best of that joy and be truly ourselves. Partying allows us to be close with other people that we wouldn’t necessarily connect with in other circumstances. To look over and see a total stranger lost in blissful happiness, smiling from the depths of their soul for no reason except that it feels good, and to understand exactly what they’re feeling because you feel it too. That is the magic of partying. That exhilarating pleasure of not-having-to-be-yourself! That sheer delight of really being free! That glory of being in love with life! That feeling of feeling really, really good!

What’s all the rest of this madness for otherwise? What are all our ceaseless efforts for if not to earn us moments of pure euphoria and elation? Are we not meant to be in a state of energized enthusiasm about our own existence? Isn’t that an evolutionary survival technique anyway — so that we want to stay alive and press on — because we have joy to look forward to? I’m pretty sure that the end result of all our work, all our battling, and all our pain and suffering isn’t to see how serious and grim we can be. The darker the world, the more we must increase our efforts to stay in the light — and to defend that light from the encroaching shadow. If there is such a thing as evil, it wants nothing more than to have us believe that feeling joy is wrong.

We must be brave enough to wholeheartedly deny all the forces working to crush our spirit. We must not let devastation and death remove the joy from life. Existence is confusing and challenging enough as it is. Taking it too seriously and removing the few opportunities for unadulterated cheerfulness does not alleviate us of this burden — it weighs us down further and saps our strength until all we can do is plod along towards the void without any relief. The more appropriate response to life is to remain at play and in awe, not to mock the severity of our collective plight, but to truly stay engaged in the bewildering and ferocious grandeur of this adventure we’re on together. Whether we like it or not, we were all invited to this party and we must work to have the best time we can while we’re all here.

Having the strength to smile, to stay close to joy, and to stay close to each other will see us through our darkest and most challenging ordeals. It’s not as easy as being glum and cold, but it’s worth the extra effort. Believing that joy is wrong is the most violent disrespect to our inherent nature as loving, pleasure seeking creatures. Let us elevate ourselves and embrace our highest and mightiest capacity for happiness. This life is our chance to unleash as much joy onto the world as we can. Let us make that joy together. Let us cheer each other up and cheer each other on. Let us party and party as hard as we can. After all, we can’t save the world in a bad mood.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# “Road Rage Is Driving Me Crazy!”

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 20, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

I’ve got a major road rage problem. Ever since I first got my driver’s license, my anger behind the wheel has grown worse and worse. It’s gotten so bad that my girlfriend won’t let me drive her around any more, and even my friends are freaked out. And even when someone else drives, I still can’t help cursing out other drivers and screaming the whole time. It feels like being on the road is a battle and every other vehicle is my mortal enemy. It’s really draining and puts me in a bad mood that lasts long after I get out of the car. Yesterday I punched my car’s ceiling so hard that I put a dent in it and badly bruised my hand. I’ve never had an actual car accident, but I’ve had a few violent confrontations with other drivers and I can see this whole thing ending badly. Meanwhile, it’s just making me a miserable person. How do I become a peaceful driver?

Thanks for your help,Road Rage Fink

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: “What’s This Partying Thing?”***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/13/ask-andrew-w-k-whats-this-partying-thing/)

**Dear Road Rage Fink,**

Driving, by its very nature, isn’t really peaceful. I’m actually writing this response while riding in a car. We’re hurdling across the landscape over a concrete slab, in a metal container being propelled by thousands of contained explosions. While there is a meditative state that occurs while driving, especially over time when the techniques of maneuvering the vehicle are second nature, we should never forget how inherently intense and violent the entire experience is. Next time you’re in a car, look out the side window at how fast the road is flying by. And if you’re someone who has been fortunate enough to survive one of the millions of accidents that have taken place since the invention of the car, you’re already well aware of just how nightmarish cars can be. Few inventions have had a more beneficial and simultaneously dehumanizing impact on daily life than motor vehicles. While automobiles are beautiful and helpful in connecting us with the world, they have also had an equally deep and disorienting effect on human perception and social behavior.

People behave in ways towards other people in cars that they never would dream of when outside of cars. If we’re walking down the street amongst a crowd of other folks, there’s an entirely different dynamic to the interaction as well as the way we feel about the people around us and their conduct. Automobiles have a personality of their own that we experience separately from the people they contain. The human beings inside become an abstraction or an idea of a person, almost like a toy has been placed in the driver’s seat just to make it seem like someone is in control. A car is a moving room that contains us and confines us, and while we feel we are in control of the vehicle, and that it is confining us for our own safety, it also results in an incredibly influential distortion of how we experience the world.

We don’t usually think of ourselves as a person on the road with other people. We are a car on the road with other cars. The car not only separates us from seeing the other vehicles as machines carrying other people we’re driving amongst, but the car also separates us from ourself. It absorbs us and we become another part of the car — another aspect of this moving shape — like it’s paint color or body style. We don’t judge the car by the driver, we usually judge the driver by the car, making all sorts of assumptions in the process. Think of how different types or vehicles literally give off different feelings, tones and attitudes. How does it actually feel to look at a pick-up truck? What is the personality of a police car? What spirit resonates from a minivan? Or a sports car? Or a bus? The power of automobiles comes from our closeness to them, like the fact that we enter them and they move us around the planet or the fact that most of us have been interacting with cars since we were born. Your entire life is tangled up in cars, and this extremely intimate interaction only increases the depth of their spirit and power over us. These vehicles have become living machines, almost like pet dogs we can ride in. But we seem less in charge of cars than we do a pet dog, or even a horse. Unlike horses we have broken and mastered for transportation in the past, we don’t ride on top of them, we ride inside them. There is something very important to notice here – something maternal, something humiliating, something desperate, and something wonderful.

Road rage is a unique phenomenon related to transportation and the driving experience. But at the same time, rage is rage. Your rage is likely related to something deeper and more personal than just driving. Getting to the root of otherwise unexplained anger requires a deep and penetrating self analysis. We must search our souls and try our best to be honest in identifying why we feel the way we feel, especially when we experience a feeling we don’t enjoy. Overcoming rage is different than directing anger. Rage is less logical and more unruly. When it overtakes us, it’s harder to remember our other feelings and tap into them. Rising above the urge to give into road rage takes an incredible amount of two seemingly opposite strengths: relaxation and calm on the one hand, and extreme concentration and focus on the other. When you’re driving, you can’t just tune out entirely, or your mind won’t be able to do all the little things it needs to do in order to help you drive safely. So what do we do?

It seems that the best approach is one of high awareness and respect. Be aware that cars contain real human beings, just like you. Be respectful of how intense driving is for everyone and resist the urge to engage in behavior you know to be dangerous and unnecessary. Really keep in mind what’s on the line – your life and the life of other people. Is it really necessary to get to that red light two seconds faster? If you’re late for something or even completely miss an appointment, isn’t that still better than getting mangled in a wreck? Learning to master our patience and awareness while driving will help us in all sort and other areas of day-to-day life. It helps us remember what’s really going on around us, what’s really at stake, and what really matters most.

Being able to drive is a privilege. Automobiles give us miraculous power and freedom. We must respect this and the responsibility and danger that comes with it. We must not become so arrogant, distracted, and caught up in petty emotional games that we forget how soft and fragile our little fleshy bodies are compared to the crushing muscle of these massive metal machines. Be strong enough to be calm. And while it may seem more “[manly](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/07/02/ask-andrew-w-k-how-to-be-a-man/)” or exciting to behave aggressively and with unjustified urgency, 99% of the time the place you most need to get to is where you already are: alive.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# How to Cope With All This Terribly Tragic News

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 27, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions, and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

Thanks for writing your column. It’s really helped me lately, which is why I’m writing to ask you about this: It feels like the world is ending. Every time I turn on the TV, there’s a new crisis: War, riots, environmental catastrophes, disease, financial collapse, cyber crime, religious rage, not to mention the boring little problems of my own regular life.

In one week, I literally saw the top stories in the newspaper all describing various versions of Armageddon, one after another — just a big list of apocalyptic events. And it seems like every recent Hollywood movie focuses on some apocalyptic disaster or dystopian vision of the not-too-distant future. If someone would’ve told me 15 years ago that things would get this bad, I would’ve found it hard to believe. And now I’m wondering, in 15 more years will they be even worse? What the hell is going on? How can things keep going this way? Is the world ending?
Please help,Afraid and Paranoid

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: My Dad Is a Right-Wing Asshole***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/06/ask-andrew-w-k-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole/)

**Dear Afraid and Paranoid**,

The world isn’t ending, it’s changing. And it’s up to us to make it change for the better. When a baby is born and turns into a teenager, we don’t say the baby “ended” and the teenager “began,” we realize it’s a fluid, if uncoordinated, transformation from one version of a young person into another. Both the baby and the teenager are unique beings with their own qualities, but they are also both part of one ultimate ongoing person.

When a young man or woman first physically becomes an adult with the ability to reproduce, it can be a traumatic and extremely distressing experience. As much as it’s exciting to realize one’s body is becoming more powerful and mature, it’s also extremely frightening to realize that one is forever leaving behind childhood and the associated innocence, and moving into a new version of life with new endowments and responsibilities that come with them. Whether we like it or not, every fundamental aspect of life is tied to change, transformation, and revolution — things turning into other things.

It’s possible that human civilization itself is in some version of adolescence right now, learning how to manage and apply newly acquired powers and abilities — testing the limits of our surroundings and enjoying, yet fearing, what we’re capable of. As a civilization, we’re constantly crossing new thresholds, encountering unforeseen and terrifying situations, and having to struggle with the painful realization that we can never return to the way things were, no matter how badly we may want to. At the same time, and in a less obvious way, we’re realizing there’s something perpetual, universal, and inevitable about our own development and the ceaseless change we encounter on scales both large and small. It’s a drama that plays itself out on every level, globally as well as individually. It’s the experience of being part of a living world.

We also must keep perspective. To those of us who feel like the world is ending now, has it perhaps always been that way? A quick glance back through history shows us that at nearly every era in modern civilization, humanity has been in the throes of a seemingly endless string of unconquerable impasses. Just as we have now, back then there were also those who were ready to throw in the towel and say, “See? This is the end of the world! I always knew it would happen!” And in a way, it was the end of the world — but only the end of one version of the world, and, in turn, the beginning of another.

This is not to say that the ordeals we face now are any less serious or grave than those of the past. Our situations now may be more critical than any we’ve faced before. But our abilities and experience are also greater than any we’ve had before. It is up to us to tackle all of our problems with confidence and not become overwhelmed by the sheer enormity of the task.

We want so badly to feel safe and enjoy a sense of stability in what we work so hard to construct. But deep down inside we know that true permanence is impossible. And we can pretend that we’re safe, and go to great lengths to counteract every conceivable threat to our way of life, but we realize there will then be literally millions of new ways our daily lives could be harmed or upended. We want to think that what we’ve worked so hard to create can weather the merciless and unsparing threats of movement and change. Our houses and buildings, our cities and countries, our careers and plans and goals and dreams are all tenuous and delicate. Even our own bodies, which we identify with so deeply and work so hard to protect and fortify, are hanging by an ever-diminishing thread, dangling over the inescapable and unimaginably vast vacuum of space.

So what can we do?

We can defend ourselves from those who wish to use our fear of change against us, and show them that we can harness the power of transformation for our own greater good. We can strive to keep our own mortality and the temporary nature of all things in the forefront of our minds, not so that we become morbidly depressed or frightened, but so that we become fully motivated and energized to live our life right now. We can imagine what it would be like if all the non-essential material elements of our day-to-day life were torn away all of a sudden. What would we be left with? We would be left with ourselves. Our spirit. Our souls. Our friends and family and the simplest pleasures of life. Perhaps it’s good to remind ourselves that the most enjoyable parts of being alive are the parts we often overlook, and the parts that would still stand, should everything else fall.

In a way, the world ends every night, and we build a new one every morning. It’s not a question of whether or not very intense things will occur. They will. So it’s then a question of how we carry ourselves through the transforming events that alter out world. We mustn’t allow terror, bitterness, or exhaustion to corrode our desire to push forward, or allow the barrage of doomsayers to erode our belief in the ability for the human race to persevere through our most difficult challenges, even those that seem insurmountable. Nothing is as sustainable as our spirit and desire to survive. Let us never lose that spark — that fire — that flame of life. We must keep it burning and held high, with faith that its light will illuminate the path and guide us through darkness.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# Prayer Is Stupid, Right?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

September 3, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hey, Andrew**.

Thanks for doing what you do and helping people. I’m going to make this short and to the point. My older brother was diagnosed with cancer last week. My whole family is freaking out and trying to deal with the news. Everyone is trying to find different ways to help, but something my grandmother said has really got me angry. She said we should all just “pray for my brother,” like prayer would actually save his life. Just thinking about it now makes my fists clench with frustration. We need to actively help my brother and do actual things to save him, not kneeling on the ground and mumbling superstitious nonsense. I got into a fight with my grandmother and the rest of my family about this and now I feel worse than ever. I need to get them to see that praying and religious mumbo jumbo doesn’t help. How do I explain this to them?

Thanks for reading this,Not Gonna Pray

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: My Dad Is a Right-Wing Asshole***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/06/ask-andrew-w-k-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole/)

**Dear Not Gonna Pray**,

I’m deeply sorry to hear about your brother’s diagnosis. I’m sending you my thoughts, and my heart goes out to your brother and your whole family. Guess what? That was me praying for you. I think the idea of “praying” is a lot less complicated, a lot more powerful, and a little different than you may realize. In fact, I’ll bet you’re already praying all the time and just don’t realize it.

Prayer is a type of thought. It’s a lot like meditation — a type of very concentrated mental focus with passionate emotion directed towards a concept or situation, or the lack thereof. But there’s a special X-factor ingredient that makes “prayer” different than meditation or other types of thought. That X-factor is humility. This is the most seemingly contradictory aspect of prayer and what many people dislike about the feeling of praying. “Getting down on your knees” is not about lowering your power or being a weakling, it’s about showing respect for the size and grandeur of what we call existence — it’s about being humble in the presence of the vastness of life, space, and sensation, and acknowledging our extremely limited understanding of what it all really means.

Being humble is very hard for many people because it makes them feel unimportant and helpless. To embrace our own smallness is not to say we’re dumb or that we don’t matter, but to realize how amazing it is that we exist at all in the midst of so much more. To be fully alive, we must realize how much else there is besides ourselves. We must accept how much we don’t know — and how much we still have to learn — about ourselves and the whole world. Kneeling down and fully comprehending the incomprehensible is the physical act of displaying our respect for everything that isn’t “us.”

This type of selfless awareness contains a contradictory aspect that sets the tone for true immaterial experience. It’s the feeling of power in our powerlessness. A feeling of knowing that we don’t know. A feeling of gaining strength by admitting weakness. We work so hard to pump ourselves up and make ourselves believe that we know all the answers and that we have the power and strength to do anything — and we do — but the fullest version of that power comes not from our belief that we have it, but from a humbling realization that we don’t.

The paradoxical nature of this concept is difficult, but it is the key to unlocking the door of spirituality in general, and it remains the single biggest reason many people don’t like the idea of prayer or of spiritual pursuits in general — they feel it’s taking away their own power and it requires a dismantling of the reliable day-to-day life of the material world. In fact, it’s only by taking away the illusion of our own power and replacing it with a greater power — the power that comes from realizing that we don’t have to know everything — that we truly realize our full potential. And this type of power doesn’t require constant and exhausting efforts to hold-up and maintain, nor does it require us to endlessly convince ourselves and everyone else that we’re powerful, that we know what we’re doing, and that we’re in control of everything.

To know that you don’t know is the definition of a spiritual awakening. And keeping that realization at the front of our mind and in the core of our being informs the rest of our existence. It takes a deeper type of strength to admit to ourselves that we don’t have it all figured out than to run around keeping all our plates spinning. It seems strange to think that turning yourself over to your own bewilderment would actually bring clarity, but it does. Solving this riddle is the beginning of any true spiritual journey.

Many people feel threatened or uncomfortable with this sort of gray area. They like things to be “yes” or “no,” “black” or “white,” and “right” or “wrong.” They want to live in the “real world” that they can touch and make sense of. When things “don’t make sense,” they retreat. These people will have to allow themselves to fully admit that they don’t know, in order to actually begin knowing and that’s often too frightening of a task. It can be too painful to even imagine, after all those years of effort, simply abandoning our carefully crafted structures and stepping into the immense chasm of the uncharted and unknowable.

Many of us worked for years to build up our idea of the world and who we are in it. We’ve clung ever more tightly to the idea of what is true and what is false. We’ve toiled and schemed to get what we need to “be happy,” and to gain the sense of security that comes with “figuring things out” and “making it.” We do that by building a better and stronger protective shell to shield us from the painful horrors of the unknown.It can be too painful to even imagine, after all those years of effort, simply abandoning our carefully crafted structures, and stepping into the immense chasm of the uncharted and unknowable. And now, it’s time to take it.

I want you to pray for your brother right now. As a gesture to your grandmother — who, if she didn’t exist, neither would you. I want you to pray right now, just for the sake of challenging yourself. I want you to find a place alone, and kneel down — against all your stubborn tendencies telling you not to — and close your eyes and think of one concentrated thought: your brother.

I want you to think of your love for him. Your fear of him dying. Your feeling of powerlessness. Your feelings of anger and frustration. Your feelings of confusion. You don’t need to ask to get anything. You don’t need to try and fix anything. You don’t need to get any answers. Just focus on every moment you’ve ever had with your brother. Reflect on every memory, from years ago, and even from just earlier today. Let the feelings wash over you. Let the feelings take you away from yourself. Let them bring you closer to him. Let yourself be overwhelmed by the unyielding and uncompromising emotion of him until you lose yourself in it.

Think about him more than you’ve ever thought about anyone before. Think about him more deeply and with more detail than you’ve ever thought about anything. Think about how incredible it is that you have a brother — that he exists at all. Focus on him until you feel like your soul is going to burst. Tell him in your heart and soul that you love him. Feel that love pouring out of you from all sides. Then get up and go be with him and your family. And you can tell your grandmother that you prayed for your brother.

Love,Andrew W.K.

# Ask Andrew W.K.: Live and In-Person

## by [BRIAN MCMANUS](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/brianmcmanus/)

September 4, 2014

Since it started running in the first issue of the Voice this year, undisputed Party King Andrew W.K.’s advice column has [touched millions of readers](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/07/the_10_most_helpful_ask_andrew_wk_columns_as_determined_by_traffic.php). It is, we’re quite certain, the only column in the history of time that’s been praised by both NPR and [Glenn Beck](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2014/08/rightbloggers_love_andrew_wk.php), and the only one tackling such diverse topics as why some people are drawn to heroin, the power of prayer, the wonder of dogs, and how to handle a right-wing asshole parent. (See all of Andrew’s columns in the link below.) In short, Ask Andrew W.K. is a hit. But that’s also part of the problem, because Andrew can only answer one of the hundreds of emails he gets each week. To remedy this he’s bringing Ask Andrew W.K. to you live and in person.

That’s right, this Wednesday, September 10th, 2014, Santos Party House will host Andrew W.K. in a live “Ask Andrew” question and answer session! This night will be your chance to ask Andrew any question you want, in person, and have him answer it live and on the spot. It will be unpredictable, it will be intimate, and it will certainly, Andrew assures us, be party. You can buy discounted early bird tickets until midnight of September 7 right here for the very party price of $8. After Sept. 7 the price goes up to $10 at the same link, and we suspect tickets will go fast, so get them now.

Seriously. Now. Go. Bye. See you at Santos Party House Wednesday.

# My Boyfriend Listens to Evil Music

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

September 10, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I’m writing today because you’re such a positive person and I need help dealing with negativity. I’ve been with my boyfriend for two years, but recently I’ve been having a harder and harder time hanging out with him at his house. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not that I have a problem with him personally, I just have a problem with his music. He’s always been into metal and pretty aggressive stuff, but now his musical taste seems to be getting truly evil. I can’t even describe how some of this music sounds — it’s just really negative vibes. The album artwork and posters and books he has in his room all confirm this. Lots of blood and guts and devils and just evil-looking stuff. I’m not a Goody Two-shoes or anything, but I was raised in a very loving family who taught me that stuff like this really can be bad for your karma, and I really don’t feel comfortable around it. And even more than that, I really don’t want this stuff corrupting my boyfriend and making him change from the loving, positive person he is. I tried removing some of the albums from his room and he freaked out. I tried telling him I wouldn’t come over with that stuff in his house, but that didn’t work either. I don’t want to make him mad, but I do want this negative stuff out of our lives. So, since you’re so focused on positivity, I’m hoping you can give me some advice. How do I rescue my boyfriend and our relationship from these negative influences?

Thank you,Sick of Negative Vibes

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: Prayer Is Stupid, Right?***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/09/03/ask-andrew-w-k-prayer-is-stupid-right/)

**Dear Sick of Negative Vibes**,

You know what the biggest negative vibe is in this situation? You. Trying to make your boyfriend give up the music he enjoys — that is true negativity. I understand how you’re feeling, but rather than censoring someone’s experience, I suggest you strive to develop your own spirit and make it large and strong enough to appreciate and interact with all types of emotional concepts, all types of feelings, all types of people, and all types of beliefs — including those that deal with the ideas of darkness, cruelty, death, destruction, anger, hatred, and evil. Desperately trying to hide — or make other people hide — from certain types of feelings is a losing battle. And it’s likely that we’ll experience more hurt and damage in our efforts to avoid that part of the world than we will by developing a heart and mind capable of engaging with the full spectrum of reality, from light to dark, and beyond.

It’s interesting how often people confuse “evil sounding” music with true evil. By its very nature, music is benevolent. Music means well. It’s virtually impossible to bend the will of music toward a truly negative intention. Music can be used to achieve all sorts of things, depending on who wants to use it and for what purpose, but the music itself is pure goodness. Music doesn’t waste its time in dealing with human concepts like “good and evil.” Thankfully, music exists in a realm above and beyond the need for logical ideas and theories. Music is where we can find relief from reason and truly experience “pure feeling.” Music is what feelings sound like — feelings before we analyze and deconstruct them into digestible abstractions like “happy feeling” or “sad feeling.” Music is just pure feeling.

For this reason alone, it’s probably the greatest gift humanity has to work with. And also one of the most mysterious. It would be a total disrespect to lower our conception of music to something as literal as a “mood” or an “emotion” or a “negative” or “positive” idea. Music exists outside of all that. And that’s why it feels the way it feels and doesn’t feel like anything else. No amount of reading or movie-watching or eating or even sex can quite equal the inexpressible pleasure of music for music’s sake. We must always remember this, especially when we begin to doubt the value of music or question its intention. Humans may have intentions, but music doesn’t. Music is humanity with all the bullshit removed. Music is humanity at its best.

So don’t get too caught up in lyrics, or album covers, or what the people playing the music look like. All of that isn’t music. That’s just human stuff — the icing on the cake — the human bits and pieces we throw in for our own purposes. Music isn’t involved in lyrics and imagery and style. Music is melody and rhythm. Besides, even the most sinister words and images cannot break music’s naturally bountiful spirit. And that’s why it can still feel so good to experience music of any variety. That’s why sometimes the angriest music can make you feel the happiest. Because here is a way to interact with those bad feelings in a totally good-feeling way. It’s cathartic. It’s healing. It’s good for the soul.

Music is a safe haven where we get to explore the full range of what it is to be alive — a way we can explore feelings and sensations we can’t describe or have access to any other way. No one listens to “sad sounding” music to feel awful. We listen to it because somehow it actually makes us feel good in a way that nothing else does — it’s a good feeling that’s hard to explain or get any other way. It seems mysterious and contradictory, but intense negativity can sometimes have an uplifting effect, especially when it’s experienced through music.

Besides, songs that try too hard to be “nice and sweet” can come off cloying and ingratiating. We all have our different tastes, and thank goodness we do. After all, if everyone thought the same way and liked the same music, life would be boring. At least almost everyone can agree that we love music in general — and that we actually need music in order to be complete human beings — and with that spirit at heart, we can respect each other’s individual preferences and tastes, and at least relate to the fact that we’re all trying to find good feelings through music one way or another.

So please don’t give your boyfriend a hard time about the music he loves. Just love him and be glad he has music in his life that brings him joy. You can bring him joy too, or you can be a force that takes his joy away. And what would fill the void left by the absence of his music, anyway? It would probably be filled with his resentment for you, and more anger and disharmony than his “evil” music ever brought into your relationship in the first place. Your intentions may feel noble and justified, but they’re only going to cause harm. Too much damage in this world is caused by people trying to “remove” what they don’t like from existence. I hope you put your energy into adding joy to the world. And please don’t ever again try to take away someone’s music.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**My Friend Is Joining the Military and I’m Furious**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

September 17, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

One of my closest and oldest friends just told me last night that he wants to join the Army. I was completely shocked. He had never seemed interested in this before and never really mentioned it, and now he’s decided to not go to college but sign up with the military instead.

At first I just didn’t say anything, but then I got really pissed off and told him not to do it. I believe in peace and am just so upset at the idea of someone I’ve known and loved for so long participating in this kind of violence. I basically told him that if he goes through with this, I won’t be able to be his friend anymore. I can’t stand by in good conscience and let my friend go kill people or get killed, can I?
Pissed Off Pacifist

**Dear Pissed Off Pacifist**,

Take a look around at your life and where you are right now. How do you think we got here? Millions of humans literally going through hell to carve out this convoluted, if comfortable, version of reality from the raw and brutally indifferent earth. The ground we’re on has literally been built on the blood and bodies of countless lifeforms who died in a raging battle to build the world as it is now. It’s a world that is deeply flawed and full of ugliness, needless suffering, blind cruelty, and screaming insanity, but it is the world we have built together, one way or another. No one can exist and say that this is not their world — you built it too, and we are maintaining it every moment we live in it. No matter how badly we want to avoid violence, we must acknowledge the violence that we emerged from — the sacrifices of so many often nameless people and creatures who really did die and kill to make what we all are engaged in now.

We are always standing on hallowed ground. Everything is stained with blood, and to exist at all is to benefit from the sacrifice and savagery of the countless victims and villains who came before us. We don’t have to be happy about what they did or how we arrived to live in this luxuriously decadent moment, but we must acknowledge that nearly everything we interact with daily has come with a price. Much had to be lost for anything to be gained. Many people truly did give up everything, or had everything taken away, in order to help build what we now can take for granted, in all its complex and flawed beauty.

War is the hell we create for ourselves on earth. It’s horrifying and nightmarish and brings out the best and worst we have to offer, over and over again, only then to be destroyed back into the mud of conflict and darkness from which we summoned it. But we cannot be so ignorant as to forget that the moments of heaven we’ve also been lucky enough to enjoy are intrinsically bound up in the hell they’ve often emerged from, or survived in spite of.

This isn’t to say that peace can only exist with war — we realize that is a perverse and twisted mindset — but it’s to say that there is something painfully inseparable about the heaven and hell of peace and war and how one seems to imply and necessitate the existence of the other. To be at war — with nature, with each other, with oneself — seems like an inescapable aspect of the human experience. The tireless need to build the world the way we want it to be, based on what we consider our highest ideals — the unquenchable thirst for not simple survival, but to build and perfect our own version of heaven, whatever the cost. This is an impossible endeavor, and ultimately punishes us and requires us to exist in hell while we torment ourselves, and everything around us, in our pursuit of heaven — our ideal version of the world.

You and I and your friend are all living in the midst of this pursuit of heaven. And therefore, we are also living in the midst of the hell that our pursuit creates. Both exist together as a result of each other and also as a motivating force propelling each into further amplifying the other. The better things get, the worse they get. And the worse they get, the more we try to make them better. Will this dizzying and nauseating cycle ever end? Or is this part of some larger game playing out on a cosmic scale that we can’t even fathom? Do any of us really know why the world is the way it is? And if we do think we know, what do we intend to do about it? And how do we know that what we want to do to fix the world won’t actually make it worse?

Your friend thinks joining the Army is what he can do to help fix the world, and if you really are his friend, you can’t really try and strip him of his ability to think for himself. You mustn’t try to interfere with his independence and his freedom to do as he pleases. Naturally, and rightfully, you are afraid for him. You don’t want him to have to experience the horrors of war. You don’t want him to die. You don’t want him to kill. But killing your friendship with him does not fix anything, either. It would be just another loss — another casualty of war — it would be a deeper loss if war took not only your friend’s life, but also your love and respect for him.

It will be challenging, but this is a chance for you to see how big of a love you can develop for your friend even though you disagree with him. This is a chance to love him because of who he is — not what he does or what he thinks — for that intangible and incredible thing we call him. The part of him that you’re able to love and respect despite differences of opinion. The part of him that you appreciate even when you don’t think the same way all the time. The part of him that you hope he also values in you. The part of a person that makes them who they are, and not someone else. Your friend will need your love now more than ever. He is going to venture into a dark place where the power of love is sometimes all you have to cling to. You don’t have to love or support his choices, you just have to love and support him. It can be extremely difficult, but we must be strong enough to keep this kind of love alive and in first position in our hearts and minds — ahead of everything else — especially when we feel the most compelled to stop loving entirely.

If there ever was something that could end war forever, it is this unconditional, unwavering, and illogical love that we can have for each other. It might not be the perfect solution, but it’s by far the best thing we’ve got. If you really believe in peace, then love your friend, with all your heart, and don’t ever, ever stop.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# Should I Feel Guilty for Being White?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

September 24, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I saw an [essay you shared called “White People Problems”](http://killingthebuddha.com/mag/damnation/white-people-problems/) that was a pretty angry response to [one of your advice columns](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/06/ask-andrew-w-k-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole/). I think it’s cool that you consider views from people who disagree with you, but from what I can tell, the person who wrote the “White People Problems” essay was basically saying that by being a white person, you’re automatically luckier than other people — that you’re “privileged,” and that you don’t really understand how hard life is. Well, I’m white, and guess what? I don’t feel privileged at all. Like many people, I was raised by a single mother after my father (a drug addict) bolted. I currently work three part-time jobs, none of which pays much more than minimum wage. I started working as soon as I was legally able and never had a real opportunity to go to college. And yet I keep hearing how privileged I am to be white. So I ask you, should I feel…

Guilty For Being White?

**Dear Guilty For Being White**,

You don’t need to feel bad about being who you are in order to have an appreciation and awareness of people different than you and the challenges they face. Some people have continued to mistreat others based on how they look and where they’re from. We don’t need to compete over who has more or worse problems to have empathy for the unjust treatment of others, especially when it’s an injustice that you may personally never face.

You’re a person. And being a person is not something to feel guilty about. We can feel guilty about other things — things we’ve done, things we’ve said, things we’ve thought or believed. But we must still be open enough to realize the incredible cruelty faced by countless members of our human race, and how the reverberations of the past are still resonating in very real ways. Some things that don’t seem present for some are up-close-and-personal for others. There are people who have more from the start, and there are people who have the odds stacked against them. We must have compassion for the plight of others, and realize how we may, knowingly or unknowingly, play a part in it, and even benefit from it. We must constantly imagine what it’s like to be someone else — not just to “walk in someone’s shoes,” but to actually try and inhabit their very soul — to try and feel how they feel and think how they think. Yet we must also respect and realize that no one can ever truly comprehend what it’s like to be someone else — we can never fully know what they’ve gone through or how it feels to exist as them.

This creates a terrifying separation, but it’s also a fundamental and beautiful part of why each of us is unique. We can never really know anyone’s experience, but the process of trying to know and relate to each other is one of the cornerstones of humanity. We’re all one-offs, individuals, and at the same time, all in the same boat. As we each strive to get where we’re going individually, we should never forget that we’re all still going to end up there, together.

When it comes to privilege, I agree with the author of the essay you linked to in your question, [Briallen Hopper of Yale](http://killingthebuddha.com/mag/damnation/white-people-problems/). We can better understand the concept of privilege when we understand the following: Even though your life may not be trouble-free, just having the chance to consider some of the ideas we’re discussing here as simply ideas — and not as true hardships you experience yourself — counts as a type of privilege. Contemplating discrimination as an abstract concept, rather than as part of the everyday existence you’re forced to endure, is a luxury some people never get to enjoy. To watch other people fight far away from us — where we don’t have to fear for our immediate safety, or be negatively affected by the unfairness of an established system they weren’t allowed to participate in designing — is a type of blessing we must not ignore, even if it’s a blessing we didn’t ask for. These are all types of privilege, and many more exist.

Yet, every privilege contains within it the potential to become a hindrance, especially when those privileges disconnect us from the visceral adversity so many other people experience as reality. We mustn’t let our blessings harden our hearts. The world is too nuanced, chaotic, and complicated to try and compare our troubles by using a single standard – not everyone has the same starting standard to work with. Our dilemma is manifold, and so are its causes. But we do ourselves a disservice whenever we attempt to find the root of all evil in one location, on one side, or in one idea. When we try to pin down the location of evil, it simply shifts to another location. And sometimes, without us even realizing it, that new location may be inside of us.

Fortunately, evil can also be transmuted into good. Every disadvantage contains the possibility of an unforeseen benefit; every disability can inspire abnormally advanced alternate strengths. Rarely is a specific quality inherently good or bad — it’s what we make of it, or what we do with it in spite of itself — or what we do instead of it, or because of it. Our ingenuity knows no bounds. With enough perspective, imagination, and determination, we can locate new doorways when there seems to be no way out. If we take advantage of our natural ability to look beyond ourselves, and more importantly, to look through the eyes of others, we’ll discover wellsprings of opportunity woven into the fabric of humanity’s shared struggle.

We’re all different people with different things to offer — different attributes. Everyone has a mixture of both advantages and disadvantages. Some are more beneficial and some are more challenging. Some are inflicted upon us, and some we create willingly. These qualities do not have to define us, but they undoubtedly have tremendous impact on our experience as individuals and as a society.

There are an infinite number of variables that play into each moment of life — bad luck, destiny, free will, or all of the above. There are some of areas that we seem to have no control over, and others that are completely in our power to manipulate and influence. However, most events in life are a subtle combination of being both in and out of control — they are multifaceted and contain both “what happened” and “what’s happening.” What “will happen” is the only place where we have perpetual influence.

So we must each take what we have to work with and create as much goodness as we can. We must understand each other’s anger and use its power to bring out the best in all of us. We must try to right wrongs. We must try to work together toward common goals. It can be tempting to declare certain topics and areas of life “off limits” to certain people because they don’t possess the necessary experience or background to understand them as deeply as others can. In these instances, we actually need more discussion and inclusion than ever. We must encourage each other to take part in the experiences of all people, so that we don’t broaden the divide and see resentments.

We must never lose sight of our main objective because we’re fighting over who’s approved or allowed to contribute and care. Some people like to argue and find fault in others no matter what — and that’s OK. All those feelings – including frustration and even hate – work to drum up energy around places that desperately need it – ultimately helping us gain more insight and clarity. All out feelings are valid and useful if we have the wisdom to appreciate and nurture their best elements.

Each of us has an often unknowable role in helping the world unfold, and sometimes in ways that appear to make little sense at the time. When we zoom out far enough, we see that we’re all part of each other’s interlocking path. We must not be too quick to judge when someone else’s path appears different from our own.

In order to celebrate the rich diversity of life, we must be prepared to embrace all the challenges that come with it. We must keep the deceptively simple concept of loving kindness burning bright in the forefront of our minds, especially when others tell us it’s naive. Love is never naive. Compassion is never inappropriate. Love and compassion make life livable.

We must focus on what we can each add to the equation right now. Each perspective gives us a wider horizon, a larger field of vision, and a greater depth of understanding. This is the true beauty of the human spectrum. If everyone thought the same, the world would be boring and we would be blind. We thrive on seeing things differently from one another so that we can see things more clearly. When we look at the world as individuals — from 7 billion perspectives — we get to see more of the picture. We’re all members of the human race. We’re all on this earth together. And that’s a privilege we all share. Let’s make our time here as loving and joyful as it can be, for everyone. And remember… just because you don’t see a problem doesn’t mean it isn’t there.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# Tackling Procrastination

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

October 1, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hi Andrew**,

I’m a terrible procrastinator. It started back in high school, when I literally put off everything I had to do. Sometimes I would get very inspired and motivated, and other times I just felt so lazy I couldn’t do anything. By college, it had got so bad that I basically had a panic attack when I avoided writing two big papers until the night before they were due and literally went through hell and back to finish them in time. The problem is, I’m good at procrastinating. I got good grades on those papers, and haven’t really ever missed a deadline. It’s just the putting stuff off and the pressure piling up that’s really wearing me down. I think all the stress has taken years off my life. I’m seeing it get worse lately and I just need to figure out how to get that spark that kicks me into gear. For some reason, I just keep sitting around and doing other stuff instead of what I’m supposed to do. Look what I’m doing right now…I’m writing to you instead of actually just doing my work. Please help me!

Uninspired Procrastinator

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Feel Guilty for Being White?***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/09/24/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-feel-guilty-for-being-white/)

**Dear Uninspired Procrastinator**,

I think procrastination is highly underrated. Or at least, it’s a word that’s overused and not necessarily what you’re describing here. In fact, it’s possible that almost all the stress surrounding your situation comes not from potential issues caused by delaying your work, but from the fear, anxiety, and stigma surrounding the phenomenon of procrastination as a concept itself.

For example, in your letter, you didn’t mention any times when you actually missed a deadline or had a bad outcome from procrastinating, you mainly just expressed your deep concern about being someone who procrastinates and the anguish your concern causes you. Sure, doing a lot of work at the last minute takes a lot of energy and is super intense, but that’s how the process works at times. I don’t know how old you are now, but assuming you’ve been functioning this way for many years, it’s highly possible that the way you work on tasks and manage your time is perfectly OK, and that it’s your perception of it being flawed that is causing the majority of your suffering, and tension. Sometimes when one’s own natural inclinations and skills clash with preconceived ideas of “good behavior,” there develops a perverse and sadistic cycle of torment, where your spirit wants to flourish, but your rational mind constantly abuses and punishes it for “misbehaving.”

The concept of procrastination is really referring to a battle that comes from our free spirit colliding with a world that’s been overly structured and overly scheduled. Of course we want some structure and schedule — having an idea of what, when, and where is necessary for certain areas of life, but what about for our spirit? Our imagination and creative capacities have no real interest in, or use for, the stringent protocols of work structure and rote schedule.

Brilliant ideas often suffocate when they’re forced into an enclosed space. As much as we would like to be able to say, “Get inspired now!” our inner mind just simply doesn’t work that way. And that’s a wonderful thing. That’s what keeps life surprising and entertaining and transcendental — when moments of inspiration reveal themselves unexpectedly, it’s exhilarating. You can’t schedule a revelation. You can’t put a deadline on a breakthrough. Sure, you can set aside an hour for brainstorming, but when no lightning strikes, you spend most of the time wondering why you didn’t come up with anything and feeling bad about it. And then later that day, when you’re walking through your front door, you’ll suddenly have a radical idea that seemingly no amount of deliberate concentration could’ve produced.

These are riddles that are not meant to be solved — puzzles whose pictures take shape when we don’t put all the pieces together. We don’t need to see behind the curtain in every situation. Sometimes trying to figure out the answer gets us further from true insight. The mysterious nature of inspiration, motivation, drive, and creativity is confounding — and can be downright irritating — but it’s the tireless refusal of our stubborn spirit to fit into the “regular order of things” that’s so intrinsic to its essence. Why can’t we call upon these skills at will? Why can’t inspiration be pinned down, honed, and placed in a toolbox of other abilities like arithmetic or riding a bike? Why must some of our most powerful skills be so elusive?

The very nature of what makes us creative beings is also what makes us unpredictable and our powers fleeting. Trying to break our own spirit so that it can be tamed, framed, and tapped will, oftentimes, drain us of that very spirit we’re so desperately trying to access. It can kill our inner light. The great anxiety and suffering we think we’re feeling due to procrastination could actually just be the desperate cries of our souls begging for our spirit to be unleashed in its own way, in its own time.

We’re meant to procrastinate. We’re meant to give our spirit the time and space it wants. No matter how much society wants results, our spirit wants freedom. And if we give it that, it will give us miraculous gifts in return. It’s almost as though our job as humans is to clear the way for our superhuman qualities to show themselves — they can be shy and delicate. Great care must be taken not to scare them off. We mustn’t let the lowest and most brutish parts of ourselves interfere with our highest and most ethereal powers. The best we can do is to listen deeply as our instincts speak to us, and follow them passionately, no matter how much effort it takes, or how much anxiety it causes — even if our instinct tells us to do nothing.

Learn to reinterpret that anxiety as simply part of you helping free your spirit. Don’t be a slave to your sense of order or the demands put on you by overly stringent hierarchies. Do whatever you can to give your inner self the time it needs and deserves, and it won’t let you down. It’s not always easy, and it takes patience. And even though letting your inner spirit work for you can be exhausting and even excruciatingly painful, it’s always worth it. Discomfort is a small price to pay for brilliance.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# Pizza Is Healthy

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

October 8, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I love pizza. And I eat lots of it. Now, for the first time in my life, I’m worried that my love of pizza is bad for me. I read some pretty shocking health food articles that focused on eating only natural food, and some of my friends have started giving me a hard time, basically saying that pizza isn’t “real food.” They say it’s poisonous junk that is slowly killing me. They say I should live a more healthy and natural life. That my way of eating isn’t part of an “authentic” lifestyle. I’m not severely overweight, and I’m a pretty active and happy person, but now whenever I eat pizza I feel kind of depressed. I know you love pizza as much as I do. How do I keep my love affair with pizza going but also live a good and natural life?
Thanks for your help,Pondering A Pizza-Less Life

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: Tackling Procrastination***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/10/01/ask-andrew-w-k-tackling-procrastination/)

**Dear Pondering A Pizza-Less Life**,

Pizza is a state of mind. Pizza is way of looking at the world. Pizza is part of a true belief that we as humans can create our own sources of true joy. And the joy that pizza brings is real and tangible. Happiness, from pizza or any number of things, is authentically crucial to our survival and well being, just as much as water or air. Pizza is more than just food; it’s a genuine physical and spiritual pleasure. Anyone who says that money cannot buy happiness has clearly never spent their money on pizza. These are not exaggerations — these are sincere recognitions of the value pizza has to us as a reliable source of joy.

Just like music isn’t just sound, pizza isn’t just flour and tomato sauce and cheese. It’s a phenomenon with deep meaning for us. Pizza is an invention on the same level as the invention of electric guitar. What makes humanity great is that we can go beyond nature and still have it be a part of our nature — our natural ability to make new things is a natural part of what makes us supernatural beings.

The same people who say pizza is bad because it’s not “natural” could also say electric guitar is bad because it didn’t naturally fall from the sky in one piece. Sometimes things are valuable specifically because we came up with them and put them together on our own. The fact that they didn’t occur in the natural world is part of their beauty — they’re amazing because we brought them into being from our own natural existence. And we are a natural extension of nature.

As with so many sources of joy, there will be people who specifically lash out at the areas of life that others hold dear. Some people get a twisted sort of joy in systematically abusing and degrading the joys of other people. It’s not so much that they want to convince you pizza is bad; they want to convince you that you’re bad for loving it, and that they’re truly healthier, smarter, and all around better people for eating differently or having a different lifestyle. It’s not enough to just do what they enjoy, they have to take others down in the process.

It’s healthier to be truly happy than it is to painfully censor yourself and your passions. We can die at any time from anything. And would it really have been better to have spent those precious years without the natural happiness of something like pizza? The world is an intense and overwhelming place and we create things like pizza so that being in the world can feel a little less harsh.

No amount of effort to eat well, exercise more, or eliminate all “bad things” can ever fully abolish the anxiety of being alive. Learning to love what makes life truly lovable is a much better use of our time, rather than trying to edit away everything we’ve worked so hard to create.

Besides, when you love something with all your heart, like the way you love pizza, it becomes an inseparable part of your being — it’s always with you, even when it’s not directly in front of you. Just like you don’t have to own an original Picasso in order to love his painting. You don’t have to be visited by Santa Claus every day in order to have a close connection to him. You don’t even have to see your best friends every day in order for them to still be a huge part of your life.

Similarly, you don’t have to eat pizza at every meal for it to still bring you huge amounts of ongoing happiness. Just thinking of a song can fill your head with stimulating music, and just thinking of a pizza can fill your soul with satiating joy.

You know where true wellness comes from? It doesn’t come from taking certain vitamins and only eating certain “natural” foods, and focusing on an “authentic” and “organic” life. True wellness comes from loving the experience of being alive with all your might and giving yourself the chance to experience as much true joy as you can before you die. And if pizza brings you joy, then by all means, love that pizza like your life depends on it. Because it does. You really can die from a broken heart. Don’t break up with pizza.

Love,Andrew W.K.

**Should I Worry About Ebola?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

October 15, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I’m shitting my pants about this Ebola virus. Just hearing the word “Ebola” makes me literally sick to my stomach. I’m sick of hearing about this disease and I’m sick of feeling terrified about it. Every morning I wake up for work, I scramble to watch the news and read the latest horror stories, and then I spend the rest of the day irritable and panicked about this growing epidemic. And it seems like every day a new fear of mine has come true: more people getting sick, no one doing anything real to stop it, and more and more people chiming in about what should be done, without any real organization or plan of action. But what can be done? I feel like we’re all going to die! How do I stop freaking out about this?

Scared Sick

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: Pizza Is Healthy***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/10/08/ask-andrew-w-k-pizza-is-healthy/)

**Dear Scared Sick**,

We are all going to die. And there’s nothing that can be done about it. Whether we die of disease, old age, violence, or some freak accident, the fact is that life, and everything about it, is temporary. And this current disease, and the wave of stress and panic it’s rightfully causing, is also a temporary situation. Nothing lasts forever, whether it be good or bad, except death. That is the best reason to stop freaking out about this and dying in general. It will happen someday whether we like it or not. But is that really a reason to be constantly depressed? Or is the fact that we’re going to die what actually gives our life value?

Disease, disasters, and random fatal accidents constantly remind us of our own inescapable mortality. They remind us how much our very existence hangs precariously in the balance at all times. They remind us that the people we think are in control don’t really have an idea what’s going on and don’t really know how to save us or run the world. We’re all powerless in one way or another — some more, some less — but our mortality is one thing we all have in common.

We don’t like to think about dying, so most of the time we put it out of our heads. And that’s a perfectly reasonable thing to do. We have too much living on our minds to fill our precious minutes with the constant reality of an eventual and unavoidable death. The idea of a global infectious disease outbreak is horrifying, and is possible, maybe even likely, to occur someday — just as it has been many times in the past. But we are all already infected with a fatal condition called being alive. And rather than having this add to our anxiety and panic, it should help keep things in perspective, and motivate us to enjoy our time here as much as we can — not experience it as a dreadful and terrifying countdown to extinction.

Besides, if we’re going to be afraid of catching a deadly disease, then we should also be afraid of all diseases at all times — not just now, during this current news cycle. Based on the odds, we should be even more scared of dying in a car wreck, or suffering a severe life-altering injury. And if being constantly and extremely afraid of getting a fatal disease is a rational and justified state of mind, then we might as well also be perpetually afraid of being murdered, of being the victim of gang violence, of dying in a plane crash, or of being blown up by a bomb.

The thing is, it’s OK to be afraid of dying. It’s OK to feel anxiety and stress about an uncontrollable and threatening world. It’s good to want to survive. But we must weigh the amount of fear we indulge ourselves in against how much good it actually does us. How much fear of death is healthy before it starts to take away from our ability to live the life we’re so afraid of losing?

We have to remember that getting a rare disease is still very unlikely compared to so many other potential calamities that can befall us at any moment. And we must realize that spending precious time and energy reckoning with the possibility of death — rather than making the most of our brief and miraculous life — is a sincere disrespect to existence itself.

Stay strong, do what you can to help yourself and others stay alive, be grateful to those who are putting their own lives in jeopardy to save ours, and don’t give in to the fear to the point where it has sapped the joy out of the life you have. Feel compassion for those who have perished, not just from this disease, but from every illness, every injustice, every tragedy, and every misfortune. Don’t let the terror of death cut you off from the beauty of life. Remain humane.

We will get through this, just as we have so many similar trials and tribulations in the past. Have faith in the ordeals and extract as much meaning from this as you can. We will be OK, even if we’re not OK. Stop looking at the news and go for a walk outside for a while. Go hang out with your friends and laugh and smile. Go hug your family and pet some animals. Most of all, just don’t stop celebrating the amazing gift of life you’re living right now.

Love,Andrew W.K.

# Am I Getting Too Old to Party?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

October 22, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

It’s my birthday and I feel depressed. I never used to be one of those people that hated telling people their age, but for the first time in my life, I feel like I’m getting old. How do I keep the party going even though I’m old?
Yours truly,Aging Rager
***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: Should I Worry About Ebola?***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/10/15/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-worry-about-ebola/)

**Dear Aging Rager**,

Your fear of not being able to party as you get older isn’t uncommon, but it’s unwarranted. If anything, the more experience you have at partying, the better you get at partying. The more you understand about what brings you happiness, the more skills you can acquire to bring that happiness about. Living longer makes you better at life.

This is why our elders are so appealing. We realize they’ve accumulated extremely deep stores of knowledge and wisdom precisely because they aren’t 18 years old. We stand in awe as we ponder what insights and secrets they’ve extracted from the volumes of life they’ve endured. Similarly, the more time we spend learning who we are in this world, the better we get at being ourselves — this is how one becomes a master — this is the great gift of aging.

As with many aspects of a materialistic culture, ethereal ideas like mastery and wisdom are often undervalued. We are made to feel bad about change, appearance, and, most of all, our immaterial inner world. Aging demands that we reckon with overwhelmingly intense ideas about the mysteries of the world, eventually dying, looking different, loss and heartbreak, and the impermanence of everything. But these things are only truly upsetting when we attach too much importance to the material world in which the pain of these ideas dwells, outside of our true inner self.

Our true inner self — our spirit — is ageless and never dies. But this concept is so hard to conceive of that we often distract ourselves with little games that seem to give us a place to rest our anxiety and distract us so we don’t have to dive deeper into what is really going on inside us. We worry about how we look, our attractiveness, about stuff and objects and pursuits and money and a million other things. And it’s totally fine to play these games, as long as we remember that they are only games. They don’t define our essence, and they are not why we are here. And when these games begin to distance us from the effortless beauty of existence, they take on a sinister and self-abusive quality. Some of these games are purposely set up to make sure that we can only ever lose — they only can separate us from ourselves — playing these games too passionately can kill us even though we outwardly appear to be living. Obsession with youth is just fear.

Besides, when we think back to our younger years, we often tend to exaggerate the good times and block out the bad. There’s nothing wrong with remembering things in an idealized way, as long as it doesn’t make us lose appreciation for where we stand right now. If we’re intent on always comparing our current situation with how things used to be, we are likely to never be satisfied and to dread moving forward into the new and unfamiliar.

There’s a difference between “getting older” and “being old.” Getting older is just another way to describe the process of being alive. The longer you go without dying, the “older” you become. We can easily understand how aging in this way is a great triumph. Those who have reached old age have truly achieved a remarkable feat of endurance, and we should recognize and respect all that they’ve experienced and withstood to survive so long. This is why it’s equally intense when someone dies much too soon, and didn’t get the chance to survive long enough.

The best we can hope for is health and strength and a mind that’s able to comprehend, appreciate, and penetrate the world around us, no matter what stage of life we’re in. Make the most of the age you are right now, and realize that you still are you, no matter how old you are. Don’t buy into the hype about “getting old,” because aging doesn’t automatically mean life gets worse. That’s all guilt-based nonsense usually used to sell products and fantasies that are never as good as they’re described — they’re just entertainment. And that’s OK. But don’t give in to it, or give up and get lazy. Don’t fall back on “getting old” as an excuse for not living full-on.

What matters most is using every moment you’re alive to become the best person you can be. All of us are children only for a short time. The majority of our life is spent as an adult. And as an adult, we have the tools, the resources, and the physical and mental fortitude to shape the world so that the dreams of our childhood can be realized. The gift of childhood gives us the vision and the gift of adulthood gives us the power. Be glad that you’ve even lived into adulthood. Be glad that you’ve even had the chance to have another birthday. Many children didn’t get to ever see adulthood. Appreciate yours, and celebrate it in honor of all those who’ll never get to have a birthday ever again. And remember…

People don’t stop partying because they get old, they get old because they stop partying.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# The Science of Halloween

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

October 29, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hi, Andrew!**

Believe it or not, I really don’t like Halloween. Out of all my friends and family, I’m the only one who dreads this time of year and doesn’t get excited about dressing up or going out and doing “spooky” stuff. I’ve always been this way. I just don’t believe in this sort of stuff — like ghosts, goblins, haunted houses, and all that supernatural nonsense. I believe in rational thought and science, and to be honest, it creeps me out to see so many millions of people allow themselves to get into such an obviously shallow frame of mind every year during this “holiday.” How can I participate in Halloween without bringing everyone else down, while at the same time not compromising my belief that all this is moronic?

Halloween Hater

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: Pizza Is Healthy***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/10/08/ask-andrew-w-k-pizza-is-healthy/)

**Dear Halloween Hater**,

You don’t need to enjoy dressing up for Halloween, and you certainly don’t need to believe in stuff you don’t want to. But maybe you can celebrate Halloween in a different way: For you, maybe Halloween can be the time of the year where you allow yourself to not believe in your beliefs. Even if just for one day, see what it feels like to doubt that which you think is undoubtable. Embrace the horrifying spirit of the unknown, the untested, and the unproven. Allow yourself to be skeptical of everything, even the idea of skepticism.

On Halloween, allow yourself to live in a world — for one day — where certain things cannot be explained, wrapped up, or proven. Allow yourself to exist between the known and the unknown, the rational and the irrational, the heavens and the earth, the earth and hell, the human and monstrous, the demonic and angelic, the tangible and ghostly, the good and the evil. Just because you don’t believe in something — “supernatural nonsense” — doesn’t mean it isn’t real, or maybe even beyond the very concept of “real”. This is the spirit of Halloween, and it’s a science all its own.

The arrogance of those who believe only in science and rationality doesn’t stem from any flaw in science or rationality itself, but from a flaw in the believer’s belief that their belief in these things is somehow not a belief at all — that it is a “true knowing.” The primary error in this thinking isn’t simply based on the belief that science is “better” than religion or immaterial philosophy, but in believing that science is ultimately separated or removed from other disciplines of investigation entirely. The more science becomes a rigid, dogmatic, and totalitarian world belief, the more it just becomes another frame through which to view the world — the more of an ideology it becomes — and the closer it gets to that which it claims to be furthest from. This attitude actually hurts the progress of science rather than helps it. All methods of investigating, quantifying, and interpreting the world around us are valid to a degree — and as much as it frustrates us, none of them is definitive. This is nearly impossible for us to understand, which is part of the very essence of the unknowable roots of nature. We can never know everything, and it’s infuriating.

Some modes of explaining the world work better at describing how the world behaves in certain situations, but no mode of investigation should ever be mistaken for being the actual world itself. And all modes should be seen as being a lens with which to interpret the view, and not the view itself.

It takes a truly open mind to maintain having a truly open mind. Our mind’s impulse is to solve the world. But just because our mind thinks it has solved the world doesn’t mean the world is solved. The gods laugh not at our desire for truth, but at our haste in declaring that we have figured the truth out, once and for all. Throughout history, our hubris has unnecessarily hindered our imagination and ability to gain deeper insights. This is an unnecessary tragedy.

Science and that which is not science are more closely related than many of us care to realize. The material and the immaterial are made of each other. The empty space allows for the things which fill the space. This is the threatening and uncomfortable idea that motivates our hunger for knowledge, but which is ultimately insatiable, by the very nature of the tools we are using to extract meaning from the world.

We must not forget that science is of the world, and not above it. We can only learn so much about our minds, because we are using our minds to do so. This is something to celebrate and encourage and delight in, and not something to fear or resent or try to eliminate. Science must make room for the rest of the world. Our beliefs must make room for possibility, the unknown, and unexplainable. And most of all, our mind must make room for itself.

Happy Halloween!

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# Please Eat Shit and Die!

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

November 5, 2014

and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

Would you please do us all a favor and eat shit and die?

Thanks,I Hate You

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: My Boyfriend Listens to Evil Music***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/09/10/ask-andrew-w-k-my-boyfriend-listens-to-evil-music/)

**Dear I Hate You**,

One of the most intriguing and particularly intimate cases of polarity in the phenomenon of eating shit is shit itself. Excrement, feces, diarrhea, and all various forms of human waste — including urine and vomit — are simultaneously repellant, yet an intimate part of our own bodies. It’s truly astounding when one considers how going to the bathroom is really among the most crucial and fundamental aspects of living. Defecating is secondary only to eating, and is essentially eating in reverse — intrinsically connected to the experience of growing and surviving.

If we think about it, shit itself is quite literally one of the worst “most important things” in the world. If we picture being tied down and forced to have a substance smeared all over our face and forced into our eyes, nose, and mouth, is it really possible to imagine that substance being something worse than shit? At first, we might think something like vomit could be worse, but after careful and honest introspective thought, if we had to choose, most of us would prefer being forced to put a stranger’s vomit in our mouths, as opposed to their fresh feces. Blood, urine, semen, and dead rotting bodies are also awful to imagine eating, but they still don’t quite equal the repulsive power of imagining a steaming soupy bagful of strong diarrhea being splashed onto your open-mouthed face.

It’s also interesting to note our feelings when we imagine interacting intimately with human shit versus animal shit. The thought of eating dog shit is revolting, but again, for some reason, it doesn’t seem quite as bad as the waste of some strange human. Why?

As repulsive as picturing all this is, there’s real value and insight to be gained in contemplating these sorts of shitty ideas. For example: As people, we avoid shit at all costs, yet we’re literally carrying it around inside of us, and producing mountains of it, right from within our own bodies. Someone pissing their pants is almost a non-event compared to someone shitting their pants. When someone has a horrific crash while doing tricks on a skateboard, we don’t say, “He totally drank piss!” We say, “He totally ate shit!” What sounds more insulting, “Fuck you!” or “Eat shit!”? Shit is entirely and completely repellant. And it’s meant to be so.

Obviously, our body and mind has gone to great lengths to make us associate everything bad with everything shitty. We most likely will die if we end up eating too much shit. It’s a biological fact that shit is full of shitty stuff. We strive to stay as far away from it as possible, and yet it’s coming from inside us — it is made from us. Certain obsessive-compulsive disorders arise in those who fear and detest shit so much, they won’t even go to the bathroom. Yet it’s interesting to note that by holding all their shit inside their body, they’re paradoxically closer to it than ever — clinging to it, keeping it locked inside themselves, almost like a treasure.

Even the finest gourmet dinner served at the most expensive and luxurious restaurant all turns to shit in just a matter of hours. The best matter — gourmet food — becomes the worst matter: shit. Our body takes the finest things and turns them into contaminated garbage, just by it moving through us, from one end to the other. It’s reverse alchemy — turning gold into something worse than lead.

With all this in mind, it’s important to think about eating shit, both symbolically and literally. The individual who can eat shit — their own and others’ — has suddenly removed an enormous weight from their shoulders. Imagine never being afraid of eating anything again. Imagine never being afraid, period. Crossing the line of shit-eating changes you forever. Even if you never really enjoy doing it, you will have crossed an abyss of epic proportions. You’d sort of have nothing else to fear that could compare. Your capacity for withstanding discomfort would be nearly infinite. It’s the final test of intimidating action, and something both extremely grotesque yet extremely natural. It’s a final frontier.

At the same time, hopefully none of us are ever forced to eat any shit, but if we do eat it, hopefully we can reverse the process once again, and make an upsetting and negative experience into something positive and valuable to our soul. Much like eating helps feed the body, consuming and digesting experiences can feed the soul. If eating shit is unhealthy, contemplating its implications and our own feelings related to it are healthy exercises. Are there other areas of our lives in which we take something good and digest it into something bad? Or vice versa? And are those processes necessary for our own survival? Perhaps we should avoid the bad shit we eliminated from our lives, but occasionally challenge ourselves to re-ingest it?

The more we can see the miraculous processes of our own body as extensions of the world around us, the more we can master this state of being alive. Everything has something to teach us about something else. We can learn from contemplating our greatest repulsions and fears, and examine how our own internal processes illustrate and exemplify the very process of life itself. Everything is precious and valuable to our spirit, even shit.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**Is It Bad to Be a Loner?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

November 12, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew**,

I’ve always been a quiet and reserved person, but I’ve been feeling pressure to be more talkative and social. Do you ever feel pressure to be a certain way? I see people who are so easygoing with social interaction, but I really enjoy spending time alone. Do I need more friends to be good at partying? How do I become the life of the party?

Thanks very much,In A Shell

***See also:***[***Ask Andrew W.K.: Please Eat Shit and Die!***](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/11/05/ask-andrew-w-k-please-eat-shit-and-die/)

**Dear In A Shell**,

Sometimes people who seem the most socially comfortable are actually just as shy as you. Sometimes people who are using exaggerated and overly congenial behaviors are behaving that way to make their own type of shell or protective barrier, because of their own fear of seeming shy or too reserved, just like you are.

We all want to be liked. We all want to feel good about ourselves in the presence of others. This is a natural part of the human spirit — our desire for camaraderie and connection. But how we deal with that desire for connection — and how we go about making it — can lead to self-doubt, a sense that something is wrong with us, and a lot of unnecessarily distorted personality traits.

First of all, nothing is wrong with you. Nothing is wrong with being quiet and reserved. It’s OK to not have a lot of friends. It’s OK to enjoy spending a lot of time alone. There may be times where you have a great deal of social interaction and other times when you’re very solitary. Both are OK. There may be times where you have a lot of friends, and there may be times when you have only one — yourself. This is also fine.

Somehow social confusion has developed about “how to be a good person,” and a large part of our disorientation comes from thinking who we are has to do with our outward appearance or social style. This has probably been amplified by popular culture, in the form of how we see people act in movies and on TV, but we also look to each other for signals and directions on how to behave. Social cues are ever present in day-to-day life and are portrayed nonstop in almost every area of civilized life. But we mustn’t lose track of ourselves in the midst of so many other personalities we could act like. We must not let our search for “how to act” or “how to be” replace the beauty of simply being.

We must be brave. We must be kind. We must stop feeling guilty or bad about how we naturally are, even when it doesn’t resemble the attitudes or personalities we see portrayed around us. We must allow ourselves to become ourselves from the inside out. We must resist the pressure to conform to the material world and the standardized and limited personality types it offers us. We must instead turn our attention to our own inner-world, where we can truly succeed at reaching the highest potential of our true self.

You already are the life of the party. Your life is the party and you’re always right in the middle of it, all the time. Stop trying to modify your true self to fit some prefabricated idea, and instead put all that energy into loving your own true nature. We come not only in all different shapes and sizes, but in all different textures and attitudes and dispositions. As long as you allow your natural love and kindness to lead the way, you’ll always be OK. Next time you feel shy or reserved, think of it as a great thing — just as good as being extroverted and social — it’s just a different version of the same beautiful thing: a human being. And that’s what partying is all about.
Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**As an Atheist, How Do I Handle Religious People?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

November 19, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hi Andrew**,

I’m hoping you can help me. I’m a passionate atheist and one of my best friends is too. I’ve known him since we were six years old and I love him like a brother. Just last week, he got married. He hired a non-denominational minister to conduct his ceremony. Everything was going fine until the minister said, “We are gathered here today, in the presence of God, to unite these two people in matrimony.” I tensed up as soon as I heard the word “god” and basically spent the rest of the ceremony fuming over the fact that this minister snuck the god thing into my friend’s special day. The whole thing was tarnished. I never really mentioned how upset I was to my friend or anyone else, but I can’t stop thinking about it and feeling like I should’ve spoken up. I really hate religion and that religious people always need to force their dogma into everyone’s lives. Just because they think everything’s being controlled by some bearded sky-daddy doesn’t mean they need to insert their faith into otherwise beautiful parts of my life. I’m the kind of person who stands up for atheism. I’ve made a commitment to fight against religion whenever I can. I’m most upset that my friend allowed this minister to say the word “god” during such an important moment in his life and then didn’t say anything back or even seem to care. My question is: Should I mention this to my friend, or do I just let it go?

Kind regards,Anonymous Atheist

**Dear Anonymous Atheist**,

Thank you for asking about this. You definitely shouldn’t feel bad for caring. The fact that you’re thinking a lot about this situation shows you have a thoughtful and strong character. It’s natural for us to encounter moments which challenge us. Having the capacity to question our most deeply held opinions is not a sign of weakness, it’s a sign of strength. Especially when we have the composure to resist our immediate emotional reactions and let our common sense lead us toward a more dignified type of contemplation.

Keeping an open mind and an open heart requires an incredible amount of determined effort. The act of questioning and the search for truth demands the utmost courage and discipline. And it’s not a discipline built around staunch and unwavering adherence to one’s beliefs, but an unwavering commitment to the quest for honesty, integrity, and discovery, even at the expense of one’s own beliefs. This is to ensure that new insights and opportunities for enlightened growth aren’t dismissed simply because they conflict with previously held opinions.

In our collective struggle toward truth, it’s required that we maintain a true openness — an openness so vast that it’s difficult to define. The only word approaching a description of this infinite openness is the word “love.” And with that in mind, maybe the word “God” is also attempting to describe this incredible openness.

I’m not here to convince you of the reality of God or to attempt a full definition of God. I also don’t have adequate space to delve into anything approaching a comprehensive discussion of deity, religion, or even spirituality. Rather, I’m going to use this brief space to present you with a very simple idea to consider. Since you seem to have been pondering your thoughts in general, perhaps you’ll find some use in pondering this humble possibility:

Perhaps your friend was so enthralled and focused on who he was marrying, and his love for that person, that he didn’t even notice what the minister was saying about God. And even if he did notice, maybe he was so lost in the loving joy of his moment that he found the idea of fighting with anyone, about anything, impossible. Perhaps his feelings of love were so overwhelmingly strong and palpable that any and all words in the whole of human language would just become another word for “love.” Perhaps the word “God” became love. Perhaps love really does mean God, and God really is love.

By this, I don’t mean that a “bearded sky-daddy” invented a thing called “love” that “He” controls and that when you feel love you are really just feeling His controlling and all-ruling kingly presence. I don’t even mean that God is “a being” of any form. I mean that God is literally love — experiencing loving feelings, like the ones you feel when you think about your best friend, is what the word “God” actually means — that this fragile and elusive thing called “love” could actually be the most important and miraculous power to emerge out of the universe and cosmos, period. And that by embracing this feeling of love, you are experiencing God.

For many of us, resisting any experience of God is related to an abstract fear of being “brainwashed” — to resist joining “the herd,” losing one’s identity, independence, and individuality to “God” or some sort of ignorance. But maybe we need to give up some amount of our individuality for a sense of togetherness? Maybe it’s OK to sacrifice that part of ourselves that’s held us back from experiencing true and total love? If we were to be brainwashed by love, would that be such a bad thing?

Love is the only way we can truly save the world and each other. And instead of scoffing at this notion or brushing it off as a naive or superstitious type of control, why not try considering the possibility that love itself is “the missing piece” — the most obvious yet elusive part of a universal plan, the essence within a natural order of life that we may never fully explain or understand, yet that we are undeniably a part of and are dependent on for our very survival?

Next time you cringe when you hear the word “God,” why not try replacing “God” with the word “love”? Why not try making these words mean the same thing, just as an experiment? It doesn’t mean you have to believe in a man in the sky, but you can believe in love, and it can be your version of a higher power.

Love brings out the best in us. Love raises us above hatred, pushes us beyond selfish desire, urges us to overcome prejudice and fear. Love allows us to triumph over those impulses which threaten to divide and destroy us. Love allows the greatest hopes of humanity to appear within reach. Thinking with love at the core of our worldview gives us a new perspective and a new way to approach life, and perhaps it is love itself that we have been searching for on our endless quest for truth.

Perhaps love is the ultimate truth. Love is, quite truly, the only way we will make it. If God does exist, wouldn’t he want us to be in a state of total love?

And if God doesn’t exist, then our need for love is more crucial and urgent than ever.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# How Do I Stop Worrying and Just Go for It?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

November 26, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

For many years, I’ve been trying to find the courage follow my dreams. I gave myself until the end of this year to finally make a move, but as my self-imposed deadline gets closer, I’m feeling more and more anxiety. The idea of changing my life literally hurts sometimes, even though I really do want to follow my passion. Without going into too much detail, I’ve basically always had the same dream. And in my heart, I know what I want to do, but I’ve always had too many doubts to move forward. I end up talking myself out of following through and instead just play it safe for another year. How do I stop holding myself back? How do I follow my heart when I keep talking myself out of it? How do I do what I love when it seems too terrifying to try?

Thanks for your help!Stuck In Stability

**Dear Stuck In Stability,**

The mind and the heart often seem to battle over controlling the life of their owner. The mind usually wins because it’s extremely loud and convincing. The heart’s nature is to be more gentle and passive — it doesn’t like to fight. In contrast, the mind’s tendency is to be domineering and relentless, and it has a more up-front position in our psyche — it takes advantage of this proximity to maintain a tyrannical dictatorship over our behavior and choices. Meanwhile, the heart pulses with a subtle yet consistent yearning, never fully allowing us to tune out its mystical aspirations.

The mind tells us to be rational, calculating, and conservative, and continuously lists all the reasons we shouldn’t listen to our heart’s more deeply held desires. The heart is persistent as well, but it keeps whispering to us from deep within our soul, whereas our mind shouts right into our brain and dominates the conversation.

The mind can be like a fear-based movie projector, playing us previews of all the negative outcomes that could befall us by following our heart.

Why does the mind do all this?

In truth, the mind is afraid of the heart. The mind thinks it is you. The mind sees itself as your true identity, and it wants you to believe it too. It doesn’t like the idea that something as elusive and non-intellectual as the heart could be the most sincere expression of our true self. As the mind clings to its power position, it will use all its reasoning tools — often disguised as common sense — to dissuade us from listening to the heart’s more ethereal and intangible passions.

Of course, both our heart and mind are crucial elements of our being, and both help us define and express our true self. We must ultimately figure out how to make them work in harmony, and use each of their strengths for the best of what they offer. The first step is to eliminate the mind’s stronghold over our spirit.

The true duty of the mind is to serve the heart, not interfere with it. The mind’s intelligence is best used in carrying out the desires of the heart — directing the heart’s loving and creative power out into the physical world. The mind has the practical tools and intellect to bring the heart’s vision to life. Our true self emerges from the heart and is either blockaded or furthered by the mind.

The mind works at bridging the outer and the inner. And ultimately, the mind should learn to enjoy its role as a facilitator and gatekeeper. It can protect the heart and decide what to let in and what not to expose it to. The mind can also decide what parts of ourself to let out — opening our heart and sharing it with the world.

So, as Emily Dickinson so perfectly put it, “The heart wants what the heart wants.” The only question is, can we quiet our mind enough to listen to our heart? And can we build the adequate courage to follow it? Let your mind have its say, but remember that you don’t have to obey it like a slave. Your heart will never steer you wrong. Even if it’s painful, scary, and extremely challenging, the heart is the closest thing we have to perfection, and our life’s work should be learning to follow it, even when it hurts.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# Your Hippy-Dippy Love Message Is Naive

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

December 3, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hey, Andrew.**

I dig your music and what you stand for, but I’m kind of getting sick of all the hippy-dippy love stuff lately. Please don’t take this the wrong way, I just think your whole message has kinda gotten corny. Maybe I’m out of line, but I don’t see how all this cheesy lovey-dovey stuff makes sense in the real world. You’re naive. Sometimes love just doesn’t work. Sometimes people need to experience a bunch of bad shit in order to wake them up and see the truth. You have to admit that sometimes violence is the only way to make real change and get people’s attention. Love isn’t always the answer, man.

Sorry for the harsh newsflash. But hopefully this helps you.

Sincerely,No Peace

**Dear No Peace,**

Deep lasting internal change occurs when a spark is lit through a display of humanity — when someone who you expected to hit you hugs you instead — that causes real growth — that instills the realization that we really can love one another, despite our justified anger. No matter how tired we are, no matter how many reasons we have to hate and harm each other, we can still choose love. But we often don’t. Why?

Why are we so quick to doubt love? Why are so many of us calling love unrealistic, not powerful enough, lame and even “corny”? Why do we work so hard to talk ourselves out of being loving people and instead list endless reasons why love just won’t work?

We say we want progress and victory, but what sort of “progress” makes us question our ability to treat each other with kindness? What sort of victory divides us from our own hearts and belief in harmony? What form of intelligence makes us scoff at our otherwise highest potential mode of behavior? When love makes us feel awkward, what does that tell us about ourselves?

Where does all the awkwardness about love come from? Maybe it’s our frustration that something so incredibly simple as love could be so powerful. Maybe it’s our resentment that something we didn’t invent ourselves could be the answer to our most serious problems?

These are questions each of us must ask ourselves in quiet moments of honesty. And before we list all the “because” reasons, we should remind ourselves of what we ultimately want. If we ultimately want love, we can’t just scoff at the possibility that love is the answer to getting it.

When we think about the growth of an individual, we start with the newborn child, who expresses and desires nothing beyond the most pure love and gentleness. When a baby reaches out for the embrace of its mother and father, all it wants is love and to give love in return.

As this baby turns into an adolescent, it might begin to question the idea of love and doubt that it really needs love. Perhaps someone close to this young person has given him or her reason to grow distrustful of love. The adolescent begins to weigh the usefulness of love against other “strategies” and sees love as an “emotion” or a “mood,” rather than as a universal truth at the heart of all life.

As the adolescent grows into an adult, this person may continue to lose further touch with love and seek only to use the emotional version of love as a tool for personal gain. Or perhaps this person has reached such disillusionment regarding love’s validity that he or she no longer believes in its very existence. For someone in this situation, love has faded into a fairy tale, and is not something that lives and works in the real world. Sometimes this means the end of love in this person’s life forever.

But sometimes something remarkable happens to the adult as he or she enters old age. There’s an awakening — a release of pressure — an incredible clarity that offers a greater perspective on what truly matters in life — and our elders, through their lifetime of experience and accumulated wisdom, often return to a full and complete belief in pure and total love. Just like the baby emerges from the mysterious source of life at birth, as we re-approach the abyss of creation in death, we’re reminded of what was true all along — that love is everything. Love is humanity. Love is truth. Love is life.

It would be wonderful if each of us wasn’t forced to go through such a long and arduous lifelong journey in order to rediscover and stay close to love. There must be a way to continue to believe in love, even in our most desperate moments of doubt and anger.

When our anger is inflamed, our immediate emotions tell us that we must lash out — that love is stupid and beneath us — that we must take extreme action — that we must do something big. It seems like love is too small and soft and meek to accomplish anything tangible — love seems like a cop-out. But love is the greatest and biggest action of them all. Love is above the intellect and superior to all other emotions and outpourings and efforts. It’s not an emotion at all — it is the supreme truth at the core of all existence. Love is the thought above all thoughts and the height of this thing called humanity.

You don’t have to agree with someone in order to love them. You don’t have to like someone in order to love them. Love is above opinions, feelings, and beliefs. Whatever actions we take, and whatever means we use to achieve our collective goals, must use love as our guiding principle, or else we simply continue the very things we’re fighting against.

If there are people that wish to oppress us, they want nothing more than to distance us from that all-encompassing feeling of love. If there are powers that be trying to control us and hold us down, they want nothing more than to see us fight — to divide us — and to have us believe that we have incredibly good reasons to hurt each other. They don’t want us to believe in love. They want us to think love is impossible, unrealistic, and “not the way the real world works.” Nothing would defeat our oppressors more thoroughly than all people living as one united force of true love, understanding, kindness, and togetherness.

Whichever way we choose to reach that end result of love, and however we each interpret and use love, one thing is certain: There is no greater promise for the survival of humankind than our own inborn ability to feel love for one another. The moment this type of unconditional and brotherly love is declared “naive,” or gets lost in the midst of our lesser emotions, is the moment we lose our humanity and evil triumphs over good.

We must hold on to love even in our most extreme moments of anger, frustration, and darkness. We must help each other to choose love and keep on choosing it, over and over and over again…

Especially when we have every reason not to.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**My Holier-Than-Thou Girlfriend Is Demonic**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

December 10, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

About a year ago, I discovered that my self righteous, astrological, new age spiritual pseudo-artistic progressive, fake, socialist, feminist girlfriend cheated on me. Actually, she had been cheating on me with a bunch of random dudes for many months. In fact, it seems that I was the last to know, and all her idiotic politically correct piece-of-sh\*t friends had been aware of this the whole time and didn’t bother to tell me, which just made me look like an even bigger idiot. Obviously, I broke up with her immediately and tried to explain to her what an awful person she is. She was oblivious to this fact then and still is now. What really angers me is that she is constantly being praised and awarded for being such an “important and sophisticated and artistic” person. For some insane reason, she is successful in crappy independent art and film circles and is considered an “important artistic voice for women”; I guess some sort of feminist role model. The thing is, it’s all complete bullsh\*t. She is a horrible and talentless person who doesn’t even live up to the standards she sets for everyone else. She’s basically always been a loser whose career is based on her overcompensating for not having anything genuine in her soul, and I’m constantly trying to get people to call her on it. I just hate all these morons and their stupid art movements and political causes and holier-than-thou feminist messages. My question is, how can I convince all these idiots to stop worshipping this woman who doesn’t deserve their praise and wake up to their own hypocrisy?

Thank you,My Ex Is Evil

**Dear My Ex Is Evil,**

There’s a lot going on here. Your anger and resentments come through loud and clear. But your hurt feelings speak even louder. What you went through is humiliating and you have every right to feel upset. But based on the fact that you wrote in about this, it seems that maybe what you’re really looking for is a way to let go of it, or more than that, to use these bad feelings as a means to feel another way — a bigger way. It’s time to move on, but even more so, it’s time to expand.

In situations where we’ve been hurt by someone, our natural instinct is to lash out at everything we associate with that person. But we can quickly find ourselves “throwing the baby out with the bathwater.” Despite your bad experiences with this woman, the fact that she considered herself a feminist doesn’t mean that all feminists will behave the same as her. It also doesn’t mean that any of the ideas or realms of thought that she was engaged in are suddenly compromised or less valuable. All the schools of thought you listed have a great deal to offer, and many of them are well worth embracing, despite the bad flavor left in your mouth from your recent negative relationship experience.

It’s very tempting to generalize and assume that everyone who shares your ex-girlfriend’s interests also has the same underlying character flaws. But deep down, we realize this is simply not the case. Movements, belief systems, and ideologies are all made up of individuals. And while they may share ideas, they’re still each made up of unique people with their own strengths and weaknesses and individuality.

We must resist the temptation to lump everyone together and make sweeping generalizations and stereotypes based on our experience with just a few people, no matter how unpleasant those experiences were. When people defend this approach, they often say, “Well, stereotypes exist for a reason.” And yes, stereotypes do exist for a reason, but not because they’re accurate judgments of people’s character.

Stereotypes exist because thinking deeply and honestly is challenging and tiring, and it saves a lot of time not having to think that hard all the time. But when we decide to jump to conclusions about people without investing too much thought into our judgments, we get substandard results, and that’s what stereotypes are — low-level generalizations of impossibly complex things, i.e., people.

It’s nearly impossible to make accurate sweeping judgments about individual human beings. People are simply too complex, too layered, and too nuanced to be understood as a set of labels or classifications. To think of people as “types” dehumanizes them. It turns people into things — things that represent certain ideas, values, or even behaviors, but things nonetheless. And things don’t think. Things don’t change. Things don’t have spirits and souls. Things aren’t alive. Only beings possess those rare and special attributes that make each of us a unique and incredible event unto ourselves. When we generalize and stereotype others, we ultimately do the same to ourselves — we begin to subconsciously think of ourselves as a thing, as a “type of person who is this way or that.” We cut ourselves off from the unlimited and infinite potential that we’re endowed with, that is being human — something that is always moving, developing, evolving, and becoming something more than just some thing.

Seeing someone as less than an individual — someone who isn’t unique or doesn’t matter in the same way we do — is the first step toward prejudice. And there is no greater means to cutting oneself off from the glory of life, and love, and the inner self, than a strongly held and passionate prejudice. What’s more, discrimination and antipathy do more to harm the individual who harbors such preconceptions than those he uses them against. This sort of worldview permanently disconnects one from oneself — it’s completely suicidal. But rather than a quick and relatively painless death — like from a self-inflicted gunshot to the brain — suicide by bigotry is a slow and painful process of spiritual decay, producing many monstrous phases of hideous anguish, as one’s soul rots and heart hardens into total inhuman cruelty.

So, use this opportunity to pull yourself up, to open yourself out. Do what you wouldn’t expect you would do. Instead of justifying all your bad feelings for your ex-girlfriend and her friends, use this as a challenge to catch yourself and save yourself from spiraling into bitterness. The people who become truly enlightened are the ones who have the most reason not to be, yet are. You can have every reason to be prejudiced and filled with hate and still choose not to be. This is how real strength of character develops. We can give in to our resentments and hurt, or we can use the pain to motivate us to become better than we are. Every bad experience is another opportunity to get stronger.

Because at the end of the day, everything else is secondary. I’ve said this before, but it bears repeating: If we strip away all our other passions, politics, causes, interests, all that’s hopefully left at the core of existence is a singularly pure love — an undeserved, unqualified, and unconditional love that still stands when all else falls.

This is the kind of love people say God has for man. This is the kind of love we have for our children. And it seems that this is the type of love that best describes the one force underlying the truth of all of our shared circumstances — a sort of joyful unfolding of creation — an endless emerging toward perfection. Everything else is basically icing on the cake or just plain bullshit. We can’t allow ourselves to get lost in those things which distract us from this feeling of purposeful love. We must cut through the haze of all our other conflicts, quarrels, and even justified hurt and see what’s still remaining after everything else is gone. All that will remain after the darkness is displaced is a simple and endlessly pure love — this is the true reality.

Forgive people, love people, bring joy into their day, overcome hate and prejudice, and be glad you’re alive to go through all of this.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**What’s Better? Nachos or Tacos?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

December 17, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hey, Andrew!**

I could really use your help answering this question…

What’s better: nachos or tacos?

Thanks,
Your Party Disciple

**Dear Your Party Disciple,**

To answer your question, BOTH ARE BETTER. Both nachos and tacos are better. For starters, both nachos and tacos are better than being dead. Both nachos and tacos are better than no food at all. And both nachos and tacos are better than each other, because as soon as you get tired of eating nachos, you can always just switch to eating tacos, and your appetite is rekindled.

Besides, one of the greatest things about life is that we don’t always have to pick favorites. We don’t always have to declare one thing we love is definitively better than another. We can love two things, or three things, or millions of things at once and in different ways. We can have tons and tons of favorite things. We can enjoy an almost infinite amount of pleasures and consider the whole experience a favorite thing in itself. Mexican food can be one of your favorite things. Food in general can be one of your favorite things.

If I had to pick one favorite activity, it would be breathing, for it’s the one activity that facilitates all others. If I had to pick one favorite place, it would be the universe, for it contains all the locations I would ever need. If I had to pick one favorite thing, I’d pick carbon, for it makes up all the living things in the world.

But in most situations, we’re not forced to pick one absolute favorite — no one is demanding that we think in such extreme, singular terms. So why try to narrow so much of life down into a kind of definite “best of” list? It’s unnecessarily stressful and takes away our natural tendency to like many things about the world. Our hearts and minds are large, vast worlds of their own, and they allow us to hold many things and find value in them for different reasons. In order to love something a great deal, we don’t always have to lower other things. Let’s raise everything we love up as high as possible.

All in all, the best thing about life really is just being alive at all. If we ever had to pick our one favorite thing in the whole world, it would be life itself — this incredibly intense, puzzling, enthralling adventure called “not being dead” that gives rise to every experience we could ever or will ever have. We might as well love what comes with those experiences as much as we can, even the painful and challenging parts. After all, this life could well be the only experience we get to ever have.

But even if it’s not, and we each live for infinite lifetimes, let’s still enjoy both tacos and nachos right now. Let’s appreciate how one of the absolute best things in the whole world is accomplished by simply melting cheese on chips. The first bite of either a nacho or a taco is a joy that is difficult to replicate by any other means. Words cannot adequately describe this kind of delight. Only our soul can fully understand these sorts of marvels.

Let’s feed our soul the entire range of life’s experiences and develop our hearts and minds to be large enough to fully take in and appreciate this incredible world of flavors we have in front of us.

And every time we eat tacos or nachos — or encounter any experience that brings us that kind of undeniable and incalculable happiness — let us take a moment to be glad that it exists, to be glad that the world exists, and to be glad that we exist to enjoy it.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**Are You Santa Claus?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

December 25, 2014

**Photo by Rick Day**

[*Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

You are my inspiration, and all I wanted for Christmas this year was you and your party attitude all wrapped up and put under the tree. But you weren’t there! Are you Santa Claus?

With love,
*Be My Gift*

Dear Be My Gift,

All I really am is a symbolic expression of the good moods and attitudes that most of us want to have. That’s how Andrew W.K. started — as a way to get cheered up. It was a way to focus on being the type of person my team thought would be the nicest, and strongest, and most fun. It started as a way to focus on all the best parts of life, and a way to stay close to those joyful feelings.

This is very similar to Santa Claus. Santa Claus was actually what I wanted to be when I grew up. He’s always been my personal inspiration, my idol, and my role model. When I tried to imagine a really cool person, it was always based on Santa. His entire existence was centered around creating joy. He didn’t just spread joy or give joy, he *actually was joy*. Santa Claus is the physical and spiritual manifestation of goodness — it’s bound up in his personality and is an inseparable part of his very nature. I always figured if I had to be like someone, why not try to be like that? But maybe I could party with people all year long — and instead of making toys, I would make parties.

As most of us realize, someone like Santa does not necessarily exist in the same way as other beings exist. He exists because of us — because you and I believe in him, and in what he represents. He is the spirit of selflessness and joyful generosity — and when we believe in him, we believe in our own ability to be selfless and generous. In this way, *we are Santa Claus*. The symbol of Santa is there to remind us of the best feelings and values we already possess — to remind us that the spirit of joyful friendliness is more real and important than any other physical gifts, and that we must never forget the urgent need for this spirit in the world around us. The greatest gift we can give is the gift of ourselves to others.

In this way, I hope you realize you already possess everything I could ever really offer you. You already have all the same qualities inside. You already have me. You basically are me, and it is you who’s making me inspiring to yourself. And you end up inspiring me too — you make me want to be what you see me as, and be the best I can be for you — it’s a perpetual inspiration machine and we bring out the best in each other.

So let’s all continue to look around us for inspiration and motivation and sources of joy, but also realize that those feelings aren’t locked away in some other person or accomplishment outside of us — the feelings of inspiration we get from others are coming from within us.

Happy holidays!

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**How Do I Keep My New Year’s Resolution, for Real This Time?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

December 31, 2014

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hi, Andrew!**

I really want to make some big changes in my life, and I want to use my New Year’s resolution this year to get my life on track in a major way. I’ve been feeling a lot of negativity with people trying to hold me back, and really want to make a huge improvement for personal success in 2015. I’ve had a hard time living up to promises I’ve made myself in the past, but this year I’m going for it. Do you have any advice on how to make my resolutions stick?

Thanks,Big Life Changer

**Dear Big Life Changer,**

Making a bunch of drastic life changes all at once can be overwhelming. It creates a lot of pressure under which we can quickly collapse, and give up trying to improve our situations. Rather than trying to take on so much at once, I’d like to offer one very simple and manageable idea that might help with the feeling of day-to-day life overall.

I once had the very unpleasant experience of accidentally overhearing some friends and acquaintances bad-mouthing me behind my back at school. It was a classic situation in which they thought I had left the building when I was actually just out of sight in another room. As you can imagine, it was a pretty devastating experience. They complained to each other about the way I talked, they said I was annoying, they said I was clueless, and they even managed to throw in a few jabs at how I looked.

As I stood there listening, I wondered if I should yell out, “Hey! I’m in the other room and I can hear you!” — or if I should just walk out quietly without their realizing, and forget about it. But as I listened and fretted about what to do, I slowly froze and my mind and emotions started racing.

I remember not so much feeling angered by what they were saying, but rather feeling huge waves of embarrassment and hurt. I felt small and weak. I also felt like a lot of what they were saying about me was probably true, even though it felt awful hearing it this way. I remember my face and ears getting completely flushed and red-hot, and my heart pumping a strange taste into the back of my throat.

More than anything, though, I remember slowly and painfully realizing that I had engaged in this exact type of mean-spirited bad-mouthing countless times. There was a distinct type of panic as I recalled all the times I had bashed other people, never in their presence, and almost always with no good reason. Friends, family, random acquaintances, and even people I had never met had, time and time again, found themselves undeservedly and unknowingly on the receiving end of my insults and petty judgments. I sat around and criticized and made fun of their situations and personality quirks just for the heck of it. And now here I was, hearing it done to me. I felt nauseated.

Standing there paralyzed and full of shame as they continued their clandestine ragging on me, I was about to walk out when I heard a new voice speak up. I couldn’t quite tell who it was, but this person calmly asked everyone to stop with the insults, and without reprimanding anyone, proceeded to stand up for me with a few quick words of compassion before putting an end to the whole thing.

I quietly removed myself from my awkward unintentional hiding spot and went outside. I probably walked around the parking lot a dozen times, shaking with emotion but not really able to land on any feeling in particular. I felt some resentment, some sadness, but mostly a growing sense of determination and clarity — like I had just learned some sort of huge life lesson in the worst and hardest way. At that moment, I promised myself and the world that I would never talk badly about someone behind their back again.

That promise has been very challenging to keep. Avoiding moments of secret and unwarranted criticism may be impossible or even unhealthy, but as with most idealistic concepts, it was the spirit of the idea that counted then. And all the times that I haven’t lived up to that promise have just made me more determined to keep trying. All it takes for me to redouble my efforts is thinking back to that experience I had in school, and how it felt for me.

**We want to be good.** And even when we do slip up, yielding to our lower impulses and venting our frustrations by complaining about other people, we must then resolve to continue our efforts to rid ourselves of those tendencies. When we start to hate on someone behind their back, imagine what it would be like if they actually heard us. Or what it would be like if we heard a recording of ourselves later. What did we sound like? Is that who we want to be? Thinking this way can put a new perspective on our own behavior and how we’re actually living our lives.

It’s challenging to avoid the urge to tear people down, but it’s not that challenging. It just requires that we stop and think and listen to ourselves. If we could just catch ourselves before we blurted a bunch of hateful nonsense, and before we launched into a tirade against someone, we could give ourselves that chance to remember how unnecessary it all is. It’s not so much a matter of holding back our hate, but putting something better than hate in its place. It just takes a small moment to follow the old maxim: If you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all.

Maybe in that small moment, we really would become a better person — just a tiny amount of improvement, but a real improvement nonetheless. And maybe, if we have a few of those moments every day, we’ll gradually grow into being the better person we know we can be. It will happen bit by bit, not in one giant move, by dint of a dedicated and constant effort.

Let’s focus this year on making our life count for goodness in the world, not just for ourselves, but also for the people around us. Our New Year’s resolution can be to become a nicer person to others, in some small way, every day. Moment by moment, we can choose to do the right thing. And moment by moment, that can change the entire world.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# I’m a Shoplifter

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

January 7, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

I’ve never really shoplifted before, but yesterday I accidentally stole a T-shirt from a big retail chain. Basically, I was paying for a bunch of clothing at the checkout, and noticed the cashier didn’t ring up a T-shirt at the bottom of my basket. She rang up everything else and put the stuff in a shopping bag on top of the unpaid-for T-shirt. I sort of noticed what had happened, but instead of saying anything I just walked out and went home. Now I have this T-shirt that I feel like I accidentally stole, but I also feel like it was kind of the store’s fault for not noticing it. It’s a huge chain store, so it’s not like this one shirt is going to hurt them too much. Is it fine to just keep it? I feel weird about it.

Thanks,Accidental Shoplifter

**Dear Accidental Shoplifter,**

I used to shoplift all the time. In fact, I went out of my way to try and steal, cheat, and scam people as much as I could — strangers or friends, no one was safe from my insatiable capacity for trickery. This was during my teenage years, and a lot of my motivation was purely sinister. I liked to do bad things specifically because they were wrong and hurtful.

Then one day I was mugged at knifepoint. I was nineteen years old and had been living in New York for about a year. It was 3:30 in the afternoon and I was getting off the subway at Third Avenue to go to work at the Kim’s Video on St. Marks Place. As I was walking up the stairs out of the station, a guy pushed me against the wall and put a steak knife in my face. He said, “I’m not joking, man! I’m not joking!” and proceeded to ask me for my cash and watch and subway tokens. I gave him what he wanted without resistance.

He let me go without injuring me (which felt especially lucky, considering a wave of subway slashings around that time), and I walked to work. I ended up going through the motions of filing a police report and trying to identify the mugger in some photos. I didn’t recognize him. I wondered if they ever could catch him. I wondered a lot about him in general, like what kind of situation could’ve pushed him to that point — where he was willing to take that kind of risk, to threaten to stab someone just for $160, a cheap watch, and three subway tokens.

By the time I got back home from the police station, I felt all the emotions flooding in. I hadn’t really felt afraid when it happened. It had all seemed sort of silly — like a dream or a joke — like, “I point this knife at you and then you give me your stuff” — it felt like a routine, which I guess it was. Now I felt angry, scared, weak, and guilty. I felt bad for the mugger, too, which really confused me. The whole thing just felt incredibly sad. When I finally walked in the door of my apartment, I broke down and cried for a while. My girlfriend comforted me. I was so glad it had been me it all happened to, and not her.

The next day, I had a new clarity about everything. The idea of stealing anything from anyone seemed absurd. I vowed never to cheat anyone again. If there was ever an obvious right or wrong choice to be made, I would go with the right one. I took the mugging — and the fact that I had gone through it without injury — as some sort of payback for all my badness, but also as a merciful warning. It was a chance to wake up and start doing what I knew was right, or I would be asking for much worse trouble.

So my personal advice for you is based on this same mindset: Go return the T-shirt. And be glad you didn’t have to get mugged in order to realize that stealing from others is bad. It’s just a T-shirt, and the big retailer might not ever notice or even care, but *you do care*. You cared enough to actually write me about it. That’s because this isn’t just about a T-shirt, this is about your own perception of yourself — your own principles, your own integrity, your own sense of order, and your own idealized view of the world. Once you start letting that slide too much, you slowly start to lose sense of yourself — your self-image slowly erodes — and you expect less of yourself and of others, and we all gradually fall further from our true potential as truly good beings.

Maybe shoplifting here and there doesn’t really matter that much. But at the end of the day, nothing at all really matters that much except when we decide it does. This is the whole point of having values — they make things about life matter, and they give meaning and shape to our world. Values are at work in our seemingly trivial actions (like not stealing a T-shirt), and in the obviously consequential (like not shooting a bunch of people). Our character is defined not just by how we respond to the big moments in life, but also, just as much, by how we carry ourselves through the moments that don’t matter very much — it’s a code we live by — a promise we each make to ourselves and the whole world, and we must make every effort not to break it, no matter how big or small the situation. And when we start to lose track of our own integrity, we start to lose track of the very foundation of our life and its meaning.

It takes commitment and constant effort to be good, and sometimes we might slip up as we try to live up to our ideals. But just because it isn’t easy to always be our best, that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t always strive and help each other in getting there. Do the right thing when it matters, *and* when it doesn’t matter. Do the right thing even when no one is looking. It just makes life better.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**Headbanging Is an Art**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

January 14, 2015

**Allow your head to bang you.**PHOTO BY RICK DAY

[*Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

While you’ve touched on some more serious issues, there’s one issue that’s been on my mind for some time. Sometimes when I’m partying, I feel the need to headbang. I must do it! The release I get from headbanging brings me a lot of joy, but there’s one major problem…I always end up getting a sore neck afterwards! Am I headbanging wrong, or am I just partying too hard?

*Yours truly,
The Wolf*

Dear The Wolf,

You’re not headbanging incorrectly or partying too hard — instead, you’re probably not headbanging or partying hard enough.

You see, headbanging is an art form, and just like painting or ballet, it requires dedication, practice, and, above all, a level of enthusiasm and passion that emerges from the soul and travels through the body. That passion enables you to rise to the heights required for mastery of the art. Headbanging also requires a large amount of letting-go and a willingness to turn one’s self over to the exhilaration of just letting your body move you, instead of you always moving your body.

The feeling of a good headbang is difficult to describe. It’s a high-contrast combination of rage, excitement, calm, happiness, anger, dizziness, clarity, and an otherworldly sense of power. There are moments while headbanging where everything about life seems to make sense — a glimpse of truth in the midst of a euphoric physical high point — where you really feel on top of the world and completely free. It feels like you can destroy any obstacle, as long as you headbang your way through it.

I remember the first time I really, truly headbanged. I had tried earnestly shaking and slamming my head to music a few times before, but I could never quite keep it going. I’m not saying there’s really a wrong kind of headbanging, but I definitely remember the moment I had a kind of headbang breakthrough, and I could bang my head with a new kind of flowing intensity. It felt like I had suddenly figured out how to fly — like all along, being able to headbang had just required my accessing some part of my body that was previously just out of reach. Like figuring out how to cross your eyes, or wiggle your ears — once you’ve discovered the muscles, you can locate them again more easily each time.

That’s how it was with headbanging — all of a sudden it just clicked. I no longer had to try and bang my head. Instead, I just allowed my head to *bang me*. I let my skull move my whole body back and forth. In fact, when I really got it figured out, it felt like my head was the only thing not moving, and my entire body and the entire planet were moving around me as my head stayed still at the center of it all — kind of like when you strap a camera to a pole and attach it to your head, aiming at your face — your head looks completely solid while the world around it pivots. That’s what headbanging feels like to me.

The sore neck muscles are just like any sore muscle that you haven’t been using that way or that often. When I first figured out how to really headbang, my neck was so sore the next day that I could barely move it. And the day after that, it was so sore I could barely talk. It was like my spine was trying to balance a boulder where my head would be. My jaw was fused to my feet — my entire skeleton was floating in someone else’s body and I had turned to cement.

It was more severe than just aggravating and tearing some muscle fibers. I think I had actually liquified the tissue all around my neck and throat — my neck felt soupy, like sharp metal pulp. I not only couldn’t turn my head, I couldn’t lift my head up at all. I had to use my hands to keep my head from falling into my chest as I walked or sat or did anything. I thought I might have actually broken my neck. I remember the muscles were so sore that the tightness ran all the way into my eyebrows and scalp. Everything above the shoulders had been destroyed and would have to be rebuilt, but it would be rebuilt with a purpose — I had a new dedication to mastering the art of being able to effortlessly enter this headbanging joy zone. The recovery was slow and painful, but I had a mission and would not be deterred. The only solution was to be patient, consume a lot of protein shakes, and just keep headbanging more and more.

Between 1998 and 2000, all I did for exercise was headbang, slam shakes, recover, and repeat. My neck size went from a 12″ collar to 14″ in two years. Now, all these years later, my neck size is 19″ and still expanding. I recently had to get a suit for a court appearance, and when I was getting the dress shirt fitted, the guy at the store didn’t understand why my neck was that of an eight-foot-tall, 400-pound man. I tried to explain it was just from headbanging, but all he did was keep asking why and glancing fearfully at my throat. My hair usually hides it, and that’s probably for the best. One good thing about having a neck size almost double the norm is that I can fit a lot more food and drink down my throat at once. And people can’t strangle me as easily. But it is hard to button that top button.

Now, some people have said that headbanging is bad for you. They say it causes brain damage and kills brain cells. All I can say is this: The parts of my brain that have been damaged by headbanging are the parts that I didn’t need anyway. Headbanging killed the brain cells that made me feel sad and depressed, that made me think that life sucked. Headbanging gave me a lobotomy and left behind only the good parts of my brain. The bad parts of my brain flowed out of my nose and out of my life. Headbanging saved my life.

So my advice to you is to just keep headbanging. If you take too much time off, your neck muscles will get soft and weak again and you’ll have to start all over and get real sore each time you headbang. I don’t really get sore anymore, because I headbang at least twice a day. It’s just part of life for me now, and it’s something that has truly made everything better. I can count on it — waves of joy whenever I want — all I have to do is bang my head to the music I love. How often can you find something in life that so reliably makes you feel amazing? Headbanging is absolutely one of the best things about being alive for me, and I truly mean that. I’m so glad you are in love with it too. Keep on headbanging and really harness that feeling of power it gives you. If more people in the world could feel this good and powerful from just banging their heads, I really think the world would be a happier place.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**Embrace the Awkwardness of Hugging**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

January 21, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Andrew,**

Today is National Hugging Day. Would you please hug me?

Thanks,HJ

**Dear HJ,**

I am hugging you. Right now. Despite what some people might believe, it is possible to actually hug someone just using your mind. I’m giving you a mental hug right at this very moment. And as you read each of these words, you’ll feel my presence wrapping and cuddling around you. I’m conjuring up every ounce of joy, compassion, care, affection, respect, tenderness, and unconditional love that I have, and bundling you up inside of it. Can you feel it?

This type of hug can be even better than a physical arm-based hug. This mental hug enrobes your soul with pure comfort and soothing care from within. This psychic hug encases your inner self with a glowing warmth. This kind of hug can reach you when my physical arms can’t, and it can stay with you for a long time — longer than even the strongest arms could keep squeezing. This is a hug that you feel from the inside out. This is a hug that you can wear like a second interior skin — it shelters your very essence and defends you from harm.

Hugs are one of the best things about being alive. Hugs actually make it possible to stay alive. The ability we have to comfort each other is what makes us humane and not just human. As a child, we crave hugs from our mothers in a primal and urgent way. But as we grow older, we don’t need to grow cynical regarding the inherent need for pure, platonic affection. As we once reached out to our parents, as children — we want to reach out to the world, as individuals, and be embraced for who we are. This natural instinct must not be discouraged, despite its at times feeling very intense.

No matter how alone you may ever feel, you must remember that you are loved and cared about and wanted in this world, even if you don’t see immediate proof or have someone right there at that moment to hug you. That’s why I am telling you this now. These words are hugs.

Remember the truth of this feeling for those challenging moments when there seems to be no one there to hug you. And that voice inside that tries to convince you no one cares? That voice is lying. The voice that tells you life sucks and that everything is hopeless and that no one would ever love you? That voice is wrong. And if you can dig deeper and hear the other voice way down inside that simply speaks truth, it will remind you that you are loved and that everything really will be OK, somehow or another. Even if we don’t know how we’ll make it through, we will. This hug will get you through the hard moments in life. That’s what hugs are about — pure reassurance in the midst of struggle and strife — that I am here and I care about you. And you will make it through.

To the people who feel that these ideas are “corny” or “stupid” or “overly sentimental,” I want to hug you, too. I want to hug you until you feel how a hug is not an idea, but a sensation. It is the fundamental basic feeling of love expressed in physical action, but for no reason other than to make someone feel loved. And do any of us really want to exist in a world where a hug like that is seen as “corny” or “stupid”?

We can make hugs our role model. Even if you don’t like being hugged or getting hugs, that’s OK too. We can still embrace each other and embrace the good things in the world. We can embrace our own existence and all the amazing, bewildering, and challenging experiences that come with it. Embrace the awkwardness. Embrace the vulnerability. Embrace yourself. Embrace life, and life will hug you back.

And always remember to make eye contact with the other person right after you hug. It drives the hug home.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# Feeling Overwhelmed Counts as Partying

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

January 28, 2015

[*Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I’m writing because I can’t seem to get past this feeling of being too overwhelmed to do anything with my life. I’m lucky because I have a lot of opportunities to realize my dreams, and I know the things I really want to do in life, but when I start to actually think about what it will take to make them a reality, I get completely exhausted and overloaded from just thinking about all the work required. It makes me feel lazy and then I get discouraged. It’s like a vicious cycle. You seem to do so much in your life. I get drained just thinking about your schedule. How do you pull it off? How do you not feel overwhelmed?

*Thanks,
Too Much Work*

Dear Too Much Work,

I feel overwhelmed the whole time. I’m constantly in a state of being overwhelmed — so much so that I’ve basically just maxed out on that feeling. It barely even registers anymore. At the same time, when I think back, I realize that all the best and most incredible times in my life were also the most intense and overwhelming. It’s just a feeling that’s always there, so I don’t even notice it anymore — kind of like breathing — you only really freak out once you stop doing it. I can’t remember a time when I didn’t feel completely pushed to my limit. It’s how life feels to me, and I imagine a lot of other people too, including you. Maybe the fact that you feel that way isn’t the problem. Maybe the only problem is thinking it’s a problem.

The trick is simple: You don’t really have to pay too much attention to those feelings — like being overwhelmed or tired or afraid. You don’t have to take those sensations too seriously. Just don’t respond to them anymore. Be too busy partying and trying to not waste your life to bother slowing down just because you feel crazy or worn out. In fact, that’s how you can tell you’re really living each day for all it’s worth — feeling like if you were to die tomorrow, could you honestly say you went out giving all you had toward this chance to live? That’s definitely what I want to shoot for as much of the time as possible. And I don’t care if it’s completely draining or if people think it’s unrealistic. It just seems like the only appropriate way to approach life, at least to me.

Think of it like this: How hard is doing stuff, anyway? Assuming that we’re among those lucky enough to have generally good health and the freedom to pursue our happiness and destiny, how hard is the rest of the work we actually have to do, really?

What’s the worst that can happen? We feel really tired? We get beaten down a few times and have some setbacks? We get frustrated and discouraged? So what? That’s really not that bad, as far as truly hard things in life go. We have to just set those feelings aside and see them as just another part of the process of this adventure. We’ll get through all those obstacles, and we’ll look back and realize that it wasn’t really that hard after all. Sure, we got exhausted — maybe even completely obliterated at times — but that feeling passed and the glory of having gone through those ordeals and not giving up lasts forever. We can always hold on to the fact that we made it out the other side, and that always overpowers even the most painful memories of suffering. Plus, it builds confidence in our ability to deal with discomfort and helps us keep on going next time we feel like giving up.

There really is no greater feeling than the pain of challenging yourself and pushing yourself as hard as you can go, and just not stopping. It’s just a simple choice: Do Not Give Up. It’s never as bad as that voice in your head tries to tell you it will be. You can experience all sorts of feelings and fears and just keep moving forward, one step at a time, and you will get there. Even if it’s hard. Even if it’s overwhelming and exhausting. You can really do hard things, and you will, and you are. And maybe someday you’ll think back to when you read this, and realize you’ve really come a long way.

There are literally millions of people who would give anything to have the chance to be overwhelmed by an opportunity to work hard at their dreams. Besides, who really wants to just rest all the time? Life isn’t supposed to be easy. It’s supposed to be amazing. Now let’s go do as much as we can before we die. We’re in it to win it, and we’re in it together. This is urgent. This is overwhelming. This is partying. This is life.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

#  Twenty Context-Free Lines From Andrew W.K.’s Most Popular Advice Columns

## by [VILLAGE VOICE STAFF](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/villagevoicestaff/)

February 4, 2015

[*Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.*]

This week Andrew has traded the slush-covered streets of New York City for the Wi-Fi–free high seas, so here’s a context-free sampling of his more memorable lines from his advice columns in the *Voice*. W.K. will return next week.

*Click the date next to each quote to read the full column.*

• “Let’s appreciate how one of the absolute best things in the whole world is accomplished by *simply melting cheese on chips*.” ([12/17/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/12/17/ask-andrew-w-k-whats-better-nachos-or-tacos/))

• “We must decide to follow our dream no matter how hard it feels. We must commit!” ([7/23/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/07/23/ask-andrew-w-k-feeling-motivation-in-the-face-of-discouragement/))

• “So, as Emily Dickinson so perfectly put it, ‘The heart wants what the heart wants.’?” ([11/26/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/11/26/ask-andrew-w-k-how-do-i-stop-worrying-and-just-go-for-it/))

• “He might just not realize how much of a jerk he’s being.” ([7/30/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/07/30/ask-andrew-w-k-my-boyfriend-treats-me-badly/))

• “We can only learn so much about our minds, because we are using our minds to do so.” ([10/29/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/10/29/ask-andrew-w-k-the-science-of-halloween/))

• “People don’t stop partying because they get old, they get old because they stop partying.” ([10/22/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/10/22/ask-andrew-w-k-am-i-getting-too-old-to-party/))

• “Few inventions have had a more beneficial and simultaneously dehumanizing impact on daily life than motor vehicles.” ([8/20/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/20/ask-andrew-w-k-road-rage-is-driving-me-crazy/))

• “The world isn’t being destroyed by Democrats or Republicans, red or blue, liberal or conservative, religious or atheist — the world is being destroyed by one side believing the other side is destroying the world.” ([8/6/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/06/ask-andrew-w-k-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole/))

• “Work so hard on what you love that you don’t even notice the assholes anymore. We won’t let anyone stop our party.” ([4/30/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/04/30/ask-andrew-w-k-how-do-i-deal-with-negativity-on-the-internet/))

• “The same people who say pizza is bad because it’s not ‘natural’ could also say electric guitar is bad because it didn’t naturally fall from the sky in one piece.” ([9/24/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/09/24/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-feel-guilty-for-being-white/))

• “Ultimately, life’s too short for us to get bogged down by things like hairstyle and appearance.” ([4/9/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/04/09/ask-andrew-w-k-looking-different-is-pretty-common-these-days/))

• “If you really believe in peace, then love your friend, with all your heart, and don’t ever, ever stop.” ([9/17/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/09/17/ask-andrew-w-k-my-friend-is-joining-the-military-and-im-furious/))

• “At first it seems like it might be easier to put a sign on your front door that says, ‘This Home Is Protected by a Gun,’ but then that might actually attract more attention from a gun thief. Maybe just get a security system installed?” ([4/16/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/04/16/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-buy-a-gun/))

• “I want you to pray right now, just for the sake of challenging yourself.” ([9/3/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/09/03/ask-andrew-w-k-prayer-is-stupid-right/))

• “Living in a city isn’t supposed to be easy. It’s supposed to be amazing.” ([5/7/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/05/07/ask-andrew-w-k-learning-to-love-nyc/))

• “I read the whole book in one day, and by the next morning, I had become a vegan.” ([4/23/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/04/23/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-stop-eating-meat/))

• “Becoming a drug addict can be a perfectly reasonable reaction to the incredibly exhausting project called ‘being alive.’?” ([5/14/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/05/14/ask-andrew-w-k-should-i-start-doing-heroin/))

• “Much like music, smiling, and laughter, partying is one of the few activities enjoyed by all people across the globe since the dawn of civilization.” ([8/13/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/13/ask-andrew-w-k-whats-this-partying-thing/))

• “Life itself is the ultimate party — and if you love getting wasted, just don’t let it waste your chance to party.” ([4/2/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/04/02/ask-andrew-w-k-my-religious-family-thinks-i-drink-too-much/))

• “You don’t have to agree with someone in order to love them.” ([12/3/14](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/12/03/ask-andrew-w-k-your-hippy-dippy-love-message-is-naive/))

*See you next week!*

**Can I Be Straight-Edge and Still Party Hard?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 11, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hi, Andrew**

I’ve been dealing with some major substance abuse problems for a long time, and without going into too much detail, I’ve finally given up and decided to enter a recovery program and go straight-edge. The only thing is, it’s really hard for me to imagine my life without drugs and partying. It’s something I’ve done every day for so long and has become my whole life. Leaving that behind is the scariest part of all this. You are an expert on partying. Can I be straight-edge and still party hard?

Fear of Not Partying

**Dear Fear of Not Partying,**

I don’t claim to have the answers to anything — and I’m certainly not a qualified expert on addiction or recovery — but I definitely commend you on your decision to make a new version of your life, because it sounds like you really want to. And I appreciate you writing to me about this particular idea of change and partying. When you want to change your life more badly than you don’t want to change your life, you will change your life. And that counts as partying.

I think there’s a common misconception that true partying must always involve drugs and alcohol. In reality, the only thing that true partying must involve is partying. How each of us decides to party within that partying is up to the individual, but true partying doesn’t necessarily require drugs any more than it necessarily requires skydiving — to each their own. As long as it doesn’t blatantly hinder someone else’s ability to party, all forms of partying are permitted. Alcohol and drugs can be amazing, and when used in a dynamic way, they can offer us genuine life-changing insights and experiences. Drugs are not necessary requirements for all, and for some, they may be completely detrimental to reaching true party perfection.

Drugs are ultimately just another piece of equipment in the toolbox of life. And like any tool, some are better at achieving certain results than others, and some aren’t useful to some people at all. Certain tools are also extremely dangerous, like chainsaws or nail guns, and they must be used with the utmost care by someone with the necessary experience and fortitude. In keeping with this, we understand that using the same tool over and over to work on the same aspect of our existence will eventually wear down both the tool and us. At some point, there’s not much result or dynamic contrast to the experience, just a blur of sickeningly bland predictability — what was once stimulating and new becomes routine, boring, and, at worst, confining. Using a screwdriver to remove and reset a screw over and over and over will eventually strip everything away and rub you raw. And using a jackhammer to try and fix the stripped-down screw certainly won’t help. What’s needed is a total and complete abandonment and change of the tool and the screw. Moving on. Breaking up. Not walking away, but walking forward.

That’s what’s so great about changing things up. The point isn’t so much to change you, it’s to change the stuff you’re doing — change the stuff that’s happening. You’re not giving up or giving in — you’re just giving yourself to yourself, and not giving yourself to drugs anymore. The person you are remains at your core, and your true self just does different things instead of drugs.

There can be a big fear of making radical changes because it feels scary to think, “I can’t imagine not ever doing drugs again” or “I can’t imagine not getting to feel that way ever again.” But if we think about it, we are constantly going through life without doing the same stuff over again. It’s actually what makes life an interesting adventure. We have many eras and phases that add up to a whole life — not just one long era, but many lives in one. And while we go through those eras, it can seem like we are changing, but it’s really us that doesn’t change while the things we are doing and experiencing constantly shift. We don’t need to constantly repeat those things in order to appreciate or enjoy them.

For example, when we went to elementary school, it was a daily ongoing time in our life — but that was just an era — a phase of our life — even if we really enjoyed it, we don’t really worry about not getting to relive third grade for the rest of our lives. That part of our life is done. The things we learned during that time will stay with us, and the most valuable parts remain relevant inside us. I really loved the first few jobs I had as a teenager, but I don’t go deliver newspapers every Sunday just to stay connected to that time.

At some point, we get enough perspective to realize that certain things in life are simply things we’ve already done. Some of the greatest times are great specifically because they’re something that we don’t need to keep doing in order to appreciate. This enables us to do new things and more things. And we realize that all the goodness and value we extracted from all the stuff we’ve already done becomes part of the person we take into our next era. That is how we grow — like a tree always getting taller and developing more branches and offshoots, our trunk and our roots remain, but we don’t need to keep cutting ourselves back down to our previous small size just so we can keep reliving what it was like to first sprout and blossom.

So maybe don’t think of this as giving something up. Think of this as gaining something more. Realize how great it is to be able to have a new phase — the continuation of a long journey — an adventure called being alive. And you have a very familiar friend to go through all the new stuff with: yourself. You’ve done what you’ve done, so now what will you do? Stay strong and keep moving forward. Be excited that you have this chance to be alive at all. Be excited that you’ve gotten to do so many things already and are still alive to do more. Celebrate this. That’s what partying is all about. I believe in you, no matter what you decide to do. Just keep the party going.

Doing drugs isn’t bad. Not doing drugs isn’t bad. The only thing that’s bad is not doing what you really truly want to do. Follow your inner truth and you’ll automatically be partying as hard as you ever could.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# How Can I Believe In a Higher Power When I Don’t?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 18, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

Your answer to [last week’s question](https://www.villagevoice.com/2015/02/11/ask-andrew-w-k-can-i-be-straight-edge-and-still-party-hard/) really helped me. I could relate to both you and the person who wrote in. I’ve actually gone to a program to conquer my addiction to painkillers, but I always got stuck on the “higher power” stuff. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t get myself to give in to the “spiritual experience” they were talking about. I’m a business student by day and a musician by night, and I’ve always paid my own way and taken care of myself, including taking responsibilities for my own troubles. Now I’m having the same old trouble with pills again, and in my efforts to quit, I’m again being encouraged to turn myself over to this “higher power” concept. That seems like a cop-out. I want to get cleaned up, but how can I be true to myself when I really don’t believe in this higher-power spiritual stuff?

High Versus Higher Power

**Dear High Versus Higher Power,**

Thank you for asking about this. And thank you for reading last week’s advice column and sharing your thoughts. I’m really glad you could relate to it.

I strongly believe everyone should think for themselves. And I totally agree with you that no one should be required to believe in anything in order to stop doing something. So I only offer the following idea as a humble suggestion.

When it comes to the idea of a “higher power,” what about thinking of it this way:

You’re a musician, and you clearly love and believe in music. What if music is your higher power?

I’m sure you’ll agree that music is overwhelming and undeniably powerful, and I’m sure you’ll also agree that music can make you feel deeply, truly good. In addition, we’re aware that music gives us a genuine and reliable physical high — the euphoric rush of gleeful excitement when a perfect melody rushes through us — the butterflies in the stomach and goosebumps we get when a music moment hits us just right — those are real physical sensations. There are times when the sound of music can truly change not just our thoughts and moods, but the actual feeling in our body. Music is a force that changes what it feels like to exist. Music makes life feel better.

But did you invent music? Did anyone invent music? Certainly, we can invent songs and sounds, and instruments and technologies that work with music, but where did the very phenomenon of music come from? What is this feeling?

And even though we didn’t invent music, we have this very real and relatively effortless ability to access it, harness it, and feel it work inside us. We can feel how it’s really a part of us, and maybe even that we are a part of it.

But what is it? What is music? It’s obviously something that can’t really be seen or touched or smelled, just heard and, most of all, felt. Out of all the things we experience in day-to-day life, nothing really works quite like music. It’s frequencies and vibrations, but why do they have this unbelievably powerful effect on us?

Music is something completely different than anything else we encounter, and yet it’s also very familiar to us — as close and dear to us as a family member or best friend. But unlike a close friend, no matter how accustomed we are to hearing music and feeling its magic, it remains mysterious and somehow removed from us — as infinitely complex and wondrous as the whole of existence. Maybe music is the sound of existence itself.

Much like the staggering vastness of existence, music is something that is infinitely bigger than us — and yet, despite all of its undeniable otherworldly grandeur, it is also very simple and small and close — we can bring music out of the smallest places, just by humming a melody or whistling a tune. It’s remarkable how something as huge and omnipresent as music can also be so up-close-and-personal and literally be inside of us.

So, when someone says you need to have a spiritual experience, I say the feelings you get from music also count as a spiritual experience. The part of you that feels something indescribable from music is the feeling of your own soul connecting with the spirit that lives inside all of us.

Music is a very real higher power. It counts just as much as any other higher power people turn to. And it’s all part of the same ultimate power, which is impossible to define or explain anyway — just like music — the ultimate power and truth of the world is something that can only be felt and experienced.

No matter what anyone else tries to force you to believe in, you just have to believe in the truth of being moved by music — everything else you need eventually emerges from that same place and feeling.

Let music move you more than ever — allow it to be bigger than you, and yet also a part of you. Trust in that feeling of music and trust in your love for that feeling and your ability to recognize and appreciate it.

And if believing in music works for you, don’t let anyone else tell you it’s not good enough.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**How Do I Make My Family Understand I’m Transgender?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

February 25, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

Last month I came out as transgender, beginning my transition to female. My mom has repeatedly tried to get me to move back home and see a therapist to “fix” me. My oldest sister called me a “sexual deviant” and forbid me to talk to my nieces and nephew, all of whom I was very close to. It’s now been a month since this has happened. My question is, how can I reach out to my mom and my sister to help them understand better?

Sincerely,Rejected Trans Woman

***See also:***[*New York’s Bravest Is Trans FDNY Firefighter Brooke Guinan*](https://www.villagevoice.com/2015/02/24/new-yorks-bravest-is-trans-fdny-firefighter-brooke-guinan/)

**Dear Rejected Trans Woman,**

First and foremost, I commend you for moving forward with an incredibly intense yet deeply important choice: the choice to be yourself. Choosing to be true to one’s self — despite physical, emotional, and social challenges that may come with the journey — is an integral part of realizing not just one’s own potential, but of realizing the true nature of our collective human spirit. This spirit is what makes us who we are, and by following that spirit as it manifests outwardly, and inwardly, you are benefiting us all. This is what defines and furthers our shared journey of discovery and individuality.

You are you, and as you progress on this adventure, you are striving to release more of that “you-ness” from deep within and out into the world. And this “you-ness” is truth, truth as expressed through your life as a unique person. It’s your song, your melody.

Each of us has a melody that is meant to be heard loud and clear. Our purpose in life is to transcend all the aspects of ourselves and our surroundings that seek to block out or interfere with the pure and uninhibited singing of this music inside us. The degree to which we are truly successful as humans is the degree to which we have mastered the art of being one and the same with our own song, so that it’s not even a separate melody we’re singing, but rather we are the melody itself.

Some of us struggle with our greatest enemy — fear — and often do not get far in our efforts to release our true self out into the world. You should feel proud that you have already conquered the hardest challenge, of conquering and freeing your self from yourself. The remaining challenges may be painful, but they are really only disguised opportunities for you to expand your heart and spirit to even larger and truer dimensions. Trust in the ordeals.

There are many things that can stand in the way of our efforts to release our true self, but most of these things don’t have much power over us in the end, despite their apparent material or psychological impacts. Ultimately, there is no single outside person, circumstance, or force that can crush our human spirit once it has found the strength to embrace itself.

You have done this. And now it’s time to use this power for even more good.

I would tell your mom that you love her. Then tell her you love her again. And then again. Don’t even get into her absurdity about being “fixed,” or talking to a therapist. Look at this obstacle with your mom as another opportunity to set yourself and your spirit free. It’s a test to see how high you can rise, how big you can be, how much compassion you can summon, how much unconditional love you can develop.

Tell your mom that no matter what she says or thinks, you know that deep down inside she loves you. She brought you into the world, and started you on this journey to realize yourself and release your spirit from her care. Remind her that it is your journey and your spirit and your life — not hers. Far too often, parents truly think of their children as “their” kids, rather than seeing the truth that they’re simply custodians with the privilege of helping bring another sacred spirit into being, to give it love and the nurturing support it needs to thrive and develop the strength to become itself — your self — and not your mom’s or anyone else’s.

Tell your sister that no matter how upsetting this may be for her, and no matter how cruel and drastic and hurtful she may try to be, you still love her. Then tell her you love her again. And then again. And tell her that no matter what she says, you know she still loves you, even if at times she herself doesn’t realize it.

You can tell her that you are still yourself. In fact, you are even more yourself than ever before. And you can add that you don’t need her to say what she thinks about your choice or even need her to understand it, because you love her beyond all understanding. The love you have for your family transcends all logic and norms of behavior and rules and ideas that she or anyone has about you and your spirit. All you have is love, and all you care about is letting that love shine out from within you.

Your love is big enough to compensate for the shortcomings and challenges others are facing. Your love is big enough to love your family even when it doesn’t feel returned. Your love is big enough to envelop all the hurt and confusion and pain of life in one enormous, warm embrace.

Your love is the ultimate love that empowers all your efforts, a true love for what is indestructibly and perpetually you. This is more than self-love; this is a pure and blinding love of all existence and the glory of this amazing and perplexing adventure called “life.”

Focus on this love, and more love, and even more love. More love than necessary. More love than possible.

You are this love. And this love is what you are releasing from within you as part of this journey. I’m proud of you. And I love you.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘Can Negative Vibes Actually Hurt You?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 5, 2015

**Andrew W.K.**PHOTO BY DUSTIN ASHCRAFT

[*Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.*]

Dear Andrew,

I kind of can’t believe I’m really writing these words, but I seriously think my ex-boyfriend put a curse on me using some sort of black magic. We were together for only about a year, and he was always deep into witchcraft and spells and related books on the subject. Early on in our dating history, he had told me that if I ever broke his heart, he would put a curse on me and make my life a living hell. I didn’t take it too seriously at the time and kind of forgot he ever mentioned it, but I broke up with him last week (for a whole bunch of good reasons), and the last thing he said to me was to “Get ready for hell,” because he was putting a curse on me that was so powerful and evil I would regret ever being born, etc. This kind of psycho stuff is actually one of the many reasons that I left him. But now I have noticed a lot of stuff going wrong since that breakup night. Some of it’s small, like a glass plate randomly breaking in my hands and cutting me, or my new car breaking down for no apparent reason. And some of it is big: I just lost a huge job opportunity without explanation, and my cat got mysteriously sick two days ago and is staying overnight in the vet’s office with an unknown stomach illness. Now I’m actually starting to wonder if this guy really did curse me and what I should do to protect myself. I never took this stuff seriously before, but I’m genuinely scared and can’t stop thinking about it. Am I being an idiot?

*Help, please!
Cursed By Ex*

Dear Cursed By Ex,

The only way someone can put a curse on you is for you to believe that someone can put a curse on you. The human mind is an extraordinarily powerful instrument, capable of all sorts of miraculous feats and achievements, but out of its many capabilities, one thing a person’s mind cannot do is infiltrate another person’s mind against that person’s will. Your mind is your own, and no type of curse or spell or suggestion can impact your inner self unless you allow it to do so and believe in its validity.

With all that you shared with this man, it seems quite clear that he would have the necessary intimate understanding of your personality to manipulate you and your feelings. Part of being in a romantic relationship with someone is letting them into your heart, and with that, under your skin. This is always the risk we take when choosing to follow love and passion where it leads us — and it’s almost always a risk worth taking. But we must remember that when we open ourselves to others, we become more susceptible to their influence. This influence can, of course, be good and inspiring and wonderful, but it can also be cruel and abusive and exhausting. It sounds like you were already experiencing undesirable results from dating this guy, and you wisely broke it off. What you must do now is regain your sense of self and allow your heart and mind time to remove his intimate closeness from your immediate thoughts. His spell over you is no more of a curse or a power than the familiarity that develops once you’ve grown close to and intimate with someone or something.

Malevolent spells are useless against a person who doesn’t believe in their potency, so most people wishing to mentally harm someone else must put the majority of their effort not into reciting obscure incantations or creating potions, but rather into trying to actually make their intended victim believe they can genuinely be cursed. This mental manipulation and psychic sleight of hand is very similar to the type of atmosphere a stage magician conjures when attempting to hypnotize an audience into a state of mind in which a trick can be worked upon them.

In many cases, the person wishing to harm someone using spiritual warfare is so convinced of their own ability to curse someone that their conviction is compelling enough to convince those around them. You might catch yourself second-guessing your common sense (“What if I’m wrong? What if it really *is* possible for him to curse me this way?”) with sinister visions of his face hovering in your head. You must allow these thoughts to pass. No need to doubt yourself here. You are safe. Again, no one is vulnerable to a psychic attack by anyone unless they allow themselves to be, whether through their own willingness to be manipulated or tricked, or by their own shared belief that one’s own mental fortress is not secure. Insecurity makes us more vulnerable to the lesser intentions of all manner of devious forces, including spurned lovers, con men, and, similarly, politicians.

With all that being said, I do not mean to imply that psychic and paranormal phenomena do not exist. They do exist. What I mean to say is that your own mind and your inner self are your own safe havens — the safest places of all — and you turn them over to others by your own choice, not by anyone else’s power. It’s time to take back the part of yourself that you gave to this man and get him out of your head completely. And the proven healing ability of time will take care of most of that for you. Just move on and don’t dwell on this, but don’t try too hard not to dwell on it, either. Just live. Just breathe. And laugh.

Lastly, remember that for some people, playing mind games is their greatest pleasure in life. If you truly don’t want to deal with mind games and drama, then don’t deal with people who revel in it.

In the end, rather than bashing this man or his interests in witchcraft or the less common fields of knowledge and spiritual study, try to summon up a feeling of compassion and empathy for his type. Sometimes the people who feel the most powerless are the ones most drawn to what they believe are special secret powers that will give them control over the world and other people’s lives. As was said earlier, the person who believes he can curse someone else must also believe it is possible for him to be cursed in return, and therefore is constantly in a state of negative warfare and magical battling. In order to send out the bad vibes, you must have them inside you first. And that doesn’t feel good at all.

The kind of person who truly wants to curse someone isn’t a person we should fear or make fun of, but rather someone we should try and feel understanding for. Perhaps this is a person who is struggling and feeling powerless and lost; perhaps this is a person who could use a little more sympathy and kindness shown to him. Perhaps this is a person to make peace with. No otherworldly curse can match the power of human goodness. Bless you.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**‘Can Negative Vibes Actually Hurt You?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 5, 2015

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Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘My Girlfriend Makes More Money Than I Do and It’s Stressing Me Out’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 12, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew W.K.,**

I have a lovely girlfriend who makes significantly more money than I do, and I find this situation aggravating and stressful. She and I live together, and the kitchen is now “my domain.”

I know that love conquers all, but how do I be “the man” when I consistently find myself relying on her?

Your Friend,T

**Dear T,**

“The man” isn’t as valuable as “a man.” And “a man” realizes that in order to be a great man, he must be a good person first.

In order to be a good person, he must respect his partner as a distinct and equal person, and not just an abstract identity attached to him, such as “my girlfriend,” “my woman,” or “my wife.”

A truly good man must think of other people as unique beings of inherent value and greatness, capable of just as much greatness as himself. Rather than resent another’s greatness — especially the greatness of a loved one — a true man strives to encourage it.

In recognizing someone else’s capacity for greatness, he may also see her become even greater than himself. Perhaps in ways that he didn’t expect. Perhaps in ways that defy social standards. Perhaps in ways that force him to look closely at his life and feel self-conscious and insecure. But rather than fear these feelings, the great man embraces them, for he realizes they’re opportunities to improve the quality of his soul, to loosen the strangling grip of his ego, and to free himself and others from unnecessarily stifling conventions.

A true man is wise enough to not always be the best at everything, and is at peace with this. A strong man allows others to be strong and then helps them get even stronger.

A truly great man doesn’t only use his resources and energy to increase his own greatness, but shares his vitality and ability so that others can actualize their own greatness. Perhaps becoming even greater than anyone thought they could become.

A great man does not sulk and complain about feeling inadequate or “unmanly,” but is constantly doubling his efforts to live with more humanity in his heart, to become more “human” than simply “man.” He strives to be challenged, to be tested, to be humbled; he embraces these tests of character, for he understands that the uncomfortable feelings that come with these trials are ultimately expanding his own inner nature and making him a fuller version of himself. He is wise enough to embrace the complete range of feelings and emotions — including weakness, humiliation, doubt, and even emasculation — knowing that all these sensations have value, and not limiting himself to the way he thinks “a man’s supposed to feel.”

A true man also realizes how tempting it is to oversimplify life into subjective indicators of material success, things like earning money, performing physical tasks, adhering to certain lifestyles, and embodying certain personality types. These outer experiences appear easier to master and control, and therefore are more often used to measure and judge how “successful,” or how “manly,” or even how “happy” we are. It seems much easier to evaluate people based on things like money and houses and cars and how much they “provide” for their families materially, than on the quality of their own character and what they contribute to the spiritual needs of the world around them.

Devotion, attention, loyalty, tenderness, understanding, resolve, resilience, patience, honesty, selflessness, and commitment — compared to the physical world of material success, the qualities of character are much harder to measure and more elusive for most of us. It’s more challenging to live honestly and unselfishly for one day than it is to earn a billion dollars in a lifetime.

We would often rather think our value as a person is primarily reflected in the material world, but it is in the immaterial world that our true self matters most and has the most impact — the way we make people feel about themselves and about being alive.

So don’t worry so much about money or if someone earns more than you do. Focus as much as you can on being the best person you can be inside and out. Develop your own integrity based on inner awareness and self-honesty. Strive to remove as much selfishness as you can from your decision-making. Show kindness and goodwill toward strangers and friends. Be excited about opportunities to challenge yourself and your ideas about who you are.

Consider your commitment to these noble efforts as your only reliable indicator of true manhood — or better yet, true humanity. Elevate yourself, and elevate the world.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# ‘How Can I Talk to My Bigoted Friend?’

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 19, 2015

**Dear Andrew,**

I recently moved in with a friend who I’ve known for almost a decade. Turns out he uses a lot of homophobic slurs and insults. He also says racist stuff and badmouths pretty much every minority group you can think of. I had never seen this side of him until we became roommates, and now I’m really disturbed. I pointed out how offensive this was, and his response was, “They’re just words,” and that I should lighten up. What do I do?

Yours sincerely,Concerned

**Dear Concerned,**

Your friend’s answer of “They’re just words” is similar to punching someone in the face and then saying, “They’re just hands.” Words are powerful and can be used to hurt or comfort, just like hands can be used to hit or hug. Next time he uses derogatory language, you could just call him an “ignorant racist dumbass piece of shit,” and if he gets upset, remind him that “they’re just words.”

Words are not “just words.” Words are power. Words are living symbols of expression. Words can cause you to feel angry, even violently hurt. They’re supposed to. Even if we realize that words are “just words” — sounds made by our mouths and larynx — those sounds convey ideas, and those ideas convey meanings, and meanings convey a very real power. The world is made up of words. We think with words, we communicate with words, and we translate our experience into language so we can understand and express it. Words are meant to be powerful. We made them that way for a reason, so that they can give meaning to our life. That’s why there’s an undeniably physical quality to hearing words that are meant to be hurtful, insulting, and cruel. You feel them; you don’t just hear them.

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by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 6, 2014

If this man weren’t your friend, and instead just a stranger you overheard insulting people, it would be much easier to call him out on his ignorance and then walk away, freeing yourself from ever having to deal with him again. But the fact that he’s your friend — and, for better or worse, your roommate — complicates the situation immensely, because you care about him.

When you witness someone you care about brandishing hatred and prejudice, it’s not just the words that sound ugly. It isn’t just the insulting, cruel, and mean-spirited nature of the language or ideas that’s upsetting. The sadness you feel isn’t limited to the pain his words caused you directly, nor is your compassion limited to what you feel for the targets of his abuse. The painful and complicated feelings that arise when someone you otherwise love is participating in hate and prejudice is a sadness that comes directly from seeing another’s psychological ugliness so prominently displayed. You may feel angry and disgusted, but deeper than the frustration, and even deeper than the hurt, is a penetrating sadness, and perhaps even pity.

Since this man is your friend, you want him to be the best he can be. You want him to be a good person. You want to see the highest aspects of his self take the lead and direct his behavior. You want him to be someone you can feel proud to call your friend. But when you see him wallowing in his weakness, in his prejudice, and in his small-mindedness, it hurts. It’s like seeing someone you care about get sick and wind up in the hospital at the hands of their own vices. You wish you could find a way to convince them not to live like that. You want to show them how they’re hurting themselves and the people around them in hopes of helping them see another way of being. It’s very hard and painful to see someone you care about be less than the person you know they can be.

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by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 16, 2014

Out of all of humanity’s shortcomings and faults, prejudice is the most damaging and amplifies our most destructive capacities. Prejudice is a disease of the soul that distorts the world and poisons the heart of the infected person. Prejudice not only cuts one person off from those around him, but cuts that person off from himself. Prejudice attaches itself to the lowest and most fear-based emotional impulses, and feeds off a person’s vitality, directing all his valuable energy into his least constructive and most profane modes of thought and action. To see someone suffering from extreme prejudice is to see a human enveloped in darkness — and it’s often a progressive condition, getting worse and harder to shake the longer it has power over him.

It hurts to see your friend succumbing to his own prejudice. It hurts to watch as he loses track of his own spirit and trades it in for a superficial kind of power and false superiority. You want to help him and save him and stop him from dwelling in this blindness. As hard as it may be to try to find compassion for him, you just try. Try to understand why he is what he is. Do not excuse his behavior, but try to comprehend his confusion — not to accept or dismiss it, but to locate it, so you can try to heal what he is suffering from.

Realize that you might not be able to save him from this. Understand that there is only so much you can do. And be warned that he may try to bring out your own worst behaviors as a result of your engaging with his. You must hold very firmly to your own integrity and your own openhearted convictions. Remember what is really at stake: The anger and hate that he projects can easily overtake you and infect your heart as well. Do not sink to his level.

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by [VILLAGE VOICE STAFF](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/villagevoicestaff/)

December 23, 2015

The best you can do is tell your friend that you love him, and that he sounds awful when he talks like that. Tell him that being a racist makes it impossible for you to be true friends with him, even though you still care about him. Tell him that you’re embarrassed for him. Tell him that you’re afraid for him. Tell him his ignorance makes him sound like someone you know he isn’t. Tell him that you know he’s a better person than this.

No matter what, let the horrifying experience of seeing your friend’s darkest and most deplorable qualities reaffirm your own commitment to living your life without prejudice and hatred. Let this unfortunate interaction help motivate you to examine your own soul for even the smallest signs of bigotry, bias, discrimination, and narrow-mindedness. Make sure that what you see in your friend is what you never find in yourself. And if you do find it inside you, work tirelessly to heal it. You might not be able to get through to him, but you can get through to yourself. Be the person you wish he was. Unite yourself with your own best vision of humanity. Unite the people around you with a shared vision of possibility. Unite everything. Divided we fall.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘Why Is It OK to Hate People?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 26, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

All my friends and acquaintances claim to “hate people.” Why is this a trend? Why is it considered cool to “hate people”?

Regards,I Think People Are Alright

**Dear I Think People Are Alright,**

I was just thinking about this the other day. I was feeling angry toward a group of people who were needlessly attacking another group in the media. It got me pondering the idea of a person who hates another person because of that other person’s hatreds. For example, if a person came along and said, “I hate tall people!” and then another person stepped up and said, “Well, I hate short people!” and finally a third person came along and said, “You should both be ashamed of yourselves for hating people! I hate people like you!” — well, with that one statement, however righteous it may seem at first, the third speaker has now become the exact kind of person he claims to hate — the kind that hates other kinds of people. By hating the kind of people who hate other kinds of people, he automatically becomes the very thing he hates, and in turn, hates himself.

The lesson here is that we must be very careful with our emotions, especially that tyrant of all negative and lower feelings: hatred. In our efforts to eliminate what we see as bad in the world, it takes extreme discipline and self-awareness not to lose our way in the midst of the battle, and end up contributing even more bad to the bad we’re so intent on wiping out. As we’re aware, war can never really achieve peace, no matter how badly we want peace, or how badly we want to believe that by fighting, we can eliminate fighting. It’s common sense, but we usually go to great lengths to convince ourselves that this time it’s different, or that in this case violence really is the only answer. But it never works. Hating hate does not end hate. It just helps it grow.

It is worth examining why the word “hate” does seem to be used so frequently. With a moment of honest reflection, most of us will probably admit to saying we “hate” things all the time. But we also probably don’t really mean it. We are sort of exaggerating, and it’s common to do so. It could be largely due to the dramatic impact exaggerated speech has on the listener. With so much noise out in the world, we often end up unknowingly exaggerating what we mean in order to amplify our voice and cut through the chaos.

Look at your letter. You started out by saying that ALL your friends and acquaintances claim to hate people. Now, is it possible that every single friend and acquaintance of yours really does claim this? Sure. More likely, you were just using the word “all” for impact — or out of habit — or just because that’s something people say and it just sounded right. I’m guessing you do have plenty of people in your life who don’t actually claim to hate people. So maybe you were engaging in the same exact type of exaggeration as the others were when they used the word “hate.”

Other common exaggerations are using words like “everyone” and “always,” such as, “Everyone is always saying how great that flavored-crust pizza is.” Now, again, as much as I love pizza, and literally millions of other people do, too, we clearly realize that there are probably some people on earth who don’t think pizza is that great, flavored crust or not. Even if all the people in the world who do like flavored-crust pizza were frequently expressing their love for it, it would be nearly impossible for them to always be saying it, 24 hours a day, forever and ever.

These sorts of exaggerations have been used so frequently that we barely even notice them, and they just sound like the way people talk. But we should notice them. And we should especially notice when we say them. Even more so, we should make an effort to notice when we think them. How clear are our own thoughts? How exaggerated is the voice in our head? Why are we feeling the need to overstate and exaggerate our feelings and ideas? These are questions that each of us can only answer for ourselves.

As far as the people around you actually “hating people,” it is probably another understandable exaggeration. People are intense. There is a cheap satisfaction in hating things and saying so. It seems to release a type of internal emotional pressure. But it’s a short-lived and deceptive release. It actually builds up a worse and leads to a more sickening kind of tension in your soul. You can feel your chest tighten and your breathing shorten when you focus on that kind of hate. The more bitter and pointed the hate becomes, the more painful and inflamed the physical feeling gets. Medical and spiritual experts have agreed that harboring hatreds and resentment does cause actual illness, and you can really feel how that’s possible when those sensations take hold of you.

Ultimately, in order to find true peace and live a truly good life, we can’t hate anything. This doesn’t mean we have to support and endorse everyone and everything. It also doesn’t mean we have to agree with every viewpoint or enjoy every experience. It just means that in order to improve as a human race, we must eliminate hate. No more “hating” certain songs. No more “hating” certain movies. No more “hating” certain places, or foods, or cars, or clothing, or books, or anything. And absolutely no more “hating” people.

We must catch ourselves when we allow these lower emotional impulses to get the better of us. At times, it can be hard to see them coming. But hopefully, with enough dedication and desire, we can shorten the distance between our experience, our reaction, and our emotions and get some control over them. We can put in their place the higher and more noble attitudes we possess. Instead of our irritation, our impatience, our cynicism, and our hatred, we can focus on goodness. It’s not easy to do this. In fact, mastering emotions in this way is possibly the most difficult challenge in life. But it is also the most noble effort we can make as a human being — to try and truly become a better person.

Every day is full of opportunities to do this — chances for us to become more or to remain less. Can we meet these tests head on? Will we bring out the best in ourselves, or give in to weakness and falter? And though we might not always succeed, and though we may often feel like it’s too hard and that we’re simply not strong enough, we still decide to keep trying. We must never stop trying to live a better life.

With all the efforts we make trying to be better than other people, the only person we should really try to be better than is ourselves. This is the most important effort we can make with our precious time. Keep making this effort in your own life, and keep supporting the people around you in their efforts, too. We can do this!

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# ‘Do You Ever Get Depressed?’

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 2, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

I’m a depressed person. I get sad and unmotivated and basically just feel like being away from everyone, including myself. It’s weird because most of the time I don’t really have a good reason for feeling so bad, I just feel it anyway. Do you have any advice on what to do with bad feelings like this? People don’t understand me. I try to tell them, but they think it’s just me being too sensitive, or I should just snap out of it. You always seem so happy and I really look up to you for that. But do you ever get depressed? How do you stay so positive?

Thanks,Downer In The Dumps

**Dear Downer In The Dumps,**

For nearly all of my life, I have struggled with severe depression. Sometimes it’s been a lingering feeling in the back of my head that something isn’t right, and that something is me. Other times it has been a full-blown physically incapacitating despair. It’s hard for me to even describe it, let alone imagine going through it again, although I imagine I will, as I have dozens of times before.

The times when my depression was really bad are difficult to put into words. People who haven’t been depressed asked me if it was like being in a really bad mood, or feeling really, really sad. It’s not like that at all. It’s not a mood or an emotion. Depression is like being exposed to a truth about reality that is so full of sorrow and misery that it shuts down the very part of you that exists as a human being. It’s like being told that everything good about life was a lie and that the biggest lie of all is you. But you’re not just thinking about these awful truths, you are the awful truth — and you become that feeling.

People have also asked me, “Why can’t you just snap out of it?” Trying to “snap out” of depression is like trying to eat food when you’re nauseated. It’s like trying to stay awake when you’ve taken a dozen sleeping pills. It’s like trying to run a race where you’re underwater and everyone else is on dry land. It takes an extraordinary amount of strength just to exist in the midst of a depression. Just breathing with your lungs takes a full-blown conscious effort. You feel like you don’t want to do anything ever again. You feel like you don’t want to be. And then you feel bad for feeling that. And so on.

The fact that it’s so hard for other people to understand what it’s like to feel severely depressed can add to the feelings of frustration and alienation. Depression distorts and stains every aspect of yourself and the world around you and rips away at everything that is happy and beautiful, as though the façade of joy has been removed from everything you once held dear. It’s like having a fever in your soul. It’s like what the end of the world tastes like.

In addition to these overwhelming physical feelings of terrifyingly bleak depression, I’ve also continuously wrestled with a long list of other low emotions: frustration, jealousy, resentment, anger, rage, hatred, violent impulses, paranoia, and feelings of hopelessness, exhaustion, despair, selfishness, self-pity, and low self-esteem. Mixed in with these feelings have also been extreme shyness, anxiety, fear and dread, and a general feeling of guilt about having all these feelings in the first place. I’ve never had a justifiable reason to feel this bad, and that made me feel even worse. I have a good life and good people around me, so why can’t I just be happy all the time? I’m still trying to find that answer.

And maybe I never will get an answer, but in the meantime, I think the best answer I have is: because I’m human. I can also tell you that these bad feelings have motivated me and pushed me and challenged me in ways that I would never have been otherwise. Maybe I was meant to feel this way for a reason. And even if I wasn’t, I’m going to try to put them to good use while I’m dealing with them.

I’m not proud of these feelings, but I’m not ashamed of them, either. I don’t identify myself as someone who “has” these feelings — they’re not me. They are just something that the “me” is experiencing, and all I can do is not let them beat me. They may take me down for a few minutes, or an hour, or a day, or even a week, or maybe even longer.

But the one thing I have learned throughout this odyssey is that those bad feelings are not who I really am. They are not the truth. And they will pass. And I will get back up. The real me is somewhere in there all the time, and the test is to see if I can hold on tight enough to make it through the storm. We must hold tight, and then try to rise back up. Maybe not instantly, but at some point, as soon as you can feel it start to lift a little. It takes an extraordinary amount of effort to push through it. Pulling out of a depression by sheer willpower is among the hardest physical and emotional challenges I have ever engaged in. But I have done it, and you can, too.

Sometimes I think depressions are just growing pains — like exercise for your soul. When you exercise your body, it gets sore as it rebuilds and gets stronger. And maybe sometimes life experiences make your soul get sore, and then it has to grow and expand to recover. Growing is painful. Growing is life. Life is painful. It’s learning how to master and direct that pain and use it for something beautiful.

I never would be writing to you about this now had it not been for these experiences. All these bad feelings have led to something. They have been the core motivation for me wanting to learn how to feel better — how to become a better person, and be someone who is truly worthy of being a human. I decided to devote my life to overcoming these feelings and turn that into my entire work.

That’s what first motivated me to start my party mission, and to become a musician and entertainer — to get cheered up and hopefully cheer other people up, too. I wanted to have something I could devote myself to that was all about “feeling good,” a feeling that was bigger than me and, most importantly, bigger than my bad feelings. This became something that would force me to find a way to rise up when I otherwise wouldn’t have reason to. We can pull the best out of ourselves if we have a life-or-death reason, and this became that for me. I believe that through these sorts of efforts, we really can become more than we are. Life is something that we have to figure out and do whatever we can do to keep going while we can. Turn the negatives into positives. It’s all energy — good or bad — and we can use it to fuel our highest and most worthwhile efforts on this earth.

Never feel afraid or ashamed to seek help from others, including doctors or other professionals. Never stop trying to figure out new things you can do to change the way you feel. Stay close and hold tight to the things that you know bring you real joy. And remember, at the heart of it all, there is a truth and it’s telling you that life is beautiful and that you are a good person who deserves to be part of it. Even when that truth is lost in the darkest storms of your hardest moments, please remember that it is there, and that even though it may seem far away or very small, it is more powerful and larger than our pain and struggle. That will pass, but the truth will remain. Have faith in that.

We can keep getting closer to that truth, and we can let our devotion to it become the centerpiece of our lives. It’s a truth that tells us everything is OK even when it seems like it’s not. It’s a truth that tells us that it’s OK to feel however we feel, even when it hurts. It’s a truth that tells us that life is more beautiful and awe-inspiring than we can even contemplate — and, most amazing of all, that we are a very real part of it. It tells us that it’s all going to be OK. That you will be OK. That you already are. Never forget this. I love you. Stay strong.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘How Can I Shake My Bad Karma?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 9, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every Wednesday, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew W.K.,**

I work at a used-car dealership where I’m forced to rip people off. It’s killing my spirit a little bit every day. I wish I could be making the world a better place, but instead, I’m spending 60 hours a week selling snake oil and gypsy tears to poor unsuspecting people. How do I dig myself out of this situation and reverse all of the bad karma?

The job pays well, and while I know the money isn’t everything, it covers the bills and supports my family. Should I quit this job and take a lower-paying job? Should I keep the job and just be glad I’m getting by? I’m not sure how to turn the situation around, but this isn’t who I am.

Sincerely,Killing My Karma

**Dear Killing My Karma,**

The word “karma” gets thrown around a lot. It seems it’s usually used to describe a sort of cosmic kind of good or bad luck, a punishment or reward that awaits us based on what we’ve done in the past. In this way, we can think of it more simply as cause and effect: what we reap, we shall sow. But one very important aspect of karma is that it doesn’t only work toward an impending future benefit or curse. You also have karma that you’ve already developed in the past that you’re experiencing right now — karma that has led to this very moment and to the particular situation you’re contemplating.

I urge you to consider that you’ve actually been building up good karma for many years, and that this good karma is now revealing itself to you in an urgent form of undeniable instinct. It’s an inner voice presenting you with a new type of clarity — an overwhelming sense of moral integrity, a pressure — which is making it virtually impossible for you to go on living against the principles which you know in your heart to be right. Everything good you’ve ever done has developed over the years into an internal ethical compass — a conscience — which is returning your goodness with an increased sense of what leads to further goodness. The payoff for good karma isn’t necessarily some sort of external material gain, but rather an internal and ever-increasing inner wealth of understanding and strengthening of character. That’s the real payoff: getting to learn how to live a good life as yourself. You didn’t do good things in the past just to develop some sort of blind good luck that rewards you with pennies from heaven. You earned the ability to cultivate true happiness based on your real efforts to understand what you know in your heart to be good and true.

The surest way for you to develop bad karma now would be by ignoring this extremely persistent impulse telling you to change your job situation. You have a chance to decide to live a better life. And again, the bad karma you generate by turning away from your conscience here wouldn’t necessarily be experienced as typical material misfortune or hardship, but instead, by the growing personal misery and suffering due to denying one’s higher sense of purpose and living in bad faith. Taking the low road. Basically, once you start to ignore your conscience, you start down a strange and dimly lit path that grows darker and darker as you proceed without a compass. You begin to lose all trace of yourself — you lose sense of what really makes life worth living — and as a result, life gets harder and harder to navigate, and we find ourselves stooping to lower and lower means of trying to achieve easy ways of getting back on track. There’s really only one way to get back on track, and that’s by doing the right thing, even when it’s not as glamorous or as comfortable as the other options.

You’ve arrived at this very significant moment in life where you have the chance to do the right thing — a moment so important and profound that every ounce of your being and inner self are screaming out and urging you to make this change. And though this type of change can seem intimidating, inconvenient, stressful, and quite painful, it is really more exciting and valuable than any other life experience. It is an opportunity to grow and take one more step toward realizing what life can really be about. It is a chance to empower your own integrity, so that it can lead you to a deeper and more meaningful version of life.

Despite our most cynical worldviews, we instinctively know that getting ahead in life at the expense of others is not the way to live. It may give us a slight short-term advantage, but just as with any quick fix, there’s always a price to pay later, usually leaving us worse off than we were before we tried to scheme our way ahead. And at that point, we either try to change our ways completely, or we double down and go even deeper into conniving and unethical efforts to “win.” If we look for justifications for our bad behavior, we will find plenty of them.

We can look around us and quickly locate an almost endless assortment of reasons not to do what we know is right. We can say, “Well, everyone else is breaking the rules, so I have to as well.” We can say, “I have to provide for my family, even if it means doing bad things. It’s just how the world is.” We can find all sorts of excuses that encourage our self-deception and ignorance, and most of us put a lot of time and thought into finding rationalizations for decisionmaking that we know is flawed. But all it takes is one simple decision to listen to your heart of hearts — that deeper inner voice — and every negative outside influence is silenced. The choice to listen to your own natural conscience is a choice to live in harmony with your own soul, and as a result, the soul of everything.

Any naturally occurring motivation to be a better person is something sacred. And when it emerges out of you directly — without obvious outside manipulation, or encouragement — it is a miraculous type of revelation. It is the truth coming out of you and into the world. And it should be celebrated and cherished, and most of all, obeyed. Not obeyed with a type of meager servitude, but obeyed as a type of rejoicing, because it’s a chance to serve the best part of yourself and to serve truth itself. Really, there shouldn’t be any question in your heart as to whether or not you should follow this instinct. The only question should be how to develop the strength necessary to do so, and how to develop the discipline and courage to do what we really know we should do in life. The fact that your conscience is speaking to you so clearly is a testimony to how strong your character already is.

Besides, what is the point of having a nice house or providing for your family if it’s done through the scamming and cheating of others? I had some jobs when I was a teenager that involved ripping people off, and it is one of the great shames of my life. Every day I try to think of ways to make up for the hurt I caused others. And whatever little money I had has been long spent on trivial junk. There was really no achievement for all my efforts to trick people into buying what I was selling. After all, what sort of achievement is any type of success if we have no peace of mind to enjoy it? How can we raise our children to be good people if the very foundation of their home life was built on a dishonorable pursuit? Can we really feel like we’ve accomplished something great in life if that accomplishment was nothing more than a slightly more cunning method of getting money out of people in our pointless competition for who can accumulate the most fancy stuff? None of this does anything for really improving what it means to be alive. We are too well aware of people who have plenty of money and cars and houses but who are miserable in the midst of all their wealth. They traded their life and energy for a bunch of high-priced stuff, and now don’t even have the basic internal means to enjoy it. There are some people who truly believe all that matters in life is getting ahead, no matter what it takes, and that somehow if they can make enough money, they can actually buy their way out of the consequences for their own actions. But really, they are ultimately cheating themselves. We cannot get away from the results of what we are doing, good or bad. It simply doesn’t work that way, no matter how much we might wish it did.

If we really love our life, we should respect it enough to listen to what it tells us to do, even when those things are inconvenient and difficult. We should work hard to develop our ability to hear what our instinct is telling us to do, and not just block it out by hypnotizing ourselves into an oblivious state of endless physical gratification. We cannot continuously ignore what we know instinctively to be right and true and expect to be happy at the same time.

Follow your feelings and find a new job that doesn’t force you to compromise your values. The fact that you wrote in about this means you already have the answer to your own question. I hope my reply here just gave you the reassurance that your instinct is correct. You will be happier, your family will be happier — and after all, if the point of supporting your family is to bring them happiness, there is ultimately no shortcut to getting there, especially if that shortcut involves making other families unhappy. The best part is that if you listen to your conscience, you will have truly earned your happiness and deserve all the good karma that comes with it.

The voice inside you telling you that there is a better way to live is like a precious and innocent newborn baby — a very pure type of being that only knows truth and goodness and is free from corruption and darkness. This inner being is very much a part of your family as well. Protect and raise up the inner voice inside of you just as you would your own child. It is the best part of you. It is the truth.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘How Do I Deal With Death?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 16, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew W.K.,**

I’m afraid of death. Not just my own death, but the death of my loved ones, too. I’ve never really lost anyone very close to me and I just can’t imagine what I will do about it.

Lately, my fear of losing someone close has been taking over more and more of my thoughts. I keep imagining my parents dying in a car crash, or getting that late-night phone call that one of my best friends is suddenly dead and gone. I feel really anxious, and the more I try to stop thinking about it and put it out of my mind, the worse it gets and the more I obsess about it. What should I do?

Thanks,Dreading Death

**Dear Dreading Death,**

We realize that everyone, including you and me, will die. However, as certain as we are of this inevitable death, we are equally uncertain of exactly what death entails, or exactly what occurs to someone when it happens.

The only way to entirely avoid the unknowable experience of dying is to never have been born, and that’s obviously not an option for you or me or anyone else alive right now. And the only way to entirely avoid having to experience others dying is to die before they do. And ending one’s own life simply to avoid having to deal with another’s death is hardly a reasonable solution to the problem. Really, there is no exact solution at all. Instead, we can only develop different ways to think about death and try to learn to face it with dignity and as much understanding as possible.

Our main worries and anxieties seem to center around the fact that death is unknowable, and yet we do know that we’ll experience it. And despite how pervasive and inescapable death is — and despite it being one of the single experiences we all will have in common — it remains supremely mysterious and impenetrable. All of our various encounters with the unknown are essentially extensions and variations of the ultimate unknown: death itself.

But as much as we don’t know about what happens when we die, we also don’t know what happens to us before we’re born. Despite all our efforts to understand what is happening in life, we still don’t know much about what life actually is — how it exists, why it exists, where it goes, or where it came from. Death is wrapped up as an elemental aspect of the same mystery that surrounds life. Our inability to know about what happens when we die is reflected in our present inability to really understand what is happening right now while we’re alive. This is quite frustrating, and it makes sense that all this not-knowing can cause us stress.

It’s possible that most of our anxiety surrounding death and our awareness of its impending occurrence is actually just an extension of our current confusion about the mystery of life in general. We want control and security and certainty, but most of the time, the closest we get to any real comfort is a type of self-induced mellow oblivion, achieved by making extreme efforts to really not think about life (or death) or anything much at all. It feels momentarily easier to just distract ourselves with other thoughts, or no thoughts, than having to face head-on the most pressing aspects of the situation we’re in: What is this whole experience we’re having?

So we often want to hide away from having to ponder this too much or too deeply — and that’s understandable. Being alive is incredibly intense and incredibly confusing. Death is even more so. In fact, we may never really find the answer to what is going on with either of them. It’s possible that the true nature of reality is simply beyond our comprehension. The whole truth may just not be available to us. Or, on the flip side, the truth is so available that we can’t even see it — we only see a faint reflection of it. It’s much like the way we can’t see into our own eye using our eye; we need a mirror. Maybe death is that mirror. Maybe death is a reflection of life, so we can see it and examine it and appreciate it.

Maybe instead of being afraid of death, we can look at it as something beyond fear. Maybe we can decide to counteract our instincts to avoid contemplating it, and instead ponder everything about it as deeply and fearlessly as possible. And maybe, if our meditations on death can’t tell us something about dying, they can tell us something about living. Maybe it can make life mean more. Life certainly feels more precious when we really fully consider the fact that it won’t last forever. We’re all aware of how fleeting and fragile life suddenly feels once we see someone else lose theirs so easily and randomly. Perhaps that is showing us that, somehow, death is meant to teach us how to live.

Most of all, remember the following: When someone dies, our experience of that person does not die. It changes, it transforms, but it survives inside us. That person’s existence continues on with us, for as long as we continue to exist. In fact, our experience of a person who has died not only continues, but it can grow and deepen. Our thoughts and memories of that person can reveal a deeper insight and understanding of that person than we had even when they were alive. A new kind of love develops after they’re gone, with new levels of appreciation that we simply didn’t have the means to comprehend during their physical lifetime. It’s not clear why this is. But maybe, as we so often do, we can experience a version of this growth and understanding and appreciation before that person is gone, simply by fathoming the fact that they will eventually die. This shouldn’t be depressing; it should be enthralling, it should be affirming, it should be inspiring, and it should be motivating.

In this way, you’re doing yourself and your loved ones a real service by fully contemplating the fact that they are here now but won’t be forever. You’re not taking their presence for granted. Hopefully you can turn your anxiety and worry of losing them into a joyful exhilaration that they’re actually here with you right now. Be with them, experience them, hug them, laugh with them, cry with them, and love them all you can.

We may never fully understand or know where we go after death, or where we were before this life, but while we are here — in the midst of this incredibly rich and overwhelming adventure of existence — we must do all that we can to completely appreciate and experience ourselves and those around us. By loving our life and the lives of others with all the energy we have, we can truly show ourselves and eternity that we’ve done our best to have earned this precious gift called “life.” Don’t be afraid. Just be alive. You are right now. And it’s beautiful. Stay strong.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘How Do I Show Religious Freaks That Science Wins?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 22, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Yo, Andrew.**

How can anyone believe in religion? It’s so ignorant and obviously fake. I’ve always backed science since I was a little kid, and now I’m proud to say that I’m studying to be a molecular biologist in college. The thing is, I’m surrounded by a lot of religious idiots at this school, and whenever I try to explain to them how believing in a man in heaven who rose from the dead and all that superstitious BS is literally causing the murder of millions of people, they argue back and tell me that “science is evil and is playing God,” and that I should develop my “faith” before I blow up the world.

What is the best way to finally get through to these ignorant people and explain to them simply and finally that they’re wrong? If they would just give in and accept the scientific future, they would see that they don’t need religion to enjoy life.

Thanks for your feedback,Enlightened Scientist

**Dear Enlightened Scientist,**

Science versus religion.

I’ve always found this to be one of the most unnecessary arguments in contemporary society. Why does it have to be one way or another? I may not be the most mature or educated person, but when I see highly esteemed academics twice my age arguing about this, on and on, it puzzles and concerns me. Arguing about whether science or religion is better seems about as futile as arguing about whether day or night is better. Both have their qualities and shortcomings; neither can (nor should) be expected to replace the other. They are two sides of the same coin, and they both emerged out of — and are aspects of — a fundamental search for reality.

Both science and religion came from mankind’s desire to know. Both are striving for truth. Science wants to understand truth. Religion wants to experience it. Science wants to get at truth from the outside in. Religion gets at it from the inside out. Science gives us the how; religion gives us the why. Science gives us the means to an end, religion gives us the meaning of that end. Science wants to bring comprehension to the universe. Religion wants to bring tangibility to the intangible.

You say your argument is that science has never killed anyone like people have been killed in the name of religion. While people may not murder each other “in the name of science,” we do know that nuclear bombs, chemical weapons, eugenics and biological experimentation can also contribute to death and killing in an endless variety of ways. Both science and religion can be used as a method or justification by those who want to cause pain and suffering and break the rules of common sense and humanity. And even if one has a more extreme body count than the other, it doesn’t mean that one should exist and the other shouldn’t. None of the crimes that humanity has committed against itself mean that science is evil or that religion is bad. All it means is that people can do horrible things to each other using all sorts of convoluted reasoning.

Ultimately, it seems that when people complain about the harm of religion, they’re often simply complaining about people behaving badly. They’re talking about their dislike of people behaving barbarically. As much as the truth of God may be beyond description and intellectual grasp, the truth of human cruelty and ignorance is all too familiar and measurable. And when people claim to talk about the evil of science, they’re actually just complaining about those unfortunate scientists who lack the ethical tools or moral integrity to guide and refine the use of their discoveries. Both religious people and scientific people can behave badly. A closed-minded scientist can be a jerk just as easily as a devout religious person can be a fool. No mode of thought or set of beliefs should be blamed for the lack of character in a particular individual. Nor should the vast array of benefits found in both science and religion be thrown away just because some people behave poorly in spite of them.

So your complaint really shouldn’t be with religion or people who are religious, but simply with the unfortunately all-too-familiar shortcomings of the human race. Any religion that promotes hatred is not really a religion at all. And any scientist who cannot live with the spirit of brotherly love in his heart has more problems to investigate inside himself than in the material world. Every person who feels it necessary to battle over the definition or location of truth is neither in possession of any truth to begin with, nor do they have the possibility of experiencing any truth while existing in a prejudiced, spiteful, and unloving state of mind. We must do better than this. We have to grow.

Out of all the principles we should tirelessly strive to live with, gentle kindness, flexibility of spirit, open-mindedness, and a type of pure and unconditional love are the most crucial — especially when we feel most compelled not to behave that way. We simply cannot claim to be real human beings until we can learn to live with the other human beings around us, no matter how religious or scientific they may or may not be. Learning to live with one another remains our first and most urgent challenge, and it starts with each of us honestly working at it from the inside. It’s much easier and much more tempting to lash out and attack everyone else we think is wrong, but we must start much closer to home. We can’t fix the world until we fix ourselves first.

Someday, maybe science or religion really will claim dominance and beat the other once and for all. But until then, it seems that we each have plenty of work to do personally and internally, in order to become more gracious, more tolerant, and more ***humane*** human beings.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘What’s the Purpose of a Broken Heart?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

April 30, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Hi Andrew,**

I’ve been talking to a girl for about a month now, and I’m really getting feelings for her. Compared to other girls, she really makes me happy to be me. I feel like she’s the one. I asked her to the prom with me and she said yes, as long as it wouldn’t be too romantic.

Now, to understand where I’m going with this, you have to understand that I met this girl through my mom. My mom is a hairstylist and this girl works at her salon.

One day, I got a text message from my mom telling me that this girl has no romantic interest in me at all. Now I’m extremely confused and don’t know what to do about the prom. Please, Andrew. I need your help.

Your pal,Broken-Hearted Buddy

**Dear Broken-Hearted Buddy,**

It’s going to be OK. I realize how much this can hurt. It’s a physical feeling that starts with an ache in your chest and runs all the way down to your stomach and then to your throat and settles in your face. It just so happens that I’ve been in this exact situation before.

When I was in high school, there was this really beautiful and amazing girl named Becky that I had a huge, huge crush on. I wasn’t very popular with her circle of friends, but I did everything I could to try and be around her without seeming creepy. She got a lot of attention from older guys I couldn’t really compete with. They were tough and intense, and I knew I could never impress her or get her attention like they did. But I just liked her so much.

Around that same time, I had bought a small accordion and was trying to learn how to play it on my own. I’d hang out in the art class room during lunch break and quietly practice and also work on drawings and assorted school projects. I remember one day going in and seeing Becky eating her lunch in the art room with some of her intense friends. I set up on the other side of the room to work on my accordion and art projects, secretly hoping she would somehow notice me. At some point, all her friends left and she ended up staying in the room. I didn’t realize it was just the two of us until she came over and shocked me by saying hello.

I could barely speak or look at her. My ears felt like someone had set them on fire. Despite having stared at her for many hours during our classes, I had never been this close to her. She smelled like my old babysitter — like conditioner and gum. I was so scared but incredibly, incredibly excited. It’s very hard to describe the feeling, but I’m sure you’re familiar with it. It was like a terrifying experience that you don’t want to ever end, even though it’s so overwhelming and nerve-racking you feel like you’re going to pass out.

She asked me about my accordion. She asked me about my artwork. She asked me about one of our classes. I couldn’t believe she was talking to me. It seemed like she really was interested in me. I felt like I was in some alternate dimension. In a way, I was: It was a dimension of pure and natural love surging with bewilderment and terror. I couldn’t believe I was living through this experience.

She went with me out to the swing set and we talked more about life. She was so incredibly nice, I had to keep reminding myself this was really happening. She was smiling and laughing and didn’t say anything mean or insulting the whole time — just pure kindness. We ended the lunch by hugging and she said I was cool and that we should hang out more. I was delirious.

I coasted on a high for many days. That was definitely the most purely happy I had ever felt. It seemed like everything in the world had shifted. It seemed like now anything was possible. Becky had talked to me and actually liked me. Miracles really did happen. When I’d see her in the halls and in our classes, she would smile and sometimes even say hi. That one small hello could make my entire day. By the end of the week, I had made up my mind to ask her to the school dance.

The amount of courage I had to muster up to ask her out was probably the most exhaustingly brave I’d had to be in my entire life. I was more scared than I would’ve been jumping off a cliff. To my complete shock and amazement, she said yes. I remember going home that day and really feeling like this was the best life could ever get. I had made it. This was heaven on earth; this was the high point. I couldn’t believe that in only a few weeks, I would actually be dancing with Becky, and maybe even kissing. This was too good to be true, wasn’t it?

The next day, I’ll never forget opening my locker and seeing a small folded-up piece of notebook paper pushed through the vents in the locker door. As I stood there looking at it, I had this undeniable sinking feeling that this little piece of paper was going to be something very bad. Life had gotten too good, and now it was going to all be taken away.

Sure enough, Becky had written me a note on that piece of paper that basically said how nice she thought I was, and how cool and unique and how good at art and music I was, and all these sorts of compliments, but that she really just wanted to be friends, and didn’t have romantic feelings for me. She said she’d still go to the prom with me, but didn’t want me to think she was leading me on toward something that wasn’t going to happen.

To say I was devastated, crushed, mortified, destroyed, and sick to my stomach is an extreme understatement. It took all my willpower not to start full-blown crying right there in the hall. I had to kind of duck my head into my locker until I was sure the tears weren’t going to pop out of my tear ducts. My face was red hot. It felt like there was a golf ball in my throat. And I had this unbelievable urge to climb inside my locker and never come out again.

I did everything I could to avoid Becky the rest of the day. When I finally had to confront her, I brushed the whole thing off and tried to sound completely casual and uninterested as I told her that I probably wasn’t going to go to the prom anyway. She should just go with her regular friends. I could tell she felt awkward, and she was sort of quiet during that last brief and very uncomfortable interaction. She ended up going with the most obvious tough guy she usually hung out with. I felt like the biggest idiot in the world.

But looking back, I wouldn’t have changed a single aspect of the entire experience. It remains one of the most sacred events of my life. It was one of the most intensely wonderful and incredibly painful experiences I ever had. It was also something that I still remember as clearly as though it just happened yesterday, even though it was 22 years ago now. It was my life. It is my life. I don’t want to block it out. I want to still be able to feel those feelings, even though thinking about them still hurts in some ways. But it is the feeling of being alive.

This is a chance for you to embrace this painful, wonderful, confusing event as a moment in your life. Be strong and brave and don’t let the pain take you away from yourself. There’s something valuable in every experience, something useful. Maybe we can’t see what it is immediately, but we will over time. Some of life’s adventures are very mysterious and don’t reveal their value for many years.

I was never really sure what I was supposed to have learned from my experience with that girl — it just seemed like pain. But now I see what the whole point of it was: It happened so that I could share it with you now, and so that I could offer you support from my own life when you’re going through a similar struggle. Maybe that was the whole reason it was meant to happen to me. And maybe you’ll be able to tell your experience to someone else someday and it will help them.

Stay strong, be brave, be nice. Don’t let anything take you away from the inherent goodness in your life. It all counts — all of life counts — even the really hard parts. It’s all your life and it’s all meaningful.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘How Do I Become a Successful Musician?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

May 8, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

Since I was very young, I’ve always wanted to be a successful musician. I have practiced and played in many bands and done everything I can to get my music out there, but the dream of making it big just seems to get further away and more impossible. I feel like I should just give up, but I love music so much and want to succeed at it. How can I get there? How can I be a really successful musician?

Thanks,Striving For Success

**Dear Striving For Success,**

This is an excellent question and I’m going to answer it as simply and as directly as I can, with the hopes that it makes the point as clear and as helpful as possible.

The traditional modern concept of success — being the measurement of monetary income as the primary indicator of effort and mastery in a certain field — is essentially a scam, a con, and a lie. To equate success with an amount of money earned, or an amount of fame achieved, is at best an unfortunate miscomprehension of the very nature of success. At worst, it’s a malicious distortion.

To truly succeed at something is to devote yourself to what you love, and to allow that devotion to bring out the best and most admirable qualities inside of you, so that in the end, you ultimately succeed at the only effort that really matters: becoming a better person than you were.

The musician whose efforts in music only add to the size of their bank account is really just a businessperson — a successful banker, not necessarily a successful musician. If music is the means to an end, and that end is money, the music might as well be real estate investment, or commodity trading. Individuals whose primary interest in music is positioning themselves to impress others with their style and wealth may be successful marketers and salesmen, but they’re not successful musicians, or even successful human beings. They’re just rich.

The idea that making money is the best indication of success is fundamentally flawed. Far too often the individuals who make the most money are the biggest failures in every other area of life, most notably those related to personal integrity, kindhearted values, and quality of character. Many people think that achieving material success is worth total sacrifice in every other part of their life — but it couldn’t be further from the truth. Success in one area of life should enable further and more meaningful success in all the other areas, too. Success materially and failure spiritually is no success at all.

Furthermore, success is not power over others, but discipline over oneself. Success is not doing whatever one wants, but doing what one is truly meant to do. Success is not fulfilling one’s most immediate desires, but fulfilling one’s true purpose — and fulfilling it despite obstacles, inconvenience, or how much it differs from what one otherwise feels like doing.

At best, the typical material conception of success inspires the shallowest and most superficial type of selfish ambition, and at worst, it keeps one hopelessly locked in a cycle of perceived failure, vicious competition, and unfulfilled lustful desire. It’s set up from the start as a losing game, so that no one can ever really succeed, because in the contest to see who is “biggest” or “richest,” no one ever really wins. You just keep scheming and clawing and battling, getting closer to emptiness and further from the truly worthwhile things in life.

Music, like all the arts, is a sacred pursuit. It is an end in itself. The reward of playing music is in the joy of experiencing it, and a successful musician is the person who becomes so connected with that spirit of music that he or she becomes inseparable from it. The successful musician aspires to be music itself.

So, for you to be a successful musician, all you have to do is really, really love playing music. Really, really, really love it. Worship it and adore it and turn yourself over to it. And then allow the music to make you a better person from the inside out, not just a richer person or a more famous person, but a more valuable person to the people around you and to the world, and to yourself.

Now go put all the energy you’ve spent worrying that you’re not successful enough into just playing and loving your instrument. If you can say that you’re in love with playing it, you can say that you’re successful. Never give up on what you love. It’s what makes life worth living.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘How Do I Deal With Nudity?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

May 15, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew W.K.,**

What up, dude? Love your advice column, so I’m hoping you can help me here. I’m in college, and one of my classes has a big poster of that famous Leonardo da Vinci “Man” drawing with the naked dude in the circle with his arms out. I’m sure you’ve seen it.

Anyway, I realize it’s a famous piece of art, but I don’t particularly like this naked guy’s junk staring at me all day. It’s offensive and distracting for a classroom environment. It’s just not appropriate to have some naked dude up on a wall when I’m trying to learn.

I’m sure you see where I’m coming from, so my question is, how do I get it removed? Do I just tell my teacher that staring at a naked man all day is distracting and gross? Or do I just ask her to take it down? Or do I take it down when no one is looking and throw it away? Or do I try talking to the dean about it? Or do I just cover it with a sticker or something? I don’t really want to start trouble, I just don’t feel like looking at this guy’s junk anymore and I don’t feel like I should have to. Am I stupid?

Thanks,Fed Up And Grossed Out

**Dear Fed Up And Grossed Out,**

You’re not stupid. And you certainly don’t have to look at it. You don’t even have to look at anything anywhere, ever. You could wear blinders or even full-on blind yourself surgically. Or you could start a campaign to try and eliminate that particular drawing and every other drawing you don’t like from the face of the earth. It would take a lot of work, and in the end you’d probably end up looking at, thinking about, and obsessing over the image you’re trying to get rid of more than ever before. Maybe eventually you could figure out a way to never see it, hear about it, or think about it again. Or maybe there’s another way…

It’s clear that certain images, even very valuable and historically significant masterworks of art, can be offensive to certain people. For every single thing that exists on earth, there’s probably a person who is specifically offended by that thing. We unfortunately build much of our identity around what we think we like, don’t like, love, hate, approve of, or are offended by. We consider it part of our individuality. In fact, upon deeper contemplation, it becomes clear that in most cases, our opinions really have very little to do with who we really are as human beings.

It’s also clear that certain negative life experiences have lasting effects that alter our ability to navigate the world free from their justifiably upsetting and ongoing impact. But most of us will agree that the ideal situation for anyone wishing to live a happy and meaningful life is to figure out a way to exist relatively free of offense, upset, and lasting trauma — or at least to find a way to perpetually rise above those painful circumstances when they do appear.

Perhaps rather than this da Vinci poster being an offensive eyesore, it’s an opportunity to challenge yourself and look at it in a way that will ultimately be rewarding and liberating. And if you still feel the exact same way and gain no further insight into your feelings after some pondering, then that’s OK, too. You should follow your instincts. But whenever things get us so upset that we want to eliminate them, it’s worth turning inward for a moment, and seeing if we can develop the patience to explore what might be going on underneath our emotions and what the whole experience really means beyond just being painful and upsetting.

Feelings and emotions are complicated and tend to flood over us quickly and powerfully. It takes a certain amount of willpower to pull back and look at our feelings from different angles, rather than just allowing our most immediate impulses to take over and control our actions.

The main idea here is that when we are faced with an irritating, mildly unpleasant, or even deeply upsetting circumstance in life, we can choose to look at the adversity we face as a personal attack on our values, which it very well may be. We can also look at it as a test, a challenge, an initiation, an opportunity to reach a higher level of being in ourselves, or a chance to build ourselves up, rather than to tear other things down.

All that being said, I completely respect your right to feel however you feel. I only humbly ask you to consider, with an open heart and open mind, the possibility that being offended is not an opportunity to take things away from the world, but an opportunity to add something to yourself.

Instead of trying to censor the world around us to protect our feelings from what we encounter, we should strive to build up an inner world of resilience and openness that allows us to experience and interact with as much of the world as possible, even if at times it hurts us, disappoints us, confuses us, offends us, or disagrees with us. We must not give up on ourselves, or give up on the world simply because it doesn’t always go the way we want it to.

There will always be things that can offend us. There will always be ways for us to associate otherwise innocent experiences with something sinister and disturbing. We can always find a way to connect the dots that lead us into darkness. We can always allow something to set off an avalanche of bad feelings because something is different from what we prefer. We will always have an endless number of ways to get our feelings hurt. Even the word “feeling” could eventually remind us of all our other bad memories and hurt feelings. Without discounting the very real and painful experiences we can encounter in life, we know that our ultimate goal is to be thoughtful and strong. And if we’re truly committed and determined enough, even our most upsetting life experiences can embolden our spirit and cause us to expand, not shrivel and escape into a non-feeling, non-experiencing state. Even though life will push our buttons and give us every reason to turn away from it, we must realize that deep down inside, turning away from the life is just letting the darkness win. The best way to triumph over hardship is to force ourselves back into the light.

So, instead of referring to the human reproductive organs as “junk,” try thinking of them as the miraculous means by which you were brought into existence. Instead of wanting to remove a poster that offends you, try removing the part of yourself that feels the need to censor things you don’t like. If we all went around eliminating the things we didn’t like about the world, pretty soon there wouldn’t be any world left. Being offended by something doesn’t impact that thing which offends us; that thing usually doesn’t even know or care if we don’t approve of it. Our offense only really impacts ourselves — our spirit, our character, and our ability to grow.

So, do whatever you really feel you should do here. But be warned, it’s a slippery slope. There will always be another poster or another experience or another idea that offends you. Look at yourself honestly. And think deeply. You can easily spend all your energy trying to take away what you don’t like about the world. Or you can devote your energy to adding more of what you love to the world. The choice is yours. Choose wisely. Life is short.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# ‘Can You Help Me Be Positive?’

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

May 22, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew,**

I’m done. Finished. I’m just over everything. When I was a kid, I thought being an adult would give me a place in the world where I could accomplish something and life would be what I thought it could be. Instead, all I’m learning is that getting through life in this world sucks and isn’t any easier or more fun than it was before. I’m more disillusioned and exhausted than ever. I don’t want to be bitter, but I feel like I’m seeing life for what it is: a hopeless mess of endless obstacles. Living day to day in this frame of mind has made me give up hope for the future or for myself. I used to be a happy and optimistic person. Now I’m just mad and tired. What happened?

Yours in despair,Help Me Be Positive

**Dear Help Me Be Positive,**

The belief that living is supposed to be easy is one of the greatest misconceptions about life. The idea that living is primarily about “getting through life” with minimal pain, minimal challenge, or minimal effort is completely untrue. So it’s only natural to feel disillusioned once we realize that life never really gets “easier,” but instead gets more complicated and more challenging. But behind this difficulty is the beautiful fact that we’re supposed to get more resilient and more capable of living because of these struggles.

Resilience and strength don’t come without growth, and growth doesn’t come without pain and effort. Most of us don’t really feel like putting too much effort into anything because it’s tiring and hard. It’s easier to not try and then complain about things not going our way. But even the laziest among us realizes that it takes some kind of real inner effort to extract a meaningful life from our existence. We like to think that fulfilled people just lucked out in an unfair world that cheated us. But people who truly attain happiness have earned it, and there’s no other way to get it. True happiness doesn’t come from relinquishing responsibility or waiting for some windfall of good fortune. Real happiness is gleaned through a lifetime of making conscious decisions to improve one’s self through a tireless devotion to growth. It is the hardest thing in the world.

The type of lasting inner happiness each of us wants does not come from outward achievements or accomplishments or fame and fortune, but from an inner integrity and mastering of one’s own self — primarily, one’s emotions, one’s health and body, one’s energy, and one’s mind. These areas are relatively elusive and intangible. They’re much harder to succeed at than succeeding in business, physical pleasure, or other outward pursuits. One can have every conceivable material luxury and still feel completely inadequate inside. Until our inner world is mastered, the outer world will provide little lasting security, comfort, or joy.

In one way, our most challenging test is the one you’re facing right now: whether to give up or to keep going in moments of despair. Fortunately, this moment of despair is the same moment this particular test is identified, and that becomes our first real opportunity to pass it. To pass this test, you simply resolve not to give up. This is where an inner determination and integrity begins to take shape. We decide that regardless of the apparent hopelessness of our surrounding circumstances, we are making a promise to ourselves and to our life that we will not lose faith in ourselves or our life, but will instead use every obstacle, every moment of suffering, and every other challenge as a way to bring out some useful quality in ourselves and to improve our character. This begins with an ongoing decision to remain vigilant in our building an inner life that’s capable of withstanding hardships, disappointments, and disillusioning situations, big and small.

We will continue this process by resolving to work in each area of our inner life in some way, every day: by trying to control and learn from our emotional reactions to the world, by trying to improve the basic aspects of our body and overall health, by trying to use our precious time and energy in the most constructive and beneficial way, and by trying to constantly develop the powers of our mind to become more thoughtful, more insightful, more compassionate, and more conscientious.

We slowly but surely find that the cultivation of these aspects of our life takes priority above our old concerns and worries, and gives us a new sense of purpose aside from what we used to consider most urgent or stressful. We also find that even in ongoing times of struggle, we approach our challenges with a new clarity, a new optimism and vigor, as we realize that perhaps many of these ordeals don’t hurt us as much as they actually improve us from the outside in and the inside out.

There will still be moments of doubt. There will still be times when we think about returning to our old hopeless mindset. There will be times that we almost give up again, when we think that maybe we really aren’t strong enough to keep going. But then, a small but powerful voice reminds us of our promise, and reminds us of the little bits of progress we have made — and this will be just enough to keep us committed and moving forward.

We begin to see more and more that life isn’t about getting something or going somewhere, but about becoming someone and growing inside. And anything we do end up getting or anywhere we do end up going is only valuable to us to the extent that it helps us become a better version of who we’re really meant to be: a loving and useful human being.

There’s a new sense of destiny when you realize that life isn’t about anything other than trying to be yourself and the absolute highest-quality person you can imagine being, and then making those the same thing. This is a lifelong mission, and one that it’s never too late to start. I should know — I’ve only just begun it myself.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

# How Can I Quit Smoking for Good?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

May 29, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew W.K.,**

I want to quit smoking. I’ve smoked off and on for the past ten years, and my smoking got really heavy over the past two years, sometimes almost three packs a day. It’s gotten so bad that for the first time I’ve decided I want to quit 100 percent. In the past, I tried to “cut back” or “taper off,” but that would only be for a day or maybe two, and then pretty soon I’d end up resuming my smoking again full-on, only to then have it increase even more because it seemed I was powerless in reducing it. I’ve tried various methods, including patches, and they didn’t really work. I don’t know if you smoke now or ever smoked, but I thought maybe you might have some advice here.

Thanks,All Smoked Out

**Dear All Smoked Out,**

I’ve smoked. I really wanted to be a smoker. For some reason, I wanted to see what the world of smoking was all about, so I put genuine effort into getting hooked. It eventually worked, and I smoked for several years. It felt like some sort of rite of passage, a genuine life experience that I was getting under my belt. It certainly bonded me with other smokers, and I was able to understand and have much more compassion for addicts that I hadn’t understood before.

After a few years of being a light smoker, I decided I should probably just stop smoking entirely. It never really occurred to me that smoking was bad for me. It always felt good, but I had started to notice that the good feelings and head-rushes I used to get from smoking had dissipated and were replaced by new feelings of exhaustion and hollowness. It was like I could actually feel the cigarette draining the life out of me each time I inhaled, and rather than feel exhilarated and pleasurably dizzy, I felt this deep wave of fatigue and anxiety. It would take me five or ten minutes to bounce back and feel relatively normal again.

My smoking friends told me not to take those tired and sick feelings too seriously. They said, “You just work through those bad feelings by smoking more, and eventually they go away.”

I threw away all the cigarettes I had and was determined to resist the urge to ask others to give me smokes. This worked for a while. I felt waves of temptation wash over me when I would see cigarette logos, advertising, and especially empty boxes littered on the street. I would kick the boxes open to see if there happened to be one inside. There never was, until one day I kicked at a box of Newport 100s and, to my amazement, there was one perfectly intact, beautiful, long cigarette still remaining in the corner of the pack.

I figured this was too good to pass up. It was a free pass. I immediately bought a Bic lighter and smoked the Newport. It was great and the whole experience of finding it was exciting and put me in a great mood. It felt like I had won a special game. I went back into the shop where I bought the lighter and decided to purchase a whole brand new pack of Newports. I smoked three as I walked home. But by the time I got to my door, the good feelings had worn off and I realized I hadn’t quit smoking at all. So now what?

It felt stupid to throw away this new, crisp, almost full pack of Newports, but I realized that if I didn’t toss them, I’d smoke them all and be smoking every day again. There was a very vague realization, way back in some blocked-out and faraway part of my mind, that I was hooked more deeply than I had thought and had begun to play small games with myself revolving around trying to find ways to smoke. I wasn’t fully aware of how those games would evolve. But they did.

In only a few days, I found myself back to kicking at empty cigarette boxes on the sidewalk. I longingly remembered the thrill of discovering that one surprise cigarette inside that discarded pack. I was sure if I found one like that again, it would be a well-deserved little treat — just one smoke and that would be it. Maybe that’s how I could smoke from now on: only smoke when I’m lucky enough to find one in a pack on the ground. It seemed like a great and very fun plan. Last time, my only mistake had been buying that whole pack after just getting that one freebie off the ground. Next time, I would only have the one found cigarette and never buy a pack again in my life.

A few days later, as I was walking along and looking for cigarette boxes to kick, I noticed a perfectly good unsmoked cigarette lying in a crack on the sidewalk. I fished it out, examined it a bit, and determined that it was as clean and new as the one that I had discovered in the Newport box. It must’ve accidentally fallen out of someone’s pack as they fumbled with it. This was almost as fun as finding a cigarette still in the box, so I smoked it and felt pretty happy with myself. I didn’t immediately go and buy a new pack, and just left it at that. But by the next day, I was eyeing the ground more than ever, hoping to find more not-empty packs or accidentally unsmoked cigarettes.

My eyes darted across the pavement, and I could feel my standards lowering — only new cigarettes had become found cigarettes in packs on the ground. Suddenly I saw an almost unsmoked cigarette that was sort of bent and sitting by the corner of a building, like someone had gone out to have a really quick two-puff smoke break and then hastily stubbed it out. This was almost as good as finding a completely unsmoked cigarette. Who was I to complain?

I broke off the little smoked end and snapped off the filter (where you could still see the previous smoker’s lipstick stains), and smoked it right there. It was strong without the filter, but I felt it was still pretty good. It had a harsher taste because it had been partially smoked, but I still felt like it was basically a new cigarette. I felt thrifty and resourceful. Never did I dream that in only a couple weeks’ time, this little game of scavenging cigarettes would evolve into me collecting any and all cigarette butts off the sidewalk, putting them in my pocket, and then re-rolling them at home into “new” cigarettes. All I cared about was that I wasn’t buying new packs of cigarettes. In my distorted mind, that meant I wasn’t a full-blown smoker. Meanwhile, the few people who were aware of my sidewalk butt hunting were completely disgusted and confused. It never occurred to me how warped my thinking had become.

This went on for many months, and eventually led to me just buying regular cigarettes again, rolling tobacco, and becoming a heavier smoker than I ever had been before. When I decided to quit again after seven years of steady smoking, it was extremely challenging, probably one of the hardest things I had faced up till then. I did it cold-turkey and didn’t use any method other than distraction. I don’t think willpower would’ve worked for me. I had to distract myself with life.

So every time I would feel the urge to smoke, I would do something else instead that I needed to do anyway. The craving would be very strong, but eventually the activity would take over and the craving would pass and I would get something done in the meantime. It killed two birds with one stone. Sometimes I would feel the urge to smoke, so I’d complete a bunch of simple tasks in a row, like going to get the mail, taking out the trash, running some errands, and returning some phone calls. Other times, I would have to come up with tasks to do, especially when I was traveling. If I was at the airport and felt like smoking, instead of going outside into the drop-off area where everyone was having their last-minute smokes, I would force myself to check in and go through security, just so it would be that much harder to go back out to smoke. This had the added side effect of helping me be much more on time for my flights.

Other times, I would clean up huge parts of my house that had grown disorganized, or answer a bunch of letters, or anything else I had been putting off. I realized that whenever I had been smoking, I was just sitting or standing around, not doing anything. I had wasted so much time, and I had so much that always needed to get done.

But the most effective thing I ever found to do when I had the urge to smoke was to exercise. It didn’t really matter what kind of exercise it was: I air-drummed, danced, did jumping jacks, push-ups, weights, stationary bikes, even just lifted my luggage at the airport over and over — anything other than smoking. The benefit was again twofold, but with an added element. Unlike the other tasks like house chores and work, I noticed that the more I exercised, the less I physically felt like smoking. The cravings were tangibly reduced. It really felt like oil and water; smoking and exercise just didn’t mix. The greatest part was, it felt like I was truly turning something bad into something good. All the smoking was clearly damaging my body, and now I could take that exact craving and use it to motivate myself to get better. I had always been into exercise as a way to make my mind feel better, but I had never seen how it could reduce these kinds of negative cravings, too.

I can only tell you what worked for me. I absolutely understand people who haven’t had an easy time when it comes to quitting smoking. At times, the craving was so intense and brutal that it felt like I was having an out-of-body experience. But the craving will pass. It is different for everyone, but it is always possible. And I also don’t think it’s bad to smoke if someone wants to. I have a good friend who smokes, and he just feels that it’s an important part of what he’s meant to do in life. Who am I to say otherwise?

But if you do want to stop, there are clearly lots of options out there for quitting. Fortunately, it all comes down to one simple thing: Just don’t smoke. Do something else instead. Do something good for yourself when you feel the urge to smoke. This is a technique that can be applied to many challenging areas of life. When you have a bad feeling creeping in, use it as a direct stimulation to do something good in place of it. It starts a new kind of habit and a new kind of addiction: getting addicted to becoming the kind of person you really want to be. Don’t give up.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

#  ‘How Can I Regain My Confidence?’

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 7, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**Dear Andrew W.K.,**

To put it simply, I’ve lost my confidence. I used to be able to wake up in the morning knowing who I was, feeling sure of myself and ready to take on the world. But over the past few years, I’ve felt myself slipping away and it’s come to the point where I no longer recognize myself.

Before this, I had accomplished a lot in life. I bought my own home at age 23, I’m well-educated, I love my career, and I have an amazing support group of friends and family. Yet when I look at my life, I feel boring — like there’s nothing outwardly special or impressive about me these days.

I know I should be able to be proud of what I’ve done in the past — and I am — but that drive to do more just isn’t there anymore. I just want to be confident again and know who I am. I’ve lost my way and don’t know how to get back my old self.

Your friend,Lost Along the Way

**Dear Lost Along The Way,**

There is no “old self” to get back to. There is only yourself now. There is no real way to “be who you were;” you can only to be who you are. Whatever good qualities you had then are still there, but they are not the same. You are who you were but you’re also not. This is the puzzle of the ever developing person: Realizing that the ever unfolding qualities are hard to track or pin down, even though they’re currently taking even more complete shape right now as you read this.

Stop letting your mind criticize and judge you based on a version of yourself that doesn’t exist anymore. Even though you loved those past times, if you’re really honest, I’m guessing you’ll agree that you don’t want to move back to then. If today was your final day on earth, I doubt you would spend very much time thinking about how you used to be and would instead do everything you could to be as present as possible and soak up as much of your life while it’s right in front of you. I imagine this is probably how you thought back in the day as well. You were just alive and living it for all it was worth. You can only go forward, and it will always be changing and never be what it was. The longer you live, the more you’ll realize the impossibility of holding onto anything other than where you currently are. And even that moment is in motion. It’s all one, big, huge, solid moment — a moment called “your life.” Don’t go back and live in a moment that doesn’t exist any more when you have this precious moment right in front of you now. You’ve earned it. Be worthy of your own life.

As far as the concept of confidence goes, it seems that the idea of being confident is a largely misinterpreted, poorly-applied, extremely over-valued and distorted version of integrity. What is commonly described as confidence is the sort of artificially well-adjusted swagger we secretly wished we had, but generally loathe when we see it aggressively displayed by others. It’s an unnecessarily brazen boldness that seems to be trying a little too hard to compensate for some poorly concealed weakness. This type of impudence really isn’t confidence at all, but just a loud and futile attempt to drown out fear with pompous boasting rather than truly overcoming it and transforming doubts into actual strengths. What may first appear as certitude and ability, even to the person showcasing these traits, is really just a sort of disconnection masquerading as self-assurance.

Intentionally blinding ourselves to the inherent insecurity found in nearly all aspects of our daily existence does not count as confidence. Pushing those feelings of doubt, confusion, and instability out of one’s mind doesn’t count as belief in oneself. It’s more like an aggressive ignorance, an unwillingness to go through the humbling and painful process of true self-evaluation and growth.

True confidence is a quiet and largely invisible state of inner conviction. You don’t need to outwardly prove your bravery to yourself or anyone else. When you’re genuinely confident, it’s a choice you perpetually make to be true to yourself, even when that true is full of vulnerability and risk.

You’re developing a deeper level of courage: The courage to admit when you don’t feel brave, the willingness to doubt yourself when it allows for an honest introspective examination of your soul, the honesty to admit when you’re confused and afraid, and to realize all of that in a constructive way.

Brushing off one’s doubts may seem like an easy way to empower oneself, but truly having the confidence to face one’s weaker moments with brutal self-awareness and penetrating honesty is even better. This is certainly more challenging, but it’s infinitely more rewarding for our spirit and our surroundings to be delicate and thoughtful with our strength.

It’s really this type of quiet confidence that we’re striving for. And whether we like it or not, this type of confidence cannot always be developed or measured by things like buying houses, getting college degrees, or being popular with others.

I’m someone who has never felt very confident in that typical outgoing way, but I also never really believed I had to feel confident in order to do something I wanted to do. I realized I could be confident without feeling confident. I had many of the same misconceptions that people who were confident inside always felt brave and strong. I think now it doesn’t really matter if we feel confident or not. What matters is what we actually do, regardless of how scared we may feel. That’s where this deeper type of confidence starts to develop — the confidence to live your life, even when you don’t feel particularly self-assured or bold.

So, here’s a short check list I keep in mind when it comes to true confidence. Maybe you’ll relate to these ideas and find them helpful, too.

May I have the strength to tirelessly work towards developing…

The confidence to let myself truly be myself, free from abusive self-judgment and criticism.

The confidence to follow my heart, despite the fears and reservations of my critical mind.

**The confidence to not compare myself with others, including my own past.**

The confidence to feel weak, afraid, and doubtful, when those feelings are justified and honest.

The confidence to face those fearful feelings regardless of how uncomfortable or painful they may be.

The confidence to stand apart from others when my heart tells me to do so.

The confidence to be in love with life and all its aspects, even when that love seems irrational or illogical.

The confidence to remove myself from social situations and pressures when my soul tells me they’re harmful or unnecessary.

The confidence to not base my self-worth or self-image on my outer achievements or possessions, but instead on the growth and development of my inner character.

The confidence to live by an ever improving set of principles that allow me to rise to my highest conception of myself, especially when adhering to those involving sacrifice or hardship.

The confidence to accept the struggle and difficulty that comes with committing to this path, and to stay the course despite obstacles and adversities.

The confidence to commit to the ongoing process of living life, fully and truly.

The confidence to continuously realize I’m in the midst of an adventure, and to have appreciation for the inherent value and meaning of every step in that journey, regardless of how it may challenge or inconvenience me at the time.

Continue directing your efforts to developing this type of inner confidence and let go of all other efforts to appear strong, brave or courageous. Just be yourself. Learning to have the confidence to be who you are is the simplest and most challenging task in life. The more you turn yourself over to developing this sort of inner acceptance, the more you will be shown where to go and how to get there. It starts by just being here and being yourself, with total love and total understanding. Never give up on living and loving yourself. Just keep celebrating this intense experience called life and we’ll figure it out together. I’m going through it with you.

Your friend,Andrew W.K.

**‘How Do I Deal With Difficult People?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 14, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’ve been a fan of your writing and the ideas you talk about with becoming a better person. They relate to my own self improvement work, and I’ve been applying the philosophy of positive partying to my life with many good results. But one area I’ve really had a hard time with is getting along with people I don’t like. I have good relationships with my friends and family, and I’m always working to improve them even more, but I often find myself struggling with certain people who I just can’t find a way to enjoy, no matter how I try.

I realize that deep down inside it’s probably some kind of personal shortcoming, and some of these people I dislike have specifically pointed out that I need to overcome my contempt for them if I’m really going to be the more positive and advanced person I’m aiming for. But it seems so hard and unpleasant having to hang out with these people I really can’t stand. I don’t hate them; I just get really, really bad vibes from them and don’t know why. How do I deal with this and how can I learn to get along with them in my quest for total positivity?

*Thank you,
Trying To Love Everyone*

Dear Trying To Love Everyone,

We should strive to love everyone, but by no means are we required to like everyone. In fact, it seems that the more we work on developing a basic love for all people, the more clear it becomes that we don’t enjoy spending time with some of them. This is actually what happens when we get in touch with our heart and loosen the grip our mind has on our life.

For starters, our heart realizes that “love” and “like” are two different things. Just as you can love food but not like every dish, we can love people but not want to hang out with all of them. We don’t need to force ourselves to spend time with people we don’t like just to prove how open-minded we are. That’s a type of self-abuse. We have to learn to trust our instincts and use caution when we open our hearts to the world and to other people. Just like opening your veins to a poisonous snake, opening your heart to a poisonous person can be equally harmful. But someone who is poisonous to one person can be medicinal to another, and we must let our heart tell us who is helpful or hurtful to our particular soul.

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by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 6, 2014

In our great ongoing effort to pursue a better life, we often find that as we try to improve and be positive, we can become overwhelmingly critical of ourselves. All of a sudden, we expect to feel nothing but “positive” feelings for everyone and everything around us. We begin to hold ourselves to a new and unnatural belief that everything and everyone must be “all good,” and if they’re not, it’s because we’re not good enough to realize their goodness. We start to second-guess every feeling as it arises and our mind becomes a drill sergeant, running us through exhausting training exercises in a futile effort to “think right.” But deep down inside, our heart is telling us that developing a truly open and positive spirit isn’t as simple or extreme as just deciding that everything is “all good.” That would be similar to believing that in order to become a great chef you have to force yourself to eat all kinds of food you don’t like, and that by constantly forcing yourself to eat them, you will somehow be expanding your abilities as a chef. Your mind tells you that not eating what you dislike is somehow a sign of weakness or underdevelopment, even though your heart and tongue are telling you otherwise.

Of course it’s always good to challenge our tastes and broaden our horizons, but not at the perpetual expense of our happiness. The point of journeying through the world isn’t to abuse ourselves by spending time on unpleasant activities and endeavors just to prove how tolerant we are. Rather, the point of this adventure is to find out what we’re truly meant to do and whom we’re truly meant to do it with. And the only way to experience that truth is to follow it as it emerges from the heart.

At this stage in the unfolding of the human world, there are some people who, for whatever reason, do want to harm others and cause suffering. Why they want to do this is complicated and often involves deep-seated confusion and the continuation of strongly rooted patterns of misery. We can feel compassion for these people’s pain, but we don’t need to incorporate their pain into our lives or become part of their pattern in order to have love and understanding for them.

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by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 19, 2015

Some of these people are easy to identify, especially when they attack us blatantly, like lashing out in a violent manner with a fist or a knife — but other malevolent people are much harder to spot. They use more subtle methods of attack. In fact, they will often use our own openness and desire for positive development as a weapon against us. The more we trust these types of harmful people, the more they pervert our goodness and turn it against us, making us more and more doubtful of ourselves and more distrustful of our hearts’ quiet clarity. They convince us that the harm they’re causing us is really self-inflicted. They’ll say that any pain or discomfort we’re experiencing is only proof of some shortcoming in our own soul. They will say that no matter how bad they are to us, it’s actually “for our own good” because it’s somehow making us more “advanced” to submit to their torture. If only we were as advanced as they, we could then appreciate how much good they’re actually doing us, despite all their cruelty.

Our minds, especially in their naive efforts to outdo themselves, will often try to deny what our hearts are telling us — especially when we’re trying to grow and change. Our minds will criticize our hearts for being “judgmental and negative” about someone we find unbecoming, when in fact our hearts are showing us nothing but the truth of the situation. The mind has no access to or direct experience of this kind of truth. It can only ponder, intellectualize, and investigate the concept of truth from the outside, never really knowing truth. Only the heart knows and experiences truth as a real quality, and the inner experience of this sensation forms the foundation of a deep and lasting true positivity.

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by [VILLAGE VOICE STAFF](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/villagevoicestaff/)

December 23, 2015

So, in your efforts to become a more positive person, don’t discard your intuition and natural ability to identify situations that are not positive. Don’t eat rotten fruit “just to be nice.” We can be positive and recognize negative elements, situations, and people. We can pursue greatness and light while not forcing ourselves to wallow in misery and darkness just to prove we’re strong enough to do so. Follow your heart and let it bring you deeper into yourself and your world. Bring out what is inside your heart and go where it leads you. Developing and releasing the vast knowledge of love found in the heart is the true Second Coming and the true savior of all mankind.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**‘Should I Feel Bad About My Past?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 23, 2015

*[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]*
Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’ve done some bad things in my past. Most of it was many years ago, but I committed a few more recent sins that were even worse and ended up getting me into serious trouble and really hurting some people close to me.

For the first time in my life, I decided to really try and become a better person. I’ve cleaned up my act a lot over the past six months, and now I feel like I’m genuinely turning over a new leaf. I’m being the person I knew I always could be, and if I keep my demons in check, I know I can live a good life.

The problem is, some of the people close to me who saw me at my worst just won’t let me forget about my old ways. They keep dragging me back and digging up my old mistakes, sometimes in a joking way, and sometimes in a way that’s cold and insulting. I desperately want to put the past behind me and be free of that time in my life. I know I made a lot of mistakes and I realize I hurt some people, but I need those people to forgive and forget if they really want to see me move forward. People don’t realize how depressing and discouraging it is to have to keep thinking about all that bad stuff. It almost pulls me back into my bad behavior.

How can I get my close friends and family to let my past go?

*Sincerely,*
*Forward To The Future*

Dear Forward To The Future,

There once was a gentleman who was a severe addict. When he was under the influence, he tended to be mean and rude, and he generally misbehaved in the ways you’d expect. This went on for several years, and during one of his worst moments, his belligerence was captured on video during a national TV interview. He acted terribly to the show’s host and the people around him. He eventually cleaned up his life, but that TV interview lived on and became somewhat notorious. And our ever-improving technology gave it new and extended life on the computer, much to his dismay.

He managed to never watch the interview, despite hearing lots about it from friends and concerned associates. He just couldn’t bear to see himself in that state, so he refused to view the footage. However, after a handful of years of being clean, he found himself losing his way and falling out of step in his efforts to hold on to his integrity. At the crucial moment where he would’ve gone back to his old ways, he had a flash of soul-searching brilliance and decided to sit down and, for the first time ever, watch that video. He said it was the hardest five minutes of his life. But it was almost magical how quickly it shocked his system out of the dangerous direction he had once again been heading toward. He realized he never fully faced how awful he had been back then. He realized he had never fully faced everything about himself. He was completely devastated, but forced himself to watch that short clip over and over again. It was agonizing, humiliating, and nauseating, but he watched and re-watched until he memorized every word and movement and unfortunate micro-event in all its embarrassing detail. He says now that his decision to watch himself at his worst ended up saving his life. He’s even gone so far as to keep the video loaded on his computer and cellphone to watch whenever he needs a sobering dose of perspective and clarity.

Our past is our life history. That history is extraordinarily valuable, even when it’s upsetting and painful. As the old saying goes, those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. Considering that you’ve made some truly successful efforts to change your ways and overcome your past, it would be unwise to start blocking it out entirely, even though it would be nice to feel like it never happened. We all run the risk of replicating our past errors — or making worse ones — when we don’t fully fathom the depth and scope of our total experience. We need to wrestle with what we’ve done. Sometimes nightmares are not meant to be forgotten.

When our friends and family bring up our past mistakes, it’s natural to feel defensive and uncomfortable and to wish they wouldn’t remind us of those dark times. We can feel attacked, as though we’re not being forgiven or allowed to move on. But ideally, we really should try to go beyond those initial emotional responses and have the strength to continuously own up to our past and look at it squarely and fearlessly. Instead of blocking it out, we should tirelessly dive into it. We should see all there is to see in our lowest moments and do what we can to keep them present in our mind, even though they can make us feel bad. Those low moments are a means to help us live better than before. In that way, we should feel bad about our mistakes — not so they discourage us and bring us down, but so they might motivate us and compel us to rise up. It can be an agonizing process, but this is the only real way to ensure we take full responsibility for the lesser things we’ve done. Painful memories can be useful when we apply them to the development of a character we’re proud of. Remembering our worst allows us to work toward our best.

Making mistakes isn’t so bad. Everyone does it. It’s part of life and it’s how we grow. Mistakes are forgivable, but not learning from them isn’t. The biggest sin isn’t any particular bad deed in itself, but rather the sin of choosing to remain ignorant and irresponsible in the face of great opportunities for self-education and -improvement. It’s easy to make a mistake and feel bad for a short while and then just go on with life as though nothing happened. But that doesn’t mean we actually learned anything from the experience.

For whatever reason, it seems nearly impossible for most of us to reach our highest potential without seeing ourselves at our lowest and most deprived. Our despicable behavior should never be buried away inside us. It must be brought out, dealt with, and mastered, or it will destroy us. And what’s most interesting is that through the process of bringing it out and dealing with it, those same destructive aspects of our character can actually end up saving us. Our personal history doesn’t have to be something we dread or hide from, despite how awful it feels to confront it. On the contrary, it can be an incredibly powerful book of detailed teachings on how to live our own life correctly. We can see what worked and didn’t work. And the best part is, these lessons are teachings that we can truly understand, because we lived them personally.

There are many things I have done that I remain extremely ashamed of. But as much as I would like to erase them and pretend they were all just part of someone else’s life, they were *my* life, and they still are part of my life. I keep those memories extremely close and in front of me. I reflect on them every day. I force them to remain painfully alive. It doesn’t feel good for me to think about them, but it’s not supposed to feel good. What *does* feel good is knowing that I truly don’t ever have to live like that again. And the more I keep those mistakes in mind, the more I’m sure I won’t ever repeat them.

Remember, no matter what you’ve done in the past, you can always extract some sort of good from the bad, just as long as you’re determined to learn from it. Be thankful you still have friends and family that stuck with you despite your past misdeeds, and be grateful that they’re helping you perpetually face your history in a way that keeps it alive and useful. It’s all part of the strange paradox of the developing human spirit: You’re turning lead into gold. You’re letting your worst bring out your best. You’re letting your lowest lead toward your highest. Stay strong and don’t give up, even when it’s painful. That’s how you can tell it’s real progress. It’s not easy, but it’s worth it.

Your friend,
Andrew W.K.

**‘Am I Losing My Mind?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 30, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’m annoyed by life. I’m irritated by everyone. I feel a constant frustration and I don’t know why. I’ve tried looking inside myself to figure out what my problem is, but I just get more frustrated when I can’t find the answer. I basically feel on edge all the time and like I just can’t enjoy life. I want to know the meaning of life! I want to understand it!

I tried talking to my friends and family and they say things like, “Just relax” or “Get out more,” or basically tell me that everything’s fine and I should learn to “chill” and not get so wrapped up in these sorts of big questions. But what do you do when you don’t feel like you can just ignore these questions? What if everything’s not fine? It’s so hard to explain. Am I losing my mind?

*Help Me*Dear Help Me,

Everything is certainly not fine, and you’re completely in the right for picking up on it and reacting. The world has grown into an extremely complicated and frightening place, and no amount of “looking on the bright side” can fully distract one from the horrors and riddles of existence. However, despite how pressing our situation is, we seem to have grown very good at keeping ourselves busy and occupied with a myriad of inconsequential tasks, knowing deep down that we’re dodging something desperately important. We’re supported by so many others as we collectively put off thinking too much about life and our problems for another day.

What you are feeling is your own soul’s natural attraction to the core questions of life. Facing these primary tenets of existence is intense and exhausting but absolutely necessary. Your frustration comes from not just the difficulty of the task, but from a lack of adequate support from your surroundings. Acknowledging our situation and embracing the confusion that comes with life is a crucial step in our development and salvation, but we often shy away from it.

You’re not losing your mind — you’re finding your soul. You’re opening your eyes to the wonders and challenges of life and working to develop the strength to face it. This quest for understanding is extraordinarily difficult and a lifelong journey, but it’s also exactly what we’re here to do. It’s crucial we face the biggest questions of life, not just for our sanity, but for our very survival. We can’t just “deal with it later” or say, “Hey, some things just aren’t worth thinking about.” Really, these big questions are the *only* things worth thinking about.

A great deal of energy is spent on distracting us from contemplating life too deeply. We often seem to be so overwhelmed by life and its riddles that we almost prefer to not fully be alive. It seems some of us would rather float along in a sort of suspended state of semi-awareness, alive enough to function without thinking too deeply about anything or anyone, trying to stay as comfortable as possible while just getting by. But even in this delusional blur, there’s a quiet and persistent urging, somewhere deep within us, pushing and poking at us and desperately trying to get us to wake up and face life full-on. In the long run, it often takes more effort to ignore that impulse than to simply give in and heed its call to action. I commend you for not blocking it out. It’s not pleasant and it’s annoying, but it’s necessary that we listen to it.

Many individuals, institutions, and social systems have encouraged us to tune out that part of ourselves. We’ve been told not to concern ourselves too much with that inner sense of urgency. We’ve been endlessly and generously supported in our efforts to block out the overwhelming questions about life. “Those questions are too hard,” we’re told. “Don’t bother with them.” We’re rarely encouraged to ask, “What is really going on? What is life really all about?” Because of the staggering complexity and insurmountable vastness of the world, many of the biggest and most fundamental questions are simply ignored rather than pondered at all. And because many of these questions appear to have no easy answer, we prefer to work on things we can answer more easily. It’s highly possible no one knows the answer to the meaning of life, and if someone does, it may be an answer we would rather not know. But that’s not a reason to stop asking or tirelessly searching.

If we’re to become fully realized human beings, we must fully realize as much as we can about what being a human is all about. And that includes the most distressing and impenetrable parts of life.

We should never cast something fundamentally important aside just because it’s frustrating. We’re worthy of understanding the nature of our total situation on every level. We owe it to ourselves and to each other to remain completely enthralled with life and all its endless mystery, and not just decide that it’s too tiring to grapple with. It’s not better to just focus on daily life and friends and family. It’s best to focus on all of life by looking deeply into everything we encounter, and mine our everyday experiences for what insights they can offer us as we move toward our biggest questions, as we try to penetrate the deeper layers of life.

Everything counts. And you are completely justified in feeling frustrated, irritated, and annoyed by a world that discounts and ignores so much of what is most pressing and fundamental to our existence. Do not give in. Do not give up. Be polite, be patient, be compassionate, be loving, but don’t be afraid to think and question everything, especially the most essential aspects of who and what and where and how you are. Stay the course and go all the way. May the search for truth bring out the best in you, even as it pushes you to your limit. It’s a test we each can pass if we have the courage to take it. It’s the test of becoming yourself. And maybe searching for the meaning of life *is* the meaning of life after all.

Your friend,
Andrew W.K.

**‘Anger Management Feels Impossible, but Is It?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 8, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear Andrew W.K.,

No matter the issue or how calm I try to stay, I can’t help but lash out at others around me. I try to be nice to people and lead a positive life, but my anger always gets in the way. I go and apologize to the people after I blow up at them, but then I remember something else that happened and it gets me angry all over again.

I just want to be happy as much as I can but my obnoxious angry side keeps getting in the way. I’m not angry all the time and have lots of days when I’m very cheerful, but when I have my angry days, it goes beyond just slamming doors. Any advice?

*Thanks,
Angry Optimist*

Dear Angry Optimist,

Anger is extremely underrated. In terms of raw energy and a source of powerful physical force, anger is one of the most primal forms of vitality we have access to. Different people have different amounts of this energetic drive, and it takes shape in different ways depending on the person, but nearly everyone thinks of anger as an enemy, when it really can be a wonderfully powerful friend.

It sounds like you’re someone who’s been endowed with a large amount of this power, and it is up to you as to whether it becomes a blessing or a curse. As always, it’s how we use it that counts. You don’t have an anger management *problem*; you have an energy management *challenge*.

For starters, it might be helpful to start thinking of this “anger” as a type of precious internal being — almost like a rare and wild animal. You don’t need to judge this animal as good or bad or right or wrong or happy or sad. It is just a creature who can’t help but be true to its wild and passionate nature. This wild animal’s natural state is to be ferocious and incredibly powerful. You can succumb to this animal’s fearsome and intimidating prowess, give in to it and let it pull you down and trample you, or you can harness it, saddle it and control it, and ride it toward goodness, using all of its incredible energy for all it’s worth. Again, this “anger” is really just pure, raw, life force. We too often judge it and decide it must be bad, so we label it as “anger” or “negativity” when really it is too pure to be anything other than spirit.

It’s up to us to direct it toward something good. We can let it bring out our worst, or we can discipline it and let it bring out our best.

It’s very important to remember that we’re not trying to remove, cancel or pretend anger isn’t there — we’re trying to transform it into something powerfully good. This takes some amount of conscious effort and discipline, but you absolutely can do it. The fact that you’re even aware enough of it to write in about it is proof that you have what it takes to master and tame this emotional power. Again, we aren’t trying to live without these feelings — we’re trying to live better by embracing them and using them constructively.

It’s extremely valuable to develop good manners, polite behavior, and a type of inner and outer resilience that helps you keep a hold on that rage rather than let it spill out and abuse other people. That’s like letting the wild animal break out of its cage, and then it mutilates everyone around it just because you were too lazy to keep the door locked. Once that energy breaks out in an uncontrolled and chaotic way, it’s like a powerful poison that can do irreparable damage to what you care about unless that poison is tamed and transformed.

In those situations where you feel like you can’t keep the animal at bay, the best way to keep it caged is through the power of gentle habits and good manners. Take deep breaths. Swallow your power back in where it can be transformed and redirected. Hold on to that anger until you can let it out constructively. Believe me, mastering this is absolutely one of the most difficult things in life. Running a marathon is infinitely easier than trying to master these kinds of emotions. But sometimes having something to physically push up against will help contain and absorb the power in a positive way. Pushing against weights, pushing against your physical limits, running and exerting yourself with all your might — any form of physical effort or exercise is a beautiful and simple way to transform that dark energy into something deeply beneficial and immediately rewarding.

On the other end of the spectrum, sometimes just sitting quietly can be a challenging but deeply empowering way to stop that outward overflow of rage. But remember, you are not sitting there trying to let go of the anger — you are trying to use it wisely. You must find the methods that allow you to grab hold of it and control it. These feelings are here to tell us something. They are here to be used wisely. They are here to test us. When you feel the overwhelming anger swelling and growing uncontrollable, always remind yourself of this essential truth:

“This is a test. This is just another test to see if I’m strong enough to really live my life. Do I have the strength to be the best person I can be? Do I have the strength to pass this test? Yes, I do. I can pass this test.”

The anger wants to be used. It wants to serve our best motives and it wants to be transformed into something useful and noble. With laser-sharp honesty, we will almost always see through the nonsensical reasons we have come up with for our anger. We’ll quickly realize that we’re trying to explain our inner feelings with outer justifications, and most of the time, the anger is completely and purely unrelated to anything real beyond the feeling itself. It’s just that untapped raw power, and if we don’t learn to use it wisely, we’ll continue to search for outside drama. But again, feelings and raw vital energy don’t make “sense” in the way our mind often wishes it does. We have to think beyond that sort of rational logic and look up to our higher intellect. If we are deeply honest, we know that our frustrations are usually our own self-deception and emotional ignorance looking to blame anything other than ourselves for our situations. Everything we are feeling and going through, it’s all an a series of ongoing sacred life lessons — to be used by us for our own transformation, our own salvation, and our own elevation. Failure to harness the insight of their wisdom will lower us to despair and unredeemable suffering.

Anger can be our friend, a majestic and formidable beast we have tamed. In anger we have a reliable companion we can turn to in moments where we need a trusted source of rough, respectable, and mighty vigor. We can admire it; we don’t have to fear and resent it.

So, stop fighting your anger and start using this power inside you to push to higher levels of living. Don’t let go of those feelings, but reinterpret them and train them to work *for* you rather than *against* you. Ride that raw vitality toward beauty and joy rather than empty rage and door-slamming violence. You can master these feelings. That’s what they are there for. That’s the whole point of feeling them. Never numb yourself. Feel it all, use it all, and love it all. Love it all.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**‘My Fiance Died; How Can I Live?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 16, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear Andrew W.K.,

My fiancé, Chris, died very suddenly on the night of June 17. He was only 24 years old. One moment he was OK, then the next moment he collapsed. An hour later, he was dead. I still don’t know why, but they think it was a blood clot.

He was my strength and my happiness. He was why I got up and faced every day. Now I feel like life is just something I have to endure until I can see him again. I don’t necessarily want to die. I just want the pain and waiting to be over so I can see him again. I want to be wherever he is. I miss him so much.

Now he’s gone and I’m alone. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know who to turn to. I’m lost. How do I get through this?

*– M*

Dear M,

Words cannot express the depth of my sympathy for you. No extension of my own deepest pain can come close to resembling what I imagine you’re feeling. And yet, vast waves of empathy are pulling me and many others reading this toward you right now. It’s something that can be felt and understood only on a level beyond language or emotion, a level where everything other than pure human compassion and love is disregarded in favor of a fellow human in need. I cannot explain it; I can only tell you that I’m thinking about you and sending you all the strength and power I can summon, right as I type these words. And so are many others reading this whom you’ll probably never meet. But we are all connected in situations like this — and even though that connection is invisible, it is real.

When someone close to you dies mysteriously and unexpectedly, everything is changed, everything is altered, everything is broken and then put back together again incorrectly. There is suddenly a different tone to the air, a different texture to the way things look and feel, a new and indescribably painful transformation of how it feels to exist without that other person’s presence.

But when your soul mate dies — especially without warning — there is a total and complete shattering of the very foundations of life. Nothing feels as though it can be reassembled. Nothing appears to add up or fit together anymore. Everything is skewed and distorted and somehow bound to the ever present wrongness of their being gone. This level of pain and dismay is only intensified when your soul mate is as young as Chris was. Everything about what made life work was undone in a single day. But you can’t blame yourself; you did not end Chris’s life. In a way, his death ended yours. Your life as you knew it ended when his did. Now you have a choice. And it is a beautiful, frightening, and challenging choice: the choice to live again.

You suddenly have more of a reason to live than ever before. Your life can be a tribute to Chris. You can start to use the incredible aching pain inside of you as a source of motivation to keep on going. You now have a purpose that is larger and clearer and more powerful than any purpose can be: to live on in honor of the one you love. You can make every moment of your life into a mission — a mission for Chris.

It won’t be easy. It will take the kind of strength that many people never even dream of needing. But it will bring out the best in you. You will have access to a newfound strength through your devotion to Chris’s spirit and your love for him. You’ll meet new challenges and difficulties, but you will overcome them through your tireless focus on having this incredible reason to live.

Allow yourself to feel every feeling you’re feeling — even when it’s extremely difficult to do so. Every one of those feelings is connected to the power of your new purpose and connected to Chris. And to feel them is to feel Chris. Turn every feeling of pain back into a feeling of unending and all-encompassing devotion to him. That feeling of pain is the feeling of love, and that pure love is what real Truth is made of, the kind that hurts to feel all at once. Hold on to that feeling and use it. It is your source of infinite strength and courage. That aching love is the gift that Chris left you with, a gift of raw feeling and pulsing clarity that you can build from as you keep going forward.

Chris is not gone. He has moved into your heart and soul. Keep him there and make your life count for him. You are not alone. Every person who has ever lost anyone is with you. You are surrounded by angels. You are surrounded by love. And that ever present love will show you the way forward.

You can still keep loving Chris, and still keep living for Chris. He can still be the reason that you get up and face the day. He can still give meaning to your life. Your devotion hasn’t stopped. In fact, it is stronger than ever.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**Should My Friend Abandon Her Dreams to Help Her Mom?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 24, 2015

*[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]*

Dear Andrew,

My best friend/co-worker/roommate just told me she’s dropping everything and moving back to the other side of the country to take care of her sick mother. Now, while I think that’s admirable, it seriously impacts my rent and living situation, not to mention my work life, plus I’m basically losing my best friend. I obviously don’t want to tell her how to live, but the fact is, her mom was always really horrible to her and basically made her life a living hell. When I got her this job and she moved in with me, it was basically the first time she could really start pursuing her own dreams and building a life of her own. I honestly think her giving up everything and moving back home is a huge mistake. It will not only mess up everything she worked so hard for, but it won’t be fun for her to be there — just to help out an old woman who really doesn’t deserve her. My friend says she’s 100 percent going to do this and there’s nothing anyone can say to change her mind. What should I say?

*Thanks,
Losing A Friend*

Dear Losing A Friend,

You should say, “I’m so completely awestruck and moved by the selfless devotion you have for your mother that I’m going to do everything I possibly can to support you and be whatever you need me to be during this challenge. I am your friend and I love you.”

You see, you aren’t losing a friend, you’re gaining a hero, a role model, and a living example of inspiring spiritual integrity that should make you rethink your entire outlook on life and its priorities. Your friend is transcending you. You are witnessing a transformative experience, up close and personal. Your friend is rising up to another level of being — a level that is, unfortunately, too often unseen and unappreciated — it’s as if it’s too high and blinding to look at.

Your friend is beginning one of the most challenging and difficult ordeals in life: the process of truly abandoning selfishness and living a life of service. This is an initiation that can bring out the best and most noble aspects of a person’s character, or lead to resentment, bitterness, and total failure. Many people, when faced with the opportunity to serve someone besides themselves, retreat from the challenge because they don’t think they’re strong enough to do it. What they don’t realize is that the actual process of doing it is what builds that strength inside them. Going through it makes you a better person. You will rise to the occasion when you are called upon — you will become greater than yourself when you have a reason to be.

Your friend has been called upon and she is bravely answering that call. Celebrate her. Honor her. When someone is faced with a situation in which a person truly needs them, a different kind of force moves into action. Influences and powers far beyond the pressures of day-to-day living step in and lead the way — your friend is being directed into a different emotional realm that has very little resemblance to what you think of as “regular life.”

Despite all the great things your friend has already done, and despite all the great dreams she is pursuing for herself, it’s quite possible that her current choice to suddenly sacrifice her personal ambitions in order to help her mom will be the greatest and most important thing she’ll ever do.

This is not an easy idea to understand. More often, we see people being celebrated for the ways they ruthlessly pursued their own ambitions and goals, putting their interests above anyone else’s. We’ve been told that this is a successful person — the person who did it “their way” — the person who never let anyone or anything keep them from getting what they wanted. We think this kind of person must have a very developed and strong inner character — a great inner integrity — to give them the strength and pride to resist all the endless distractions and temptations asking for their attention, their time, their love.

We celebrate the individual who didn’t succumb to any other emergency beyond their own constant and desperate efforts to “win.” They avoided, thwarted, or ignored any circumstance or person that stood in the way of their getting and doing exactly as they pleased. But is this really the kind of person we need in the world?

We need the person who sacrifices their own desires for someone else without even being asked. We need the person who looks at life not as a great race to get ahead, but as a great opportunity to be useful to the world. We need the person who tirelessly thinks of what can be done to make someone else’s life a little bit easier, a little bit happier, a little bit less painful. We need the person who is stronger than their desires and ambitions, who is willing to see life for what it really is: an intense but beautiful chance to *be.*

The fact that your friend has so much going for her in her own life is exactly what makes her choice to give it up even more powerful. The fact that her mother was “horrible” to her, and didn’t “deserve” her help, is what makes her unflinching loyalty that much more admirable. Having so many reasons to say no is what makes your friend’s decision to say yes truly meaningful. This goes beyond logic and reason and what makes sense in the material world.

Your friend is entering a world of spirit you can only know from experience. It can be frightening to consider what the world looks like to your friend right now. It’s staggering to try to picture her view of a radically altered landscape as meaning and order reshuffles. Her strength, compassion, and extraordinarily deep appreciation of life goes even beyond our common understanding. It goes into a place that can only be described as love. Your friend is truly in love.

So I wish for you to open yourself and your heart to the extent that your friend has. I wish for what is happening inside her soul to also happen to you. If you can absorb even just 1 percent of her strength, her goodness, and her clarity, you will see what life is. Your friend is what life is. Her mom is what life is — this all is what life is — in all its inconvenient, frustrating, and confounding glory. Your friend is an angel, and you’re lucky to know her. Aspire to be more like her in every way you can.

*Love,
Andrew W.K.*

# I’m Paralyzed — Is It Possible to Live a Normal Life?

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

July 30, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I write to you from a distant and cold Russia, where falling icicles ruin lots of lives every winter. Sadly, I was one of them. The lower half of my body has been paralyzed for five years. My life is limited to the walls of an apartment and a hospital ward. So, yeah, it’s no party.

I don’t know how to live. I have the huge support of my little family, but I can’t endlessly rely on them. I need to learn to live by myself. But I can’t. It’s hard to find a job or to learn something, mainly because I need to spend one-third of my day on different things related to my health. I rarely speak, because I have nothing new to tell to people around me.

And all this scares me. It makes me angry. And, most of all, it makes me feel useless. Sometimes I’m so ashamed of myself and my helplessness I literally want to isolate myself from the outside world. I know there are lots of people in worse condition than me who can live somewhat normal lives. But I still envy healthy people and can’t figure out how to overcome my current mental condition.

You gave some nice advice about dealing with suicide, procrastination, depression, lack of courage….They all were very useful to me. So maybe you could give me some advice for this exact situation. Is it possible for me to live a normal life?

*Thanks,
D.*

Dear D.,

It’s not possible for you to live a normal life. Due to what happened to you, it’s now only possible for you to live an extraordinary life — an incredible, intense, meaningful, and inspiring life. This is your blessing and your curse. It is up to you to either commit wholeheartedly to embracing your non-normal life for all it’s worth, or to follow the feelings of fear and frustration into deeper levels of despair. I realize I can only imagine the feelings of unfairness, of hopelessness, of complete and utter sadness that must have come with the realization that your life as you knew it had ended. But I can, in my own lesser ways, relate to feeling overwhelmed by life. I deeply admire you for being able to reach out and write about a situation so few people can really understand. And when I share these thoughts with you, they are not coming from my own authority, but from the authority of what I think is an essential truth about life and existence: Each of us is being tested. And your personal test involves your injury and the aftermath you’re in now. This test — like all tests — is to bring out the best you have inside. This test is not here to break your spirit. It may feel that way, but it could build your spirit into something bigger and stronger and more beautiful than ever, all for the purpose of realizing your true self — your true greatness — and unleashing its light into the world.

You’re already triumphant in many ways, and you’ve been passing this test as you’ve learned how to keep going through these past five years. You have made it to this point. Many people would have given up before this. But here you are. You’re obviously thinking deeply about your situation and your life, and you realize that your life-test is continuing to unfold. Now you’re entering into a new phase of this challenge, a new part of the test that will require an even deeper surge of inner strength, effort, commitment, and almost unimaginable amounts of courage and focus. But it is in you. And this is all part of it.

One of the most challenging things in life is to realize that our problems, dilemmas, and disasters are not here to bring us down and destroy us, but here to bring us up and build us. All the bad can be used for good. Each challenging event can in some way make us a better person, even when it seems completely unimaginable that anything good could come from something so painful and upsetting. But that is all part of the test: learning how to see everything as part of a process in which you are growing and overcoming and enlarging the part of yourself that really is truly *YOU*. That part is often brought out by adversity. This is the purpose of the test. Life doesn’t have to be meaningless.

So your challenge is to transform the worst thing that ever happened to you into the best thing. It sounds almost impossible, even as I write this to you. But part of the magic of this transformation is seeing beyond the pain and into yourself, to find the part of you that is pure spirit, pure vitality, pure heart, pure energy. Focus on THAT part of yourself as THE REAL YOU. And whenever you are feeling frustrated, depressed, afraid, or angry, remember that spark inside you that is stronger than all of those feelings. Ask that part of yourself what to do. It will always tell you the truth. It may be deep inside, but it is clear and powerful, and if you listen it will speak to you. It can be your guide. It can be YOU. It already *is* you. You just need to turn inward and bring it to the surface more every day.

The moment you were injured may seem like the most profound and negatively transformative event in your life, but it was only leading you to an event that is more important and profound: the moment you make the decision to devote your life to your own inner development. You can use the power of your mind to overcome the circumstances you’re in and live an extraordinary and meaningful life — perhaps a life even greater than you would’ve ever had otherwise. And while it almost sounds illogical to say that, the true path of self-discovery is rarely based on logic. It is based on spirit and integrity, and those are powers you still have right now living within you.

You are not trapped. You are not useless. The world is within you and around you. And every effort you make to overcome your obstacles is being cheered and celebrated by the millions of others who have been through it, too. The great heroes of all eternity are on your side and smiling down with love and belief in you. They recognize themselves in you, and are urging you to rise above. Every effort you make is a contribution and an inspiration to every person who faces a challenge of any kind. It is a shared quest for human resilience and perseverance, and you can lead the way.

I’m sending you all the love and power I can. I really hope you can feel that. I hope you can feel the power you have in your family, and feel the power you have in your spirit. It goes beyond your body. It goes beyond your room. It goes beyond everything. It *IS* the only thing that really matters now. Your life is moving into a higher plane of existence, beyond anything you can touch or see. It is that voice inside you, the one that’s deeper than the voice that doubts or the voice that fears. It is the final voice at the core of your being that tells you that you are good and beautiful and in the midst of the glory of life, in all its painful and perplexing brilliance. Have faith in that one true voice of spirit inside yourself. It will not be easy, but you can do it. And this journey will be remarkable. Not normal. But extraordinary and beautiful. And that’s what truly being alive is all about.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**‘How Do You Find Your Passion?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 9, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’m 30 years old and feel like there’s nothing I’m passionate about. Every job I’ve ever had I’ve basically fallen into. There hasn’t been anything hobby-wise that I’ve been exposed to that has inspired me to put in a lot of work or energy.

My current job has been making me read a lot of books about being a leader and living your true passion, and it’s frustrating the heck out of me! How do you figure out what your passion is?

*Thanks,
Passionless*

Dear Passionless,

To a large degree, people claim to have “found their passion” in life by simply doing lots of what they feel like doing the most. But there are just as many who would describe the experience of finding their passion as “their passion finding them” when they least expected it. One’s true purpose in life is not always something that can be decided upon, discovered through personal introspection, or encountered while following one’s tastes and preferences. It sometimes seems to be brought out by some sort of universal need: A person suddenly finds him- or herself called upon to do something extremely important, and instantly, everything surges in that direction. They continue to be drawn along a path that may never have occurred to them or even interested them previously. Following this pull of true destiny can be even more fulfilling than simply feeling a passion for something and giving yourself over to it — but it can also be confusing and even painful.

People who think they have found their passion are often surprised when they later discover that their true purpose in life was something much different from what they had planned or imagined for themselves. This requires a great amount of courage and often involves an entire re-evaluation of one’s place in the world.

Much of the common definition for “passion” involves intense levels of emotional energy, physical exuberance, and mental drive. It’s easy to get swept up in these feelings of excitement and follow them to places not truly worthy of our time and energy. Feelings of jealousy, competition, fear, lust, anger, and prejudice can often compel us to take action just as easily as love, joy, unity, selflessness, happiness, and compassion. We can invest huge amounts of time and energy into pointless or even harmful endeavors, all along mistaking our uncontrolled appetites and lower emotional impulses for our “passion” in life. Sometimes, there is so much societal and cultural pressure just to have “a passion” that we look around in a rushed panic, feeling like something is wrong with us for not being completely obsessed by a particular line of work or field of interest. We can feel forced to declare something as our “one and only” reason for living, and to forever identify with it for fear of not appearing “passionate.” This is unfortunate on many levels.

The more noble effort seems to involve carefully identifying and unleashing one’s best attributes and abilities and making them available to the world. This is not as easy as just “doing what we feel like,” nor as dramatic or emotionally intense as being what we commonly think of as “passionate.” It can, however, allow us each to have the time and space to let the world bring out our best. It can coax out what it truly needs from us, not just what we think we need and want from the world.

A passionate devotion to inwardly developing the integrity associated with being a good person is a much more valuable passion to encourage than simply giving in to a passionate pursuit of success in a specific professional field just for the sake of it. We should each first strive to become a professional at “being alive.” This may be less satisfying or pleasurable than allowing our secondary passions to propel us, but our primary passion for life and our love of existence itself should ideally be the only inner force allowed to guide our other passions toward that highest potential we each are destined for.

So don’t worry so much about whether you have “found your passion” or not. Don’t feel the need to identify yourself with your “work” or see yourself so bound up in “what you do.” The greatest work is the tireless effort to understand and be worthy of one’s life. When it comes to everything else, just give yourself a break. Work to make yourself as strong, and as good, and as available to the world as you can, so that when destiny calls, you’ll be ready, willing, and able to answer it. Be passionate about having this chance to live, and everything else will reveal itself to you at the perfect time. Don’t try to find your passion. Let your passion find you.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**Why Call Them Political ‘Parties’ When They’re So Un-Party?**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 16, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear Andrew W.K.,

Why are they called the Democratic “Party” and Republican “Party” when these politicians are the last people I would want to party with?

*Yours,
J*

Dear J,

As a very wise friend once explained to me, the word “party” originates from the word “parté,” which means to partition or separate. It refers to a group intentionally removing itself from the larger whole. It’s strange how many of us — including myself — now use the word “party” to represent a kind of inclusive celebration. The most joyful parties thrive on a sense of oneness that defies separation and division, a sort of coming together that fuses a shared sense of joy with an understanding that we’re all here, whether we like it or not, so why not make the best of it? It seems that the spirit of professional governmental politics has tended to drift away from this idea of oneness in favor of a world of endless separation. The word “party” will always be a paradox in this way, a sense of oneness inside a sense of separation. But inside that separation should always be a desire to return to the whole.

Traditional political party pursuits appear to revolve around the unnatural results of intentional division and playing sides against one another. We see the creation of divisions where there aren’t any, and the twisted amplification of natural divisions being intentionally distorted. As such, people are divided for no good reason except to sow discord, or to stoke anger for the sake of perceived progress when that progress often later leads to further frustration.

Despite there being very real and urgent issues involved in governmental politics, some of us begin to develop an unshakable feeling that everything related to this strange sphere of societal management is descending further and further into a sort of self-perpetuating insanity, a spiral of disorder that seeks to overwhelm us, muddle our thinking, obscure the truth, and leave us with far less than what we’re worthy of.

It sometimes seems that we get addicted to this spinning confusion and the divisions that spring up as we try to steady ourselves and find clarity. Emotionally thrilled and stimulated by our endless defending of one side against another, we allow the giddiness and satisfying high of attacking and judging to fill our days and define our personalities. We almost seem to avoid solving our problems.

Many of us eventually identify ourselves by whichever battles we’re most dedicated to fighting. What would happen to our sense of self if we actually won or lost these fights? Better to stay engaged, until we completely lose touch with the mysterious part of our true selves that exists beyond positions, opinions, and arguments. We begin to live our lives with a mistaken sense that we are right while “the other” is not only wrong, but somehow a lesser person — perhaps not even human at all.

The focus on dividing, on picking sides, on drawing lines, on building walls, on amplifying opposites and corrupting polarities creates an incredible and unsustainable amount of tension that is heaped on the already very intense and confounding experience of just being alive. This piling-on of so much extra emotional anguish further pushes us away from our best selves and into a state of prolonged, all-consuming panic, with all our worst impulses rising to overtake the better aspects of our characters. There just isn’t any space in our hearts to access a better version of the world when it has been made into a battleground of noise and confusion. Our collective consciousness is strewn with madness and despair, and we’re struggling to maneuver through the wasteland, where the vague idea of perfecting the world seems hopelessly naive and laughable.

Who benefits from these conditions?

No one actually does in the long run, but in the short term, there do seem to be those who stand to gain from watching the majority of humanity lose itself in the darkness. While the world grows more and more complicated, and a feeling of imminent doom hovers in our culture and society, we notice predictable phenomena swarming around the mess and feeding off the disarray. Keeping most of us distracted and exhausted seems to allow others to plot, plan, and benefit for their own gain while we remain entangled in a manufactured chaos.

Stepping back from the conspiracy idea, however, perhaps we are not necessarily the victims of a malevolent plot engineered by a select and removed elite — these political parties. Perhaps we’ve all been part of a largely subconscious collaboration to involve ourselves in a self-induced cycle of calamity, bewilderment, and sadness, a pattern that we started innocently enough, and then kept spinning because we just don’t know what the world would feel like without it. Eventually this leads to complete disillusionment and a sense of resignation, a feeling that things are what they are, and that the systematic corruption and failed network of power is irreparable and not even worth trying to improve.

It can be painful to consider that what’s broken in the world might just be a reflection of what’s broken in *us*. But it’s also empowering to consider that if we fix our own life, we may actually be able to fix the world. Until we truly live our day-to-day lives with the same type of integrity and idealistic dedication we wished we saw in our surrounding sociopolitical structures, we won’t see the change we say we want. Perhaps the mirror of the world would then reflect what we want to see. After all, how can we expect the system to be good and trustworthy when we ourselves don’t operate in good and trustworthy ways?

If there is a conspiracy at all, it’s an insidious form of lazy bitterness that allows us to expect less of ourselves because we expect less of our leaders. In actuality, whether we like it or not, our government and our situation is just an extension of you and me. It really is made of us. It’s not separated from us, despite how much we believe it to be divided from our realm of influence. This is a difficult and painful realization to contemplate. Great efforts have been made so that the “powers that be” all appear very distant and separate from us — beyond our reach and out of our control. What do we do?

We become better. Now is the time to really become a better person. Now is the time we desperately need to lead ourselves and each other into an active life of goodness. And fortunately, this is something we can start doing right now, on our own. No more cheating. No more lying. No more scamming, cutting corners, hustling each other. We must start trying to live the way we wish the most powerful people in the world would live. Then we could form a party that we truly all deserve, a party of one-for-all and all-for-one, where the only separation is found in realizing our small but incredible singular location, unique in the vastness of space, working together to be the best we can be here in this world, as one. Stay strong, and never give up on idealism. It’s more important than ever.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# ‘Is It Normal to Hate Your Day Job?’

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

August 24, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’m writing because I’m extremely disillusioned and overwhelmed by my work. It’s really stressing me out.

Some days, it’s a struggle getting through the office doors, just knowing what awaits. My workplace environment involves me being on the receiving end of other people’s malice — people that have no shame or hesitation in using other people for their selfish gain. As long as they achieve their own agenda at all costs, they’re happy.

In your experience, how do you deal with people who aren’t in it for the “greater good?” How do you stop their ulterior motives from dragging you down? How can I enjoy my job with all these sick and twisted co-workers?

*Sincerely,
No One Gets Left Behind*

Dear No One Gets Left Behind,

Most of us realize that work isn’t just there to put food on the table and pay the bills. Ideally, we realize that our work is supposed to somehow feed our souls and provide us with meaning and purpose. But if one’s work atmosphere doesn’t seem to offer that type of nourishment, one can feel like giving up, or endlessly longing for a more perfect job. Rather than quit job after job, or work in a state of perpetual anguish, we have to transform the seemingly unavoidable negative work encounters into a type of positive spiritual food. We do this using our own creative powers of interpretation, patience, and resilience. This is more than just looking at an unpleasant job as a glass-half-full situation. This is about changing your entire conception of a “day-job” and work, and realizing that all work and all activity is part of a larger opportunity to apply your experience towards life’s only great work: Learning how to be a truly good person.

We know there will most likely always be difficult — even “twisted” — people around us. And no matter where we go or what job we get, it’s almost certain that we’ll encounter other individuals and situations that bother us. Why is this? Is it purely a cosmic game of torment? Or could there be some underlying point to it all? What value can we extract? How can we take the negative aspects of our job and reshape them into positive insights we can apply towards our greatest life work?

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by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

June 14, 2015

We tend to think our job could always be easier, be better, or be more enjoyable if we only could be doing something else, if only we worked here or there, or if only we didn’t have to work with this person or that person. Then we could finally just enjoy our work. But not only are we unlikely to ever find a truly “perfect” and conflict-free type of occupation, it’s also unlikely that we’d actually truly enjoy it. Because the problem isn’t necessarily within the job or the work, but mostly within us. We are what we have to perfect, not the job or anything else. We haven’t figured out how to work because we haven’t figured out how to live. In fact, it’s the exact challenges and annoyances of work that we must use to improve our life. We are meant to go through these things. We must strive to improve ourselves using the very trials and tribulations we try to avoid. And once we do meet them head-on and overcome them, we will usually find that our job and every other area of life will improve as well. We can’t wait for the job to get better before we get better. We have to take the first step.

You have already taken the first step by writing to me with this question. Your letter is an example of using the challenges you face at work to do something self-enriching and helpful — you turned your negative feelings of frustration and disillusionment into a thoughtful and forward-moving action. What more can you do along this line of thinking?

You can start to reinterpret and reconsider everything about your work and how it makes you feel. It’s no longer just a “day job;” it is an adventure, an ordeal, a test, a challenge to see if you’re strong enough to grow. Each co-worker that upsets you is no longer an adversary or an irritation, but a challenge to see how strong you can be – to see how high you can rise. And each co-worker is also a person, just like you and me, desperately trying to figure out how to live as best as they know how.

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by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

March 19, 2015

Watch the entire work scene unfold around you — it’s like a movie. And even though it’s not actually a movie, in a way, it’s not actually real life, either. Real life is what you’re experiencing inside you, where none of this workplace drama exists — all the mind games are largely a distraction, an illusion, and you can’t allow them to cut you off from the true reality inside yourself. The annoyances and office battles are not worthy of your anger and emotional energy, but they are worthy of our intelligent interpretation.

Try to understand what people are doing and why they’re doing it, even if what they’re doing is wrong. Try to see where they are coming from, even if where they’re coming from is flawed. Have compassion for the weaknesses that inform your co-workers personalities and behaviors, even if you don’t like them or what they do. Develop empathy for their insecurities, patience for their confusions, and resilience for their cruelties.

If you want to truly challenge yourself, try to relate to them, even when you most want to distance yourself from them. Try to think of times when maybe you were difficult to work with, or when you were not at your best with others. Try to imagine the people around you as children, as you once were, and open your heart to that child in them and in you that still dictates their decision making and attitudes. Carefully examine your own motives and beliefs, be brutally honest about your own shortcomings, and use what you see in yourself and around you as a mirror, making sure you’re not behaving the same way as your antagonists in reverse.

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by [VILLAGE VOICE STAFF](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/villagevoicestaff/)

December 23, 2015

If you really commit to a disciplined approach, you can gradually transform any work and social situation into an interesting and empowering challenge. You’ll see that none of it is there to hurt you or upset you — it is there to make you grow. You can always quit a job, but you can’t quit life until you’re no longer living. So while you are, learn to make everything count, make everything valuable, and everything part of your life’s work of self mastery. Mastering your feelings and emotions in this area will give you strengths in all other areas, and almost miraculously, you’ll find the entire world around you revealing itself to be more beautiful, and more true, because you have become so.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**‘How Do I Date With an STD?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

September 2, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

Hi, Andrew W.K.,

I get plenty of dates, but when I tell someone I have genital herpes, none of my charms seem to matter anymore — they bolt. Telling people is so much worse than the actual virus. I get pretty bummed about it, and I imagine it’s even tougher for your readers who have more serious illnesses.

I’m trying to find the party in this situation, and I could really use some advice. How do I deal with being rejected over something I can’t change? How can I keep the virus from damaging my self-worth?

*Thanks,
Looking For The One*

Dear Looking For The One,

When I was quite a bit younger, I had a long-term relationship with an older woman. I had only been in a few serious relationships, but I went into this one with an open heart and complete blind trust.

After being committed to this woman for several years, she experienced a herpes outbreak. I was confused. I knew I didn’t have the virus, as I had been tested before she and I had started dating. It was then that she admitted she had always had herpes and had lied to me when I asked her early on if she was disease-free. I was devastated — not so much by the fact that she had exposed me to the virus, but that she lied right to my face and maintained the lie for so long. I couldn’t believe that this woman who I thought was supposed to be so mature and smart could be so coldly dishonest and inconsiderate about something so intimate and fundamental.

It should come as no surprise that she ended up cheating on me and we broke up not long after. She had never really been honest, and though she appeared to live a life of righteousness, she was riddled with hypocrisy. And I had trusted her entirely, even after she admitted to lying about her disease, and it was still not enough to motivate her to lean toward the truth.

The entire experience was crushing for me and extremely disillusioning, but one thing I took away from her (besides the disease) was a promise that I made to myself: I vowed I would always and forever be honest with anyone I was ever with romantically. I realized more than ever the sacred power of truth and how much of love and life is built upon it. I finally understood through actual heartbreaking experience why it was so important to be true to someone you care about, especially someone you decide to be physically and emotionally close to. It hasn’t always been easy, but even the most challenging moments of truth were helped by understanding deep down inside that this was really the only way to live — not just for the well-being of my loved ones, but for the well-being of my own soul. And while it’s undoubtedly an unpleasant and sometimes humiliating experience, being honest and direct with a romantic partner is the very foundation on which genuine intimacy and respect are built.

If you have a virus, telling the person you plan on being with is simply the right thing to do. Suffering from an illness or a stigmatized condition can cause damage to your sense of self-worth, but being dishonest about the situation will ultimately do a great deal more harm to everyone involved. It will slowly eat away at your self-respect and sense of personal integrity, even more than the disease itself.

In moments of physical sickness, the health and strength of your character matters just as much as your physical constitution. In fact, it is most likely all one interconnected system, one intricate body of physical and metaphysical integrity, and each aspect of it has the ability to negatively or positively influence your overall vitality and health.

While you might not be able to do much about the disease itself, you have total control over how you react to it, and how you conduct yourself with others in regards to it. This is a chance to do something good about something bad. It’s a chance to see things clearly and act accordingly. Being honest with people — especially someone you want to have sex with — is one of the most noble virtues you can cultivate. And while it’s awkward and maybe even painful to be honest about your illness, you will be rewarded in the end for your truthfulness.

The person who truly loves you and wants to be with you will accept that by being with you they will be dealing with this virus and most likely getting it too — or they may already have it themselves. Either way, being upfront is a relatively small price to pay in order to follow that true love. Perhaps the people who “bolt” when you are honest with them about your situation weren’t really the right people for you anyway. Perhaps your destiny is leading you toward your true love, and this seemingly frustrating part of your journey is all part of getting to your one and only soul mate.

As always, this challenge is here to make you improve who you really are — to make you more honest, more considerate, and a stronger person. Perhaps there’s a way to apply this type of honesty and consideration to other areas of your life beyond dating and sex. Perhaps this entire experience can be a chance to live a better way, where you make a promise to the world to do the right thing, even when it’s hard or embarrassing or inconvenient. If you don’t do what you know in your heart is right, you’re truly hurting yourself. There’s no reward for cutting corners, cheating, and lying. It all catches up to us at some point, and always for the worse. When righteousness is this clear and obvious, we must follow it, or we’ll slowly destroy our souls from the inside out — and not only lose faith in ourselves, but in all of life in general.

The truer you are with yourself and with those around you, the truer the love will be that you eventually find. And best of all, you will have earned that true love through a life lived in dedication to truth, and you will deserve and deeply appreciate all the glory that comes with it. Stay strong.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

# ‘How Do I Get Through Dark Times?’

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

September 11, 2015

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I don’t know exactly how to describe what I’m feeling, but it’s not good. I feel like my life is closing in around me, like there’s a dark cloud hanging over everything and slowly enveloping me in a kind of blurry panic. It’s staining everything I see and making it harder and harder for me to notice the good things when I’m surrounded by so many bad vibes. How do I make my way through this? How do I see in the dark?

*Help,
Losing My Light*

Dear Losing My Light,

Sometimes a dark time isn’t necessarily a bad time. What you’re experiencing is a transition, the end of one chapter of life and the beginning of a new one. As the sun sets and night falls, we can feel a sense of loss — longing for the warmth and brightness of the day, when we could see things clearly and take comfort in the security of life at its most illuminated and transparent. But only a fool would expect the day to last forever, and even the longest day must eventually come to a close. The wise person learns not only to accept this transition, but to appreciate it — to see the night and its darkness as an absolute necessity, a natural companion to the day and its brilliance.

We must not mistake the experience of darkness as a sign of torturous death or the end of all good things. It is just a turning point, a part of a cycle. And once the darkness has completed its part of the pattern, the shadows will retreat, the sun will rise, and the light will return once more. We must be able to accept and love the cycles of life, and learn to recognize these signs of transition as part of the ever-unfolding and developing nature of life.

The best thing we can do is use these moments of darkness to rejuvenate and recover our strength, to absorb and grow and prepare ourselves for what comes when the light returns. Do not be afraid of the dark. Do not resent it, and do not seek to artificially illuminate yourself out of desperation. Much like the body wants rest and recuperation during a good night’s sleep, the soul and spirit needs to slumber in these moments of transitory twilight. It needs to succumb to the natural spiraling movement between light and dark, positive and negative, something and nothing. It’s in this space that we come into form; in this space, we hover between being and becoming. This is what life is, and to fight it is futile and counterproductive.

Learning how to allow oneself the space to simply exist is one of the great lessons life can teach us. And it is during these moments of darkness that we sometimes have no other choice but to simply…*live*. Because it is in that nonjudgmental and non-panicked state of calm acceptance that we can see the dark and the light for what they truly are: both part of one beautiful pulse. Take a light switch, for instance: It must be in the on or off position; it can never be both. Inhale, and exhale. You can’t hold your breath forever or not breathe at all. It’s the back-and-forth of existence that allows us to exist at all.

Most of all, don’t lose hope. Don’t close your heart or make drastic decisions out of desperation. Just know that you are going through these natural ebbs and flows in life, and they’re an absolutely necessary aspect of being a person. Sometimes the pain we feel is simply the discomfort of growing. Sometimes the darkness is just a shadow cast by a beautiful and radiant light. Sometimes our hardest moments will reveal themselves to be the most rewarding and important experiences of all.

Stay strong and remember that you are the light that will continuously see you through all the challenges and darkness you encounter. The shadows aren’t always bad. Sometimes they’re just the result of so much light around the corner.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**‘How Do I Stay Grounded When I’m Far From Home?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

September 18, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

How do you keep a positive frame of mind and a sense of connection when going through difficult times far away from home? I’ve been living abroad in Belgium for the past few years, and I’ve been feeling increasingly disconnected from my old life.

I’m wondering if you’ve had any difficult experiences while far away from home and whether you have any recommendations for keeping a positive attitude while far away from familiar territory.

*Sincerely,
Far Beyond Homesick*

Dear Far Beyond Homesick,

I used to work with a man who had a very close relationship with his grandmother. His favorite place in the world was his grandmother’s house. When he was happy, he went to celebrate at his grandmother’s house. When he was sad, he went to be comforted at his grandmother’s house. And when he just wanted to feel like he belonged somewhere and get some perspective on his life, he would just sit on the back porch and quietly ponder the easy goodness of pure and uncomplicated things. He spent large amounts of time there as a child and even ended up living there as an adult, simply because there was no other place he’d rather be. He traveled a lot and went away for work for extended periods, but he always longed to be back at his grandmother’s house.

A few years ago, his grandmother died. She had lived a long and loving life, and her passing wasn’t unexpected. Her house was sold, and the new owners tore it down to build a bigger place. My friend was devastated by the loss of that house just as much as by his grandmother’s death. He mourned for her and the house, but he especially mourned for the feeling of home that now seemed irretrievably lost. He mourned that feeling of security that came from a place where things made sense — a kind of reliable calm that he could count on no matter how crazy the rest of his life felt. He feared he would never again find a place that gave him such a profound sense of peace. That place was his home, and without it he felt lost.

I was with my friend when his grandmother died and he went through his struggles. And I told him what I’m about to tell you here: Home isn’t a place, home is a feeling. You especially realize this once a place is no longer there. When you can’t go there again, you have to move that place inside of yourself. And in the process of moving the outer world into your inner world, you realize it was already inside you all along.

In that way, there really is no place like home. There is no place or location or outer phenomenon that can provide as much security as the true home found in yourself. This is one of the many timeless lessons we are taught over and over again. This is what the archetypal journey represents — not the venturing-out or -away from oneself, but traveling deeper in. *The Wizard of Oz* illustrates this and many other elemental truths very beautifully. A place like “home” was never actually a place at all, but an internal experience, an inner understanding of essential love and truth. This depth of understanding may have been brought on by an encounter with a place or a person or other circumstance, but the power those things have over us is caused by the connection they make with our inner world.

I’ve lived in a lot of different places myself, many of which I’ve loved deeply and didn’t want to leave. I’ve traveled all over the place and have been away from home for most of the past twenty years. But I didn’t leave my home behind — I always took it with me. Every place I’ve ever lived became part of me. I’ve always been at home because I *am* my home.

And you are *your* home. You are home. Those places and experiences that seemed like they were happening to you — you were actually happening to them. Everything has always been occurring in the same place: inside you. The entire world of experience occurs internally. It never leaves you and you never leave it.

Constructing a home inside ourselves is one of our great life works. Cultivating an inner house of strength and calm that can allow us to feel at home no matter where we are or what we’re dealing with — this is our goal. And our experiences in life provide us with the tools and lessons and strengths needed to construct our home properly. The feeling of being yourself is being home. Stay strong and let your adventures in life bring you ever closer to yourself. Don’t be afraid. You will make it home. You’re already there.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**‘What Should You Do When Friends Let You Down?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

September 28, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I tried to throw myself a birthday party the other night. I thought it would be a fun way to lift my spirits after a very hard year for me. I invited my friends a month ahead of time, made preparations, bought a cake, set out snacks, etc. I felt I did everything right.

When the day came, all the people who said they would come never even showed up. I was alone in my house with all my bad, lonely thoughts. No one has apologized for missing my party and I’ve been ignored since. I feel as though life is pointless if I do not have people to share it with. I do not want to live, but I do not want to die. How can I find happiness enough for me within myself and not be bothered by how carelessly people treat me?

*With love,
Party Of One*

Dear Party Of One,

In an ideal world, we would all strive to be truly self-reliant. Being self-reliant isn’t solely about maintaining a sort of rugged individualism. Nor is it about being a loner cut off from the rest of society. Being self-reliant simply means that you no longer rely on other people for your happiness, worthiness, or any other essential feeling. It also means you no longer blame other people for your sadness, disappointment, or frustration. Self-reliance is about building a world inside yourself that is more beautiful and perfect than the outside world, one impervious to outside circumstance and the ups and downs of life.

As self-reliant individuals, we would no longer feel our emotional well-being tethered to the whims of the stock market. We would no longer base the quality of our day on who said a nice or not-nice thing to us. We would realize both happiness and sadness occur inside of us and solely because of us. We would realize that how we feel is a state of being that we alone are in charge of — and no person or event or object can “make us happy” or, likewise, “make us sad.” Those feelings are states of mind that we decide on. We are in control of our inner world, and we decide how to feel about what happens outside of it.

This state of mind is the only thing we can ever hope to have control over. Rather than putting our energy into trying to control other people and their behavior, or the ever-changing world around us, we should put our energy into trying to gain control over our own emotions and our own inner responses to the outer things we have no control over. This is easier said than done, but it is one of the noblest efforts we can make as we work to master this experience called “being alive.”

It can take an entire lifetime to realize and believe that you are the key to your own happiness or sadness. It takes an extraordinary amount of honesty to start taking complete and total responsibility for your feelings. There is a certain thrill and satisfaction in being able to look at other people for our own sense of self-worth. But being able to know — *really* know — that your own inner spirit is all you really need to be OK is like climbing Mount Everest for your soul.

That doesn’t mean that we don’t want other people in our lives — and that doesn’t mean we can’t experience joy or disappointment as a result of our dealings with the outside world. But we still strive to maintain a vigilant awareness that these things happening around us are not where happiness or sadness is found. Those good or bad feelings happen *in* us and not *to* us. Everything outside of our own inner self-reliant state of mind, both good and bad, is basically icing on the cake of life. They are interesting experiences that we decide to let affect us — or not. We can even decide to let down our self-reliant vigilance so we can have a less predictable and more emotionally turbulent experience of the world — which most of us have opted to do, myself included.

It’s OK to feel disappointed when people don’t show up to your birthday. It’s OK to feel sad when things don’t go as you hoped. But just realize that you are choosing to feel that because you care about it in this particular way. Your friends didn’t “make” you feel that way. It’s wonderful to think buying a new car “gives” you a great feeling of excitement and success. But know that the car isn’t “giving” you any feeling, nor is the buying of it — you are giving yourself that feeling because of the power you decided to give the car and the act of buying it. And you could feel that way without the car. Or feel sad and miserable while buying all the cars in the world.

Self-reliance is taking your power back — back from everyone and everything that seems to have the power to make you happy or sad. It’s time to give that sacred power only to yourself, to the spirit inside. And if you decide to share that power with someone or something else, just do it wisely and with full awareness that it is yours to give. Stay strong and always remember that you have a world of endless happiness and beauty inside you. And that you can always rely on.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**‘Why Can’t I Look on the Bright Side?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

October 7, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’m living a pretty great life. I recently moved to a great city; I have great friends and a great partner. My life is pretty much what I’ve always ever wanted — how many people get to say that?!

The problem is, I keep looking for trouble. I keep looking for points of failure, keep looking for the negative in things, and I generally feel pretty down all the time.

Instead of feeling how amazing life is, I keep looking for reasons for it *not* to be amazing, or worrying about when it will stop being amazing. I also know that if I keep this up, things will start to fall apart and my worst fears will come true.

Seems like I can’t be happy with just being happy. What’s up with that?

*Thanks,
Set Up To Fail*

Dear Set Up To Fail,

I can relate to your situation deeply. For much of my life, I’ve grappled with a pervasive sense that something is “off,” that something very bad is about to happen, or already has happened and I just haven’t figured it out yet, that even the good things about life are somehow really bad deep down. A lot of this has to do with the phenomenon of death and the unknown. We are meant to feel this way from time to time. It is part of bravely facing our encounter with complete existence.

But when this feeling of wrongness takes over, it leads to a panicked search for a quick and easy solution to an infinitely complicated problem. It’s a problem so ornate and puzzling in its complexity that it’s not even really a problem at all. And in realizing this lies a solution, but if we obsess over negativity, we will find it remains just out of sight, lurking behind unseeable visions and unknowable truths. It feels as though the entire world is skewed in the direction of this fundamentally “off” aspect of negativity, and all our efforts to straighten it out are hopelessly in vain.

The more we allow this dreadful “offness” to lead our thoughts, the more we start to notice the dirt and the garbage around us — the brokenness, the sadness, the crumbling structures of human life. We notice the incredible efforts our society makes to distract ourselves from looking too long and too deeply into the emptiness, or how we paint over the decay and despair with thicker and thicker veneers of gloss. Meanwhile, our sorrow grows exponentially.

Left unchecked, this feeling of dread and inescapable melancholy starts to infiltrate every aspect of life. Even trying not to think about it only seems to increase its presence. It travels from the corners of our mind into the outside world around us, staining and distorting otherwise pleasant times. Everything feels false, hopeless, like one gigantic unfolding trick, entirely resistant to all efforts to change its trajectory toward total annihilation. And the problem with all this is that it is true.

Being alive is overwhelmingly intense. But at the same time, this intensity is also what makes life amazing and awe-inspiring. Some of the worst things are also the absolute best things about life. Beautiful things will happen and then fall apart. Horrible things will happen and somehow lead to wonderful things. How can this be? How can life be both good *and* bad? Must it be one or the other? And this is our dilemma, the riddle of human experience.

It’s not negative or positive, but both, and above them both is a sort of super-positive that allows everything to exist. And rather than this super-positive creating a sort of cancellation of feeling, this contradictory state of two-things-at-once is an opportunity. It’s an opening. It’s a doorway into truth. And that truth is available and known to us by the word “love.”

The only true solution to the riddle of life is to love it. Love it all. Love the riddle itself. Love trying to solve it. Love not being able to. Love the times when everything seems bad. Love the times when everything seems good. Love your own ups and downs. And know that they are all part of an incredibly vast and dazzling experience that you get to go through, one that’s actually happening*right now*. And love that this experience is out of control and frightening at times. Love it in all of its textures, all of its qualities, all of its pains and pleasures — and release the need to be happy, or be sad, or be anything in particular. Just simply be yourself and be aware that you’re actually here and you’re going through this miraculous thing called “life.”

Love it, and love it again. And then return to that state of love whenever you feel confusion overriding the clarity of its truth. Love it all. This has always been and always will be the one and only answer. Our greatest work as human beings is developing this ability to love. And the best part is, it’s the one ability you always had right from the start. It’s all meant to be this way. You’re doing the right thing. You don’t have to look on the bright side. You are the bright side. Stay strong.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

**‘Did You Know You Saved My Life?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

October 19, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I guess this isn’t a typical advice question. But I just wanted to let you know that you saved my life.

I’ve been in a very bad frame of mind for the past several years. The negativity had been building for a long time, and it came to a head about a month ago. A lot of my problems blew up in my face all at once, and for the first time I really felt like I was on the brink of losing my sanity forever.

It was the first time I had ever seriously considered ending my life. Things had closed in around me so tightly that I couldn’t breathe. I just couldn’t imagine a way to keep on living like that, let alone find any happiness.

Then one day I stumbled across one of your columns and slowly made my way through every piece of your writing I could find. I watched all your videos and listened to your songs, and for the first time in a long time, I felt a real sense of hope. Not only that, I felt a sense of power and strength that I’d thought I would never feel again.

I also felt like someone else out there understood what I was experiencing. Even though you didn’t know me personally, you were able to put me in touch with parts of myself I didn’t even realize were there, or couldn’t see clearly.

Thanks to you, I have a new outlook on life, and I genuinely believe that I may not have been around much longer if I hadn’t stumbled across your work. Whether it was divine timing or just dumb luck, I wanted you to know that you saved someone out here from a very dark place, and even possibly from death. Thank you, Andrew.

*Your friend,
Not Giving Up*

Dear Not Giving Up,

Thank you for your letter and for telling me about the good things you felt from my work. I truly appreciate your compliments and can relate a lot to the excitement of finding something in the world that lifts you up when you need it most. I have continued to search for those experiences in life myself, so it is a true privilege to think I was able to help you locate a similar type of power when you were looking for it.

But I want to make something very clear — and I’m not saying this to deflect your generous praise, or in an attempt at unnecessary modesty. I just want you to realize that you saved your own life.

You had a powerful encounter with truth, and truth is not something that I invented or that anyone can take credit for. Truth is an experience that you have in yourself — a type of clarity about your own existence and the miracle of life.

No matter how badly someone else tries to make you feel truth, or explain it to you, or even force it into your mind, it can only be experienced and understood through your own personal and intimate interaction with that part of yourself that is true.

Any inspiration you think you got from my work was actually already inside you all along. My work maybe helped you remember that you already had the key, but it still took your efforts to use that key and unlock your own power.

When we reach out in an attempt to make contact with a power beyond ourselves, that same power simultaneously reaches in and finds itself in us. That which saves us is found when we turn ourselves over to a seemingly distant higher trust in love and truth, but that same distant location is not far off above us in space or in some remote dimension. It’s right in the most familiar parts of our own being.

The only way you could find anything of value in my offerings was because those things were already found in you. You have to have it in order to see it. When you love a song, it’s because the song in you is recognizing itself. When you react strongly to a work of art, it’s because the work of art that is your soul is responding to its own nature. And when someone says or writes something that helps you, it’s because that part of you that is able to help yourself is sparked and brought to the surface.

In this way, for better or worse, no one can ever directly help make anyone’s life better, or solve anyone else’s problems. We may be able to help someone build a house, or give someone money to buy food, but these are only conditional circumstances that can be improved so that the person has the chance to do the real work of improving their life from the inside. The best we can ever do is remind each other that our own inner resources have the power we need to live our life.

The old saying that the truth will set you free is a deceptively simple illustration of the type of experience you’re going through now. The truth of this statement resides in the rather mysterious and indescribable nature of truth itself, which somehow pulls the best parts of a person to the surface and yet dwells out of reach — almost like a carrot being dangled in front of a rabbit, something that keeps us surging ahead.

This dichotomy of the outer and the inner can be puzzling, but it is all part of the mystery of unfolding one’s life. We come out of ourselves and into the world, and the world encloses around itself and comes into us. Each person is part of this process individually, but also in partnership with every other living being.

And that’s the most exciting part of all this: You and I are in this together. We’re cheering each other on as we go through this very intense process called “being alive,” and we can keep reminding each other to be strong, to stay close to joy and to be brave.

So give yourself credit. Give life itself credit. There is no secret solution that I or anyone else can give you. There is no magic feather that you need in order to fly. Everything you’ve ever needed or will need is already in your heart. All that I or anyone else can do is encourage you to believe in this truth. That’s what it means when someone says to “believe in yourself” — believe that you have what you’re looking for, even if you can’t always see it.

I’m proud of you and proud of us, and proud of everyone who somehow finds the strength to keep on going every day. You’re courageous because you opened yourself to your own tremendous and glorious power — a power that you can find reflecting all around you — a power that proves that life is an incredibly intense adventure worth having, even when it’s very, very hard.

Stay strong and you’ll never stop saving your own life every day. That’s what being alive is.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

*[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]*

**‘How Can I Get Rid of Anger?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

October 30, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I have horrible anger issues. I’ve had them for years and I don’t know what to do. When I get angry, it’s not a normal angry. I yell at people I care about, I swear at them, and I hurt myself, sometimes by punching whatever’s near. I don’t know what to do, and I feel trapped by these issues, like they’re all I am. I would really appreciate it if you could give me some advice on how to get rid of my anger.

*Thank you,
Angry Anger*

Dear Angry Anger,

I can relate very deeply to what you’re describing here. There have been times where I’ve punched walls so frequently that I had to replace the drywall and patch up holes. I never hit another person, just myself. Punching my own head, cutting my own face, clenching every single fiber in my body out of sheer rage and frustration, until I thought the muscle pressure would break my own bones from the inside and burst all the blood vessels in my heart.

Starting at around the age of thirteen, I became more and more aware of a type of surging emotional power deep inside me. It started in the front of my head and sank down into the middle of my chest, and from there it grew tighter and hotter until it spread throughout my whole body and back to my brain. I couldn’t figure out what the feeling was, exactly. It was extremely raw and it frightened me. The only way I could describe it to myself at the time was “anger” — a kind of seething misanthropic rage, directed at everyone and no one in particular, but coming from within myself and lashing out toward the overwhelming frustration of existence.

But why did I feel this way? Why was I so worked up? Not having an easy answer for that question only made me feel even more turbulent. I knew I didn’t have any real big obvious reason to be this mad and upset. I had a family that loved me and friends that cared about me and I was surrounded by just about every privilege and opportunity a person could ever hope for. Yet I still felt this incredible coiled-up tension that kept wanting to smash the world and me along with it.

I envied and resented other people who always seemed carefree and never in a bad mood. What did they have that I didn’t? I even had friends that had a million reasons to be angry and upset, and yet somehow they never really were. This only made me more confused, and I also felt guilty because I couldn’t enjoy other people’s happiness.

Many people told me that this inner feeling I described as “anger” meant something was wrong with me and that I needed to get rid of it. I was told over and over again that an ideal life was meant to be calm and serene and that I should learn to eliminate all those feelings and “bad energy.” This only made me feel worse and more hopeless. The harder I tried to zone out and be serene and calm, the more my inner turmoil grew. It almost seemed like trying to kill it just made it stronger.

I now think that there is no such thing as “bad energy.” There is only “energy,” and what we decide to use it for is what makes it good or bad. Just like energy can be used to electrocute someone or to save someone’s life through defibrillation, it can also be harnessed and directed toward good. The point of life is not to drift through our days in a lobotomized state of emotionless calm, nor to numb and sedate ourselves so that we can go through the motions of life while feeling nothing. The point is to use the energy we have to make the best and most meaningful life we can.

Emotions are energy. And just like all energy is valid, all human emotions are valid and worthy of being felt to some degree. But when one emotion starts to take over and dominate our lives, it can seem as though we are becoming that emotion and losing ourselves inside it. Emotions we consider negative, like anger and sadness and worry, can dominate our minds to such a degree that we can feel as though we have lost control of our minds entirely. This is our challenge: to regain control of our emotions, and listen to them, learn from them, and steer them toward empowering our life through growth and development, just like directing electricity to power a light that illuminates the way in the darkness. The point isn’t to cancel out our feelings, numb them, or hide from them, but to respect them and realize that they have something very important to tell us. Just like physical pain can alert us to some sort of need in our body, emotional pain can alert us to a need in our spirit. If we just cancel out our physical and emotional pain, we can do more harm than good, even though it seems easier at first just to tranquilize ourselves. The point is to build up the courage and strength necessary to fully feel our emotions, honestly examine them, and then turn their power into something beautiful and positive.

So I would say that you actually don’t have an anger problem, you have a surplus-energy problem. And that’s not really a problem at all; it’s actually a kind of gift. In fact, your massive inner power could be your greatest blessing. It just hasn’t been disciplined yet. You must show it where to go and what to do or it will just keep lashing out at the people (and walls) around you.

Just like the Incredible Hulk, you can be capable of great things when that power is used for good. This is your talent and your challenge. It won’t be easy, but that’s OK — it’s not supposed to be. These sorts of challenges force us to be more than we once were.

Some people have very little energy and would love to have a surplus of vitality like you have. When that power builds up in you and it feels like you could flip over a car, go do something productive, anything that allows that energy to be put to good use, instead of wasting it on negativity. Put something between you and that energy, like a project, or a task, or even a barbell or a treadmill. I’ll bet you could really sprint fast when that power wells up inside you and wants to get out.

Start thinking of your “anger” not as an affliction, but as a great inner source of super-strength that you’re learning to master. Just like a wizard must earn the ability to manipulate the forces of the universe, you can earn the right to take your power and manipulate it toward good. It’s a win-win: You get to harness your power and become a better person in the process. If you don’t prove that you’re strong enough and responsible enough to handle the gift you’ve been given, it will remain out of your control and continue to torment and frustrate you. If you don’t master the power within yourself, it can and eventually will destroy you.

No one else can master your life for you. No one else can tell you exactly how to gain control over your power. All anyone can do is remind you that it’s all part of your life quest. You must look back inside yourself for the answers and solutions to the puzzles of your soul.

It takes hard work to get good at living, but that hard work is the best work we will ever do. You must promise not to give up. You must be prepared for extreme difficulty and discomfort. You will be pushed to your limit and then pushed past your limit, and just when you think you can’t be pushed any further, you will be pushed even more. Every part of yourself will say, “This is too hard.” But you mustn’t quit. You will make it. You already *are* making it. This is all part of the process, and now you’re ready to go on to the next step.

Living is a constant cycle of falling and then rising up, being beaten and then overcoming — but the failures are just as valuable as the successes. The entire undertaking of life becomes a victory once you devote yourself to embracing its challenges rather than avoiding them. And the biggest obstacles and challenges are rarely in the world around us — they are right inside ourselves. You can do this. Stay strong. And use your powers for good.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]

# ‘How Do I Make My Friend Put Bros Before ‘Hos?’

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

November 7, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.:

My buddy and I party hard…maybe even a little too hard at times. My buddy is also a romantic fool who thinks every girl is “the one.” And that’s fine, to each their own…unless it interrupts the partying. Which it does, frequently.

Even if I drive all the way out to where he lives, I usually get a phone call when I’m thirty minutes away saying, “This girl is coming out with us. You’ll really like her, she’s awesome! Oh by the way, she’s the one!” This inevitably has him leaving the party at 9:45 p.m. because “she’s tired” or “she’s not feeling well.” Again, I’m not going to hate this guy for being popular with the ladies, but when it’s constantly intruding on my partying, it gets old…FAST!

So how do I tell my friend that he needs to put (for lack of a better term) bros before ‘hos?

*Thanks,
Party Connoisseur*

Dear Party Connoisseur,

After reading your letter several times, I find no evidence that you really care about your friend’s life beyond how it enables or interferes with your own social plans. It seems you expect him to party on your terms, or you don’t consider it partying at all. There isn’t one aspect of your letter that appears to show any real awareness or consideration for his feelings, his interests, or his own separate personal life except in how it relates to you and what you want.

You show even *less* awareness or concern for his female companions, about whom he’s shared his excitement with you despite your cynical, bitter eye-rolling. How dare he have the nerve to keep a romantic and idealistic spirit and tirelessly look for love in a challenging world! People with your attitude make this world even more challenging. You then reduce the women he cares about to mere accessories and obstacles standing in the way of your own planned uses for your friend. It seems that your main concern is yourself, and I’m guessing that if you honestly examine your behavior in general, you’ll identify these traits on display in most other areas of your life.

This is understandable and forgivable. We are told early on, and from many different sides, that being self-centered is necessary for a type of material success and control in the world, but we eventually realize that having too much control and self-centeredness comes at too great a cost in the areas of life that matter most. It turns out that being a good friend and a good person is actually about having very little control over anyone other than you and your own behavior. If we want to become better people and have better friendships, it doesn’t come from telling your friend to put bros before ‘hos. It comes from you putting disciplined effort into refining the lesser and more selfish aspects of your personality.

If you really were this man’s friend, you would let him live his own life and be grateful for any time you got to spend with him at all. If you really were this man’s friend, you would lovingly support his heroic efforts to stay upbeat and romantic. If you really were this man’s friend, you would be thoughtful and gentle as he shares his life and loves with you. He’s probably hoping for your approval and support, but he’s also excited to introduce his girlfriend to you, someone he admires and wants her to like, despite your shortcomings.

If you really were this man’s friend, you wouldn’t create rules and schedules for your friendship. You would realize that just getting to exist in the world with this man as a brother is already the biggest and best never-ending party you’ll ever find. If you really were this man’s friend, you wouldn’t put so much pressure and expectation on him and your times together, and you wouldn’t drain all the fun and joy out of those precious moments because they didn’t exactly meet your particular standards.

Did it ever occur to you that your friend is genuinely loving toward the women he dates because he cares about them and wants to be a good man? Did it occur to you that the reason he leaves a party “early” is because he cares about his date so much that he’s willing to put her well-being before his own desire to socialize?

I think this is an amazing opportunity to totally re-evaluate your concept of friendship, of partying, and of how you look at life and the lives of other people.

Your letter really got to me, because there was a time not long ago when I would’ve said and thought the exact same things. I saw the whole world as either helping my plans or standing in the way of them. I saw people — even my own closest friends, family, and girlfriends — as parts of a machine engineered to serve me and my ambitions or interfere with them. I’m still struggling with accepting that other people aren’t only there for my convenience and desires. But the most important thing in my life has become realizing that I’m not the most important thing. Realizing that I’m not the center of the universe — or even the center of the party — has been an incredibly humbling and challenging experience. And it’s one that I keep learning and re-learning, over and over again. And it feels good each time I learn it, even when it’s difficult or painful.

It’s a strange experience when you finally decide to stop fighting against the world to get what you want and start trying to help the world be what it wants. At first you feel like you’re losing your drive, or giving in to a force that was too great to keep pushing against — but then you realize that this force isn’t there to fight with you or hurt you, it’s there to love and embrace you and show you a better way to live.

The more we try to think about the other people around us, the better our own lives get. It’s very mysterious, but somehow when we stop trying to get other people to be better in the ways we want them to be, we start to become better people ourselves.

Go easier on your friend and just let him be himself. Love him and be glad that he exists at all. Love him and let him party in his own way. It’s all an incredible miracle that any of this is even happening in the first place — to get to be alive. That is the biggest party of them all.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

*[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]*

**‘How Should I Feel About Terrorism?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

November 16, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’m truly distraught. Like most people, I’m sickened and shocked by the recent terror attacks in Paris, as well as by the seemingly increasing levels of violence and discord around the world in general. I’m 31 years old. I obviously remember the 9-11 attacks and the first time I learned about terrorism and extremism, but I don’t feel like I’ve learned how to cope with it. I can’t shake this growing dread and anxiety about daily life, nor this sense of imminent doom.

I know my parents and grandparents and especially my great-grandparents lived through even more violent and troubling times, and I try to gain strength from their experiences and points of view.

But I still feel incredible stress. Everything feels pointless and depressing. I’m sad to admit it, but I’m afraid and lost. I wish there was some way I could understand what is happening, or fight back, or help stop all this. What can I do?

*Yours,
Terrorized*

Dear Terrorized,

There are no easy answers here. Nothing I can say will be adequate, will fully explain the inexplicable. When humans commit inhuman acts, sense and reason are nowhere to be found. We cannot force the situation to make sense and square with our understanding of life. When faced with a senseless situation, it is completely natural to experience an overwhelming feeling of confusion, coupled with waves of hopelessness and incredible sadness. But instead of drowning in that despair, we must cling to what matters most to us and use our love of those principles to pull ourselves up to a higher level. And from this higher point of view, we can see the situation with more clarity.

With violence of this kind, we are witnessing humans give themselves over to their lowest, basest, most animalistic instincts. They’re abandoning every humanistic impulse and divine ideal in favor of their most distorted and depraved appetites. The amount of self-denial, inverted logic, and staggering ignorance it takes to carry out such acts of mindless sadism is impossible to fathom by anyone not operating on this same vulgar level. Just as we cannot fully understand or identify with the thought process of a great white shark, we cannot hope to comprehend the mindset of a human who has chosen to abandon all the honorable and noble parts of his nature in favor of his most despicable, underdeveloped, and perverted impulses. But whereas the shark is at least true to its nature as a killer, these monstrous humans have defied their nature and capacity for goodness and reason and have become something alien and unrecognizable to us. That’s why these situations are so confusing and hard to understand: They’re not of this world, yet they occurred within it.

The world that the majority of us are striving to create and live in is one in which light, life, love, and liberty are the four emanations of the one true law of existence. We collectively believe that these qualities exist inherently in the world, in the same way as other laws of nature exist. We have identified them in the same way we have identified the law of gravity, but we also have nurtured them, protected them, and fought for them against others whose own ignorance and immaturity have blinded them from experiencing this purity of truth.

We allow each human the right to exist, to live their own life, to be their own person, to find their own purpose, and to enjoy the privileges of natural and total freedom. But we know that when one person is kept from experiencing these natural rights, all of humanity is denied a portion of its collective glory. Those who seek to infringe upon or destroy these basic principles are fighting a battle as futile as trying to stop the sun from shining or the Earth from turning. The law of humanity is ultimately the law of nature and is as incorruptible and as strong as the forces which bind our universe together in space and time. These natural forces are the definition of goodness and synonymous with truth. This is why evil is built on falsehoods and confusion: Evil is that which attempts to defy the natural laws of life, and because these laws cannot be broken, evil will always ultimately fail.

We have seen this time and time again, illustrated throughout human history, as the many attempts to thwart the natural rights of humanity have crumbled. Those who wish to destroy the right to be free and true to oneself — and to bend the law to serve their own restrictive ideology — will always eventually perish. Each and every attempt at limiting the human spirit has failed. Some have been more spectacular failures than others, and some have caused more damage and suffering than others, but before long they all succumbed to the inevitable triumph of the law over oppression and darkness. Each time, the tyrants have thought they had figured out a special new trick with which to beat the system, to bend the rules, and to overcome the power of goodness. Each time they thought they were chosen to finally topple the human spirit once and for all, but their vanity and blindness only ensured their demise. One simply can’t break the rules of the universe without consequences. They cannot beat nature and they cannot win.

So what can we do?

We can live for truth. We can fight for light, life, love, and liberty. We can make sure each person has the ability to make their own way toward their own individual destiny, unimpeded by the dogma or limitations others would wish to impose. The only worthy limitations are the limitations of time and humanity’s own internal struggle to rise up over its individual and collective weakness.

The terrorists cannot kill everyone. They cannot end the world. They cannot destroy civilization. All they can do is disrupt our lives, disrupt our minds, and, most of all, try to disrupt our hearts and spirits. In order for their attacks to truly succeed, they need to discourage us in our mission toward the total realization of our shared life purpose. Do not give them this satisfaction. In honor of those who lost their lives at the hands of these fools, we must live on and hold tighter than ever to the best parts of life. It’s natural to be afraid, but we must never give in to that fear. We must never allow their misery to infiltrate our vision of an ideal world of love and peace. They want war, but they will only get annihilation. This isn’t us versus them. This is us versus “it.” We have all of history and humanity on our side. We have the entire universe on our side. No force is strong enough to ultimately stop the unfolding of the universe. No person is strong enough to ultimately stop the unfolding of another person’s spirit.

Do not abandon hope. Do not abandon joy. Do not doubt the value and integrity of all that we have fought to protect and promote for so long. Enjoy life and live every moment for all it’s worth. If we stop enjoying life, it means the terrorists won.

*Stay strong,
Andrew W.K.*

*[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]*

**‘How Do I Become a Good Person?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

November 30, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I turned thirty not long ago and came to the realization that after living most of my life filled with bitterness and hatred, I am not a good human being. Sometimes, I imagine myself as the opposite version of who I really want to become. Wobbling through life in the most miserable way possible, I only know how to hate and how to play the victim. I don’t possess the redeeming qualities I seek in others.

Sometimes I feel like it’s too late to change. I don’t even know where to begin. What are the tips and tricks for getting my life back together and becoming a good person?

*Thanks,
Lost*

Dear Lost,

Before anyone can become a “good person,” we have to figure out what being a good person really means. And while at first it can seem easy to define this by a list of certain essential traits, it quickly becomes difficult to nail down and describe exactly what goodness is.

Is a good person someone who is selfless and puts others ahead of herself? Or is a good person someone who works to have the best life he can, regardless of the circumstances around him? Is a good person someone who has reached a type of purity and grace? Or is a good person someone who has achieved worldly success and a complex lifestyle? The more we try to pin down what being a good person consists of, the harder it gets to make sense of for our own lives.

We may choose to look at the lifestyles and accomplishments of people we admire with the hope that mirroring their specific behaviors and mindsets can secure our own “good person” status. But this often leads to greater confusion and discouraging waves of frustration as we realize that we can’t really fit ourselves into someone else’s shoes or walk down their exact path.

After wrestling with these realizations for a time, we begin to see that being a good person somehow involves being oneself. But more than that, it’s the delicate and hard-earned process of *becoming* oneself. This is ultimately a great deal more challenging and subtle than simply working through a checklist of predetermined steps, tips, or tricks. We must unfold our goodness from within. And each of us has a specific path that will take us through that process. That path is called “your life.”

In this way, being a good person is not a final state that one reaches, but a constant, lifelong project. In many ways, the consistent and earnest effort we make toward becoming a good person may be the closest we actually get to being a good person at all. This is a mysterious and rather paradoxical truth, so I’ll restate it again for clarity:

Working to become a good person is synonymous with being a good person.

Many people will not like this definition of goodness, as they would rather have their good-person status attained in a basic, provable step and completed as quickly as possible so they can put it behind them and get back to frivolous things. Many people would rather not have to invest their energy into ongoing labor toward their development. They want to pass a one-time test and be done with it. But that’s too easy. And when it comes to being a good person, the path may be simple, but it’s never easy. As has often been said, though it seems we are trying to reach a place or a state of importance, it’s not actually that destination that matters most, but the journey we go through on our way there. And what that journey does to us — and what we discover about who we’re meant to be while we’re on it — is where its true value lies.

So it’s never too late to reaffirm your commitment to continuing on your journey in life. You’ve already been unfolding yourself, and your pains and frustrations have all been part of this journey. You have never *not* been on your proper path. In many cases, our worst and lowest moments are ultimately the most motivating and inspiring in pushing us toward our unfolding goodness.

Find the courage to release yourself from your past “mistakes” and “failures” and realize that they are all part of your adventure. Each step — whether noble or flawed — has helped to bring you to where you are now, and from here on out, your life can and will improve.

It takes discipline and commitment and resilience to face yourself with honesty and humility every day, but you already began that part of the journey when you wrote in to me and started reflecting on your inner life. Always ask yourself a few questions: “Is this action I’m about to take going to contribute to goodness?” “Is this word I’m about to speak going to contribute to goodness?” “Is this thought I’m focused on going to contribute to goodness?” Follow the answers found in your heart, and let them lead you. Have faith in yourself and in your destiny. Allow it to pull you as much as you push toward it.

Realize that all along you have already been on your journey, getting your own incredible chance at being alive. It is through this very process called “living” that we each get to discover the truth about ourselves and the world around us. That’s what living is for. The only way to get anywhere is to go through it boldly and with great enthusiasm. It won’t be easy, but it will be amazing and incredible. Stay strong and keep moving forward. You already are a good person. Now let your life reveal this to you by living it and loving it with all your heart.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

*[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]*

**‘Do You Ever Get Stage Fright?’**

by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

December 9, 2015

Dear Andrew W.K.,

You seem like a very confident and fearless person, so I kind of doubt you feel this way, but I was wondering if you ever suffered from stage fright in your career as a performer. I’m a musician who has always played by myself or just jammed with friends for fun, but recently I’ve wanted to take my music to the next level and play it live, in front of a real audience.

Unfortunately, the few times I have tried performing at shows, they have been completely terrifying. How do I conquer those fears and live my dream of unabashedly rocking out onstage?

*Thanks,
Fearfully*

Dear Fearfully,

I don’t know if the term “stage fright” can convey the range of devastating sensations I regularly experience in regards not only to performing live, but in nearly every aspect of my work. It’s a constant combination of severe humiliation and embarrassment, fear and anxiety, and a type of ever-increasing anticipation that occasionally grows into full-blown dread. It never fully ceases; it just rides along beside me as a constant and horrifying presence.

From the first time I ever went up onstage (as a six-year-old, to give my first piano recital), this feeling of an all-encompassing and transcendent fear descended on my spirit and remained there. In fact, it has only increased over time. I would’ve thought that after thirty years of performing, these feelings would’ve subsided, but instead, they’ve actually grown stronger and deeper.

But other feelings have also grown alongside them. Feelings of determination. Feelings of focus. Feelings of a deep and insatiable need to do this work, no matter what. A commitment to fulfilling what I know I should fulfill — of doing what I know I must do in order to be worthy of the opportunities I’ve been given — in order to fulfill my own humble yet very important destiny. It never really gets easier to be alive, but you get better at handling the challenges you’re confronted with, and you get used to the feeling of impending doom, of some sort of cataclysmic disaster being right around the corner. I think that’s just the natural pressure of mortality. The key is to harness this pressure and use it for good. You realize you can feel these things without letting them prevent you from living your life. And when you can face those feelings in small but meaningful ways — like playing a show in spite of your stage fright — it counts as a genuine victory and a moment of triumph.

Each time you push forward and follow your dream, each time you meet a challenge head on, each time you recommit to not giving up, you get a little stronger. You get a little better. You get a little more familiar with who you really are inside. And though that doesn’t make the process less painful, it clarifies your devotion to your own life. You make a promise to your own destiny, one to follow what you were born to do regardless of how hard it may be, how torturous, or how ridiculous it makes you look.

Each and every time I go onstage, I feel like an incredible fool. Like a complete and total idiot. But there is something completely empowering about that feeling — it’s as empowering as it is crushing. It’s liberating to realize that not even my own worst fears can stop me. We have bigger and more important things to focus on: our purpose, our chance to exist, our chance to play the music, spread the energy, and unleash the feelings of joy. There has never been a single show I have played where I felt I did a truly good job — so then I try again. There has never been a show where I didn’t feel completely mortified and immersed in anguish as soon as I got offstage — but I still go back for more. I do it because I can tell that somehow this all means something, and that it’s good. It goes beyond feeling bad about yourself or how you did. In those moments, you are almost removed from being a person — you’re more than a person. You are a mission; you are a cause; you are means to an end, and hopefully that end is something truly good and full of love and power. I turn myself over to that cause every day and pray that it brings out the best in me.

Sometimes, it can feel like an outside force is taking over and making it possible to do things that were otherwise impossible. I don’t actually think that force is “outside” us; I think it’s who we really are inside, and our true essence is being amplified and brought to the surface by our desperate need for it. If you have a need to be at your best, for transcending your fears, your spirit will respond and give you the power you need to fulfill your destiny — to become who you really are. Having a mission, and a sense of purpose, gives us that strength to follow the path, even when it’s scary and awkward and discouraging. When we care more about doing what we love than we care about being afraid, we will ourselves to do it.

You simply remove the option of quitting from the array of possible choices. You promise to do what you know you must do, no matter how much it scares you. And in that promise lies all the strength you will ever need. The promise is the key. The promise transforms your weakness into your strength. And even though it’s frightening and overwhelming, you can tell that keeping that promise is literally making you into a better person.

That’s when all the fear and humiliation and confusion turns into something greater — something joyful and wonderful and strong.

The promise to follow your destiny turns you into yourself. And that is the most beautiful transformation of all.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

*[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]*

# ‘Does Heaven Exist?’

## by [ANDREW W.K.](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/andreww-k/)

December 17, 2015

*[Editor’s note: Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.]*

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’ve recently accepted the fact that I’m an Atheist. I realize most everyone in my family would be very upset by this, so I’ve kept it to myself. But now I suddenly feel very isolated. I’m having a very difficult time understanding how to deal with death knowing that there isn’t a heaven in which those I love will be seen again. Please help me with the constant fear of losing my loved ones for forever.

*Sincerely,
Afraid*

Dear Afraid,

Life confronts us with an endless series of dilemmas and pressures. The most challenging of these almost always involve that unmistakable yet mysterious quality best described as “the unknown.” Maybe the supreme puzzle isn’t in figuring out the ultimate secret answer to solve all the unknowns forever, but is in solving the need to figure out an ultimate secret in the first place. In this way, and perhaps as you’ve already done, we can accept that there are areas of life that we simply don’t presently have the necessary faculties to process or understand. Through this acceptance, we gain a type of transcendent knowledge in itself, one that’s both humbling and enlightening. An ultimate understanding of existence may be almost intentionally beyond our reach for all kinds of good reasons, but in considering this possibility, we don’t necessarily need to feel frustrated, discouraged, or belittled. Perhaps it’s beyond our grasp for a reason that is ultimately helpful, like a hot stove being out of reach from a child. Or perhaps it’s like a carrot being dangled in front of a rabbit, or a dog chasing after a false rabbit at a race track — perhaps there is something motivating about *not* getting it, and not knowing.

Maybe that lack of knowledge creates an intrinsic and propulsive energy that in some basic way connected to the very roots of our survival. We’re propelled by our trying to know; we strive and thrive as human beings in that pursuit. But what if we *did* know it all? Would we even be human anymore? Would there be a reason for us to move or go forward or exist?

When questions remain unanswered, it means there is more living still to do. Collectively and individually, we must earn our understanding through our efforts and be worthy of the shreds of truth we claw out of life. And perhaps we will never get to the One Final Truth buried behind it all, because that would stop the need for things to keep unfolding, and growing, and revealing themselves to us. We are revealing ourselves to ourselves, and the world is revealing itself through us, and us through it. If everything was known, there could be no revelation. The more we discover, the more we discover there is to still be discovered. As the great saying goes, “as veil upon veil is lifted, we find veil upon veil behind.” Maybe the veil gives shape to what it obscures. Maybe the onion is never meant to be peeled to its absolute center, for then there would be no onion to enjoy peeling. Maybe the absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth — or maybe not.

Fear can come from having the answers as much as it can come from not having any answers at all. The known is often even more frightening than the unknown. And regardless of what anyone believes or claims to know, we really don’t know very much about what living is really all about — not to mention what really happens when we die. What does it feels like to no longer feel?

One thing we *do* know, even in the face of all these unknowns, is that we can experience genuine moments of heavenly beauty in our own time living in this world. We can realize true moments of undeniable happiness, if we pay attention enough to notice them as they happen. We can even imagine a version of heaven that simply consists of what we already know and love about life right now.

Like many spiritual concepts, the idea of heaven can be explored as a symbolic illustration of many genuine aspects of our own day to day reality. It can be contemplated by believers and non-believers alike, and can offer us extremely valuable insights into our true self and the nature of what it means to be human right here and now. In this way, heaven is a state of true perfection which is already present and at the same time always in front of us. It’s something to unfold and reveal and work towards and to earn. Those precious moments of happiness will eventually slip through our fingers in the same way in which our loved ones will eventually slip into the unknown, as we ourselves will too — as all things must.

But ultimately, none of these looming and inevitable experiences with the unknown are to be feared or dreaded — they are meant to be questioned, explored, celebrated, and ultimately faced with a sense of awe and humility, and if we’re really strong, with a sense of humor.

Let us recognize heaven when we find it around us. And let us work to make heaven here and now for one another, as much as we can. It’s quite possible that when we die, that will be the moment we realize we had already been in heaven all along.

*Your friend,
Andrew W.K.*

**10 Times Andrew W.K. Gave the Best Advice**

by [VILLAGE VOICE STAFF](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/villagevoicestaff/)

December 23, 2015

Every week, New York City’s own Andrew W.K. takes your life questions and sets you safely down the right path to a solution, a purpose, or — no surprise here — a party.

This year Andrew W.K. gave some phenomenal advice to folks in need of a little guidance — whether it was about shaking some bad karma and how to #PartyPositive or tackling bigotry and depression. Here are some of his most-read advice columns from 2015.

MARIO DANE

10. [Ask Andrew W.K.: How Can I Shake My Bad Karma?](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-can-i-shake-my-bad-karma-6627653)

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I work at a used-car dealership where I’m forced to rip people off. It’s killing my spirit a little bit every day. I wish I could be making the world a better place, but instead, I’m spending sixty hours a week selling snake oil and gypsy tears to poor unsuspecting people. How do I dig myself out of this situation and reverse all of the bad karma?

*Sincerely,
Killing My Karma*
Andrew W.K.: I urge you to consider that you’ve actually been building up good karma for many years, and that this good karma is now revealing itself to you in an urgent form of undeniable instinct. It’s an inner voice presenting you with a new type of clarity — an overwhelming sense of moral integrity, a pressure — which is making it virtually impossible for you to go on living against the principles which you know in your heart to be right. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Killing My Karma…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-can-i-shake-my-bad-karma-6627653)

MARIO DANE

9. [Ask Andrew W.K.: How Can I Regain My Confidence?](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-can-i-regain-my-confidence-7240709)

Dear Andrew W.K.,

To put it simply, I’ve lost my confidence. I used to be able to wake up in the morning knowing who I was, feeling sure of myself and ready to take on the world… I just want to be confident again and know who I am. I’ve lost my way and don’t know how to get back my old self.

*Your friend,
Lost Along the Way*
Andrew W.K.: I’m someone who has never felt very confident in that typical outgoing way, but I also never really believed I had to feel confident in order to do something I wanted to do. I realized I could be confident without feeling confident. I had many of the same misconceptions that people who were confident inside always felt brave and strong. I think now it doesn’t really matter if we feel confident or not. What matters is what we actually do, regardless of how scared we may feel. That’s where this deeper type of confidence starts to develop — the confidence to live your life, even when you don’t feel particularly self-assured or bold. [Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Lost Along the Way…](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-can-i-regain-my-confidence-7240709)

RICK DAY

8. [Ask Andrew W.K.: I’m a Shoplifter](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-im-a-shoplifter-6654733)

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’ve never really shoplifted before, but yesterday I accidentally stole a T-shirt from a big retail chain… Now I have this T-shirt that I feel like I accidentally stole, but I also feel like it was kind of the store’s fault for not noticing it. It’s a huge chain store, so it’s not like this one shirt is going to hurt them too much. Is it fine to just keep it? I feel weird about it.

*Thanks,
Accidental Shoplifter*

Andrew W.K.: My personal advice for you is based on this same mindset: Go return the T-shirt. And be glad you didn’t have to get mugged in order to realize that stealing from others is bad. It’s just a T-shirt, and the big retailer might not ever notice or even care, but *you do care*. You cared enough to actually write me about it. That’s because this isn’t just about a T-shirt. This is about your own perception of yourself — your own principles, your own integrity, your own sense of order, and your own idealized view of the world. Once you start letting that slide too much, you slowly start to lose sense of yourself — your self-image slowly erodes — and you expect less of yourself and of others, and we all gradually fall further from our true potential as truly good beings. [Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Accidental Shoplifter…](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-im-a-shoplifter-6654733)

DUSTIN ASHCRAFT

7. [Ask Andrew W.K.: Can I Be Straight-Edge and Still Party Hard?](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-can-i-be-straight-edge-and-still-party-hard-6653424)

Dear Andrew W.K,

I’ve been dealing with some major substance abuse problems for a long time, and without going into too much detail, I’ve finally given up and decided to enter a recovery program and go straight-edge. You are an expert on partying. Can I be straight-edge and still party hard?

*Sincerely,
Fear of Not Partying*

Andrew W.K.: I think there’s a common misconception that true partying must always involve drugs and alcohol. In reality, the only thing that true partying must involve is partying. How each of us decides to party within that partying is up to the individual, but true partying doesn’t necessarily require drugs any more than it necessarily requires skydiving — to each their own. As long as it doesn’t blatantly hinder someone else’s ability to party, all forms of partying are permitted. Alcohol and drugs can be amazing, and when used in a dynamic way, they can offer us genuine life-changing insights and experiences. Drugs are not necessary requirements for all, and for some, they may be completely detrimental to reaching true party perfection. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Fear of Not Partying…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-can-i-be-straight-edge-and-still-party-hard-6653424)

BRIAN MCMANUS

6. [Ask Andrew W.K.: How Can I Talk to My Bigoted Friend?](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-can-i-talk-to-my-bigoted-friend-6639992)

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I recently moved in with a friend who I’ve known for almost a decade. Turns out he uses a lot of homophobic slurs and insults. He also says racist stuff and badmouths pretty much every minority group you can think of. I had never seen this side of him until we became roommates, and now I’m really disturbed. I pointed out how offensive this was, and his response was, “They’re just words,” and that I should lighten up. What do I do?

*Yours sincerely,
Concerned*

Andrew W.K.: Your friend’s answer of “They’re just words” is similar to punching someone in the face and then saying, “They’re just hands.” Words are powerful and can be used to hurt or comfort, just like hands can be used to hit or hug. Next time he uses derogatory language, you could just call him an “ignorant racist dumbass piece of shit,” and if he gets upset, remind him that “they’re just words.” Words are not “just words.” Words are power. Words are living symbols of expression. Words can cause you to feel angry, even violently hurt. They’re supposed to. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Concerned…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-can-i-talk-to-my-bigoted-friend-6639992)

FRANK VIERTI

5. [Ask Andrew W.K.: How Do I Show Religious Freaks That Science Wins?](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-do-i-show-religious-freaks-that-science-wins-6643452)

Yo, Andrew W.K.

*How can anyone believe in religion? It’s so ignorant and obviously fake. I’ve always backed science since I was a little kid, and now I’m proud to say that I’m studying to be a molecular biologist in college. The thing is, I’m surrounded by a lot of religious idiots at this school… What is the best way to finally get through to these ignorant people and explain to them simply and finally that they’re wrong?*
*Thanks for your feedback,
Enlightened Scientist*

Andrew W.K.: Both science and religion came from mankind’s desire to know. Both are striving for truth. Science wants to understand truth. Religion wants to experience it. Science wants to get at truth from the outside in. Religion gets at it from the inside out. Science gives us the how; religion gives us the why. Science gives us the means to an end, religion gives us the meaning of that end. Science wants to bring comprehension to the universe. Religion wants to bring tangibility to the intangible. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Enlightened Scientist…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-do-i-show-religious-freaks-that-science-wins-6643452)

DMP

4. [Ask Andrew W.K.: How Do I Become a Successful Musician?](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-do-i-become-a-successful-musician-6625750)

Dear Andrew W.K.,

Since I was very young, I’ve always wanted to be a successful musician. I have practiced and played in many bands and done everything I can to get my music out there, but the dream of making it big just seems to get further away and more impossible. I feel like I should just give up, but I love music so much and want to succeed at it. How can I get there? How can I be a really successful musician?

*Thanks,
Striving For Success*

Andrew W.K.: This is an excellent question and I’m going to answer it as simply and as directly as I can, with the hopes that it makes the point as clear and as helpful as possible. The traditional modern concept of success — being the measurement of monetary income as the primary indicator of effort and mastery in a certain field — is essentially a scam, a con, and a lie… To truly succeed at something is to devote yourself to what you love, and to allow that devotion to bring out the best and most admirable qualities inside of you, so that in the end, you ultimately succeed at the only effort that really matters: becoming a better person than you were. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Striving For Success…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-do-i-become-a-successful-musician-6625750)

RICK DAY

3. [Ask Andrew W.K.: How Do I Make My Family Understand I’m Transgender?](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-do-i-make-my-family-understand-im-transgender-6604739)

Dear Andrew W.K.,

Last month I came out as transgender, beginning my transition to female. My mom has repeatedly tried to get me to move back home and see a therapist to “fix” me. My oldest sister called me a “sexual deviant” and forbid me to talk to my nieces and nephew, all of whom I was very close to. It’s now been a month since this has happened. My question is, how can I reach out to my mom and my sister to help them understand better?

*Sincerely,
Rejected Trans Woman*

Andrew W.K.: First and foremost, I commend you for moving forward with an incredibly intense yet deeply important choice: the choice to be yourself. Choosing to be true to one’s self — despite physical, emotional, and social challenges that may come with the journey — is an integral part of realizing not just one’s own potential, but of realizing the true nature of our collective human spirit. This spirit is what makes us who we are, and by following that spirit as it manifests outwardly, and inwardly, you are benefiting us all. This is what defines and furthers our shared journey of discovery and individuality. You are you, and as you progress on this adventure, you are striving to release more of that “you-ness” from deep within and out into the world. And this “you-ness” is truth, truth as expressed through your life as a unique person. It’s your song, your melody. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Rejected Trans Woman…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-how-do-i-make-my-family-understand-im-transgender-6604739)

DAVID RIU

2. [Ask Andrew W.K.: Do You Ever Get Depressed?](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-do-you-ever-get-depressed-6653373)

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I’m a depressed person. I get sad and unmotivated and basically just feel like being away from everyone, including myself… Do you have any advice on what to do with bad feelings like this? You always seem so happy and I really look up to you for that. But do you ever get depressed? How do you stay so positive?

*Thanks,
Downer in the Dumps*

Andrew W.K.: The one thing I have learned throughout this odyssey is that those bad feelings are not who I really am. They are not the truth. And they will pass. And I will get back up. The real me is somewhere in there all the time, and the test is to see if I can hold on tight enough to make it through the storm. We must hold tight, and then try to rise back up. Maybe not instantly, but at some point, as soon as you can feel it start to lift a little. It takes an extraordinary amount of effort to push through it. Pulling out of a depression by sheer willpower is among the hardest physical and emotional challenges I have ever engaged in. But I have done it, and you can, too. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Downer in the Dumps…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-do-you-ever-get-depressed-6653373)

DUSTIN ASHCRAFT

1. [Ask Andrew W.K.: My Girlfriend Makes More Money Than I Do and It’s Stressing Me Out](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-my-girlfriend-makes-more-money-than-i-do-and-its-stressing-me-out-6634878)

Dear Andrew W.K.,

I have a lovely girlfriend who makes significantly more money than I do, and I find this situation aggravating and stressful. She and I live together, and the kitchen is now “my domain.” I know that love conquers all, but how do I be “the man” when I consistently find myself relying on her?

*Your Friend,
T*

Andrew W.K.: A truly good man must think of other people as unique beings of inherent value and greatness, capable of just as much greatness as himself. Rather than resent another’s greatness — especially the greatness of a loved one — a true man strives to encourage it. In recognizing someone else’s capacity for greatness, he may also see her become even greater than himself. Perhaps in ways that he didn’t expect. Perhaps in ways that defy social standards. Perhaps in ways that force him to look closely at his life and feel self-conscious and insecure. But rather than fear these feelings, the great man embraces them, for he realizes they’re opportunities to improve the quality of his soul, to loosen the strangling grip of his ego, and to free himself and others from unnecessarily stifling conventions. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to T…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-my-girlfriend-makes-more-money-than-i-do-and-its-stressing-me-out-6634878)

DOUGLAS ANSON

Honorable Mention: [Ask Andrew W.K.: My Dad Is a Right-Wing Asshole](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole-6644226)\*
*\*This is from 2014, but it’s one of Andrew W.K.’s most-read columns and still resonates with thousands of readers.*
Hi Andrew W.K.,

I’m writing because I just can’t deal with my father anymore. He’s a 65-year-old super right-wing conservative who has basically turned into a total asshole intent on ruining our relationship and our planet with his politics… Don’t get me wrong, I love him no matter what, but how do I explain to him that his politics are turning him into a monster, destroying the environment, and pushing away the people who care about him?

*Thanks for your help,
Son of a Right-Winger*

Andrew W.K.: The world isn’t being destroyed by democrats or republicans, red or blue, liberal or conservative, religious or atheist — the world is being destroyed by one side believing the other side is destroying the world. The world is being hurt and damaged by one group of people believing they’re truly better people than the others who think differently. The world officially ends when we let our beliefs conquer love. We must not let this happen. [*Read the rest of Andrew W.K.’s advice to Son of a Right-Winger…*](https://www.villagevoice.com/music/ask-andrew-wk-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole-6644226)

**Andrew W.K. Brings His Party to Irving Plaza**

by [DAVID SWANSON](https://www.villagevoice.com/author/davidswanson/)

May 17, 2018

Four years ago, when he was serving as the Village Voice’s advice columnist, Andrew W.K. received [a message](https://www.villagevoice.com/2014/08/06/ask-andrew-w-k-my-dad-is-a-right-wing-asshole/) from a reader trying to come to terms with the politics of his right-wing father. It’s hard to remember now, but America in 2014 was a very different place, and Andrew’s words seem to anticipate the current political divide. “The world isn’t being destroyed by democrats or republicans, red or blue, liberal or conservative, religious or atheist — the world is being destroyed by one side believing the other side is destroying the world,” he wrote. “Love your dad because he’s your father, because he made you, because he thinks for himself, and most of all because he is a person. Have the strength to doubt and question what you believe as easily as you’re so quick to doubt his beliefs. Live with a truly open mind — the kind of open mind that even questions the idea of an open mind. Don’t feel the need to always pick a side. And if you do pick a side, pick the side of love. It remains our only real hope for survival and has more power to save us than any other belief we could ever cling to.”

On Friday night, [Andrew W.K](http://www.andrewwk.com/). brings his message of love, hope, and partying to Irving Plaza, where he first performed almost two decades ago. In the years since he stormed into music fans’ lives like a sweaty, white denim–clad hurricane, the singer has been rock music’s prophet of positivity. In March,he released You’re Not Alone, his first album since 2009. We caught up with the singer to talk politics, music, and the power of positive thinking.

<https://youtu.be/-CBTyi-ovO8>

**Since Trump came into office, your advice to “Son of A Right-Winger” has continued to resonate with**Voice**readers. It was almost like you predicted the current state of our politics.**

I haven’t read that in a long time, but it was written from a place of common knowledge, things that other people had explained to me, sharing this perspective. It was a plea for my own sanity and my own civility, and a belief in the world’s ability to be humane and restrained while also being convicted and passionate. They’re cycles, it seems, in the human experience that really have the ability to bring out our worst and bring out our best. And, more intensely, bring out our worst disguised as our best. And I’ve been as challenged by this as anyone else.

You’ve also been a motivational speaker, and so much of your music is about seizing the moment and embracing life. How did you settle on rock music as the delivery mechanism for your message?

Being the keyboard player first and foremost — and having my earliest musical education come through the piano — I was very late to the game when it came to rock music in general. It wasn’t until high school, really, that I got into that. And before rock music I had gotten into more, I guess I would say *radica*l music, because that was the most strong departure from the traditional piano lessons I had. So that would be defined as experimental or avant-garde or modern or contemporary. That was, to me, the most exciting thing. And then I looked at the mentality of contemporary rock music as having the potential to combine anything and everything.

How so?

It was the most unrestrained and intense delivery method for the feeling I was trying to conjure up. It’s a very visceral and physical way to access a kind of primal energy and nothing else really works quite like it. All music, I think, is trying to reach a kind of core truth about being alive, a truth that can be physically experienced through our senses beyond our mental consideration into the physical, and so that’s what makes it so undeniable. But for me, almost as though I was born to do it, rock music had a maximalist sensibility that I really clicked with, just that everything was taken further. I feel like others that came before, if I may be so bold, have all been trying to get to that place together. And of course I’m extraordinarily inspired and encouraged by other people, especially thosethat have been doing it for a long time who are still engaged and still passionate and still determined to make that feeling happen for themselves and for their fellow humans.

<https://youtu.be/WccfbPQNMbg>

So you didn’t blast Queen or Kiss records to get pumped up to make the new record?

You know, I would answer this in two ways in the most respectful way possible. One, I really do try to strip my mind of everything when making a recording, and I hope it doesn’t come off as arrogant or as insincere. Most people who record music are trying — maybe they’re not, but I know there’s other people out there because I’ve talked to them — where they’re trying to say, “OK, what can I do? What can I do? Here’s what’s been done. Here’s my chance. I haven’t existed yet. I’ve never sat down to record a song so what can I do?” And it’s not to say I understand the idea that no one is free of influence and there’s a great chain of inspiration, whether it’s acknowledged or not, but there does seem to be something sacred and respectful about going out into the musical landscape and seeing if you can plant your own seed. That’s the greatest show of respect I can show to the music that I admire: to not try to copy it. I can never be that person no matter how hard I try. Who can I be? Can I get to the place they’re getting to? And I also will say even if there were influences, I would never say them, because I think it’s distracting. People can guess themselves.

How challenging is it to find other musicians who have the same drive and mission as you?

Well, I would like to say with all due acknowledgment to every band member I’ve ever had, because every band member has gotten us to where we are now, but this is the best the band has ever been. And I really say that because of the practice we’ve put in at this point. You hope that doing something longer enables you to improve doing it, and this band is the best that we’ve ever been and that’s just from time. Every other band member I’ve had has been incredible and irreplaceable and unique, but as things have come and gone, and people have come and gone and come back again, we are just at a level of focus and excitement and determination. I wish I could find another word for it, but there’s a lot of plain old-fashioned gratitude that we’ve gotten to do any of this in the first place, and that we’re still getting to do it. So I’d like to think that people would be able to feel our excitement for our playing this and playing for them.

How long, exactly, have you guys been playing together?

Well, the bass player, Gregg Roberts, and one of the guitar players, Erik Payne — they’ve been in the band since the beginning, since our first show we ever played, in 2001. They probably joined the band in 2000. Then there’s new members that have only been in the band for about a year.

Isn’t it a struggle to put out that much energy onstage, especially after all this time?

In some ways it feels completely surprising and baffling and quite confusing and thrilling, and then in other ways it feels completely unavoidable, like it was preordained and all that kind of feeling. I can’t imagine it being any other way. But then I can let my mind wander into all the other possibilities. It’s one of those kinds of projects where there’s many ways to look at it, and they’re all quite intense, for me at least. I can easily see it as, “How did I wind up so lucky as to be doing this?” and then I can also, at other times, see it as, “Wow, this is why all those people warned me not to do this!” So it’s continuously rewarding and challenging.

Does always looking on the bright side ever get tiring?

Well, as someone who’s a negative person by default, this party quest is about having a reason, a purpose to focus on the positive, to be more positive, to be a more strong and capable person, because that’s not how I felt already. So I had to have some kind of mission that was about those feelings, that gave me a way to experience those emotions that I could apply myself to. So not only is it not a burden to try to stay in that mind-set of motivated optimism, it’s crucial. And this is what gives me the chance to do it. So this work is what’s saving my life, basically. It’s very encouraging for one another to realize that this is a journey we can go on with comrades, with brothers and sisters, and it’s a great chain of humanity that is encouraging us and cheering us on from beyond the grave, or from heaven, or however you want to look at it. I just feel like my message is, “How can we find the meaning to life?” And that’s nothing that I possess. I’m just one of the people trying to get there myself, and do it in a profound way that hopefully resonates with more than just myself.

*Andrew W.K. plays*[*Irving Plaza*](http://andrewwk.com/tour/concerts/4301)*on Friday, May 18.*