

Self Care and Emotional Wellbeing

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When we bought our house I delighted in the garden the former owner had created. Over the first year I watched crocuses spring up in February, tulips and daffodils appeared like magic in March, sprouting between rocks and brightening up the landscape. Over the summer I beheld roses where ugly thorny bushes had been, and lovely scented lavender!

The first year I just watched, but by the next summer I wanted to actually learn how to take care of my yard. The garden wasn't looking as good as it had. In fact, it was growing wild. I invited a green-thumbed friend over to tell me about my yard.

"Uh-oh," she said right away, pointing to something green.

"What? What is it?" I asked.

"That," she said, "is an invasive weed and it's taking over your flower bed."

"Taking over? Is it allowed to do that?" I said.

"Are you weeding?" She asked.

"Not really. The last time I weeded I pulled out a bunch of rare poppies and so I decided I shouldn't risk it."

"Your plants look droopy. Are you watering?"

"I thought the rain took care of that." I said.

"And look" she said, plucking a brown spotted leaf, "You're not using organic fertilizer, are you?" She asked.

"No."

I didn't know how to take care of my garden and as a result, it was suffering. It took a few more years and many mistakes before I understood not to plant full-sun flowers underneath a tree, or that acid-loving perennials need different soil amendments than grass. But the results of these lessons are beautiful, and now our garden gives us a view, flowers, and an outdoor space to enjoy.

You, like any self-respecting Northwest garden have a number of needs that may not be obvious but are just as vital for your lifelong wellbeing.

Fresh air, exercise, nourishing food, time spent with people you enjoy, the opportunity to learn new things and to make a contribution to the world are all as important as water and sunlight and healthy soil is for plants.

In the rush and dash of daily living, it is easy to get caught up in the "gotta do" cycle, where our waking hours are consumed with work, parenting, cooking, cleaning, putting out the trash and paying the bills, and finally falling into an exhausted heap in front of your television for a few hours of escape before sleep.

The problem with this type of life is that it is unsatisfying, repetitive, and actually dangerous for your sense of wellbeing. The soul, or the authentic self, craves and thrives on variety, beauty, growth, novelty, creative exploration, and mystery.

While a good movie or television show might offer some of these things, the danger of television is that it is used over and over again, like a drug, for escape from the drudgery of day to day living, instead of being used once in a while as a planned experience, like having a friend to dinner or going out dancing.

Television watching becomes the default evening activity of many depressed people, and like a time vacuum, it sucks up hours that could be used doing a variety of much more interesting things; time that would be spent interacting with real people as opposed to observing imaginary people pretending to do important things.

But I like watching television! I don't want to give up what I like!

You don't have to give it up entirely, but if you would like to increase your sense of wellbeing, decrease your television time.

I wouldn't know what to do with myself without my television for company.

You can start by making a plan: List three enjoyable activities you would like to learn how to do, or simply do more often. Next look around for the supplies, instruction, or support you need. Join a class or group on your own, or if you are shy ask a friend to join you. In any given metropolitan area there are groups meeting each night of the week devoted to just about anything you can imagine: knitting, bowling, computer gaming, tattooing, playing musical instruments, juggling, astronomy, drawing, fencing, etc...

Share your gifts. What ever you are good at, be it a learned skill (such as carpentry) or an inherent one (such as a good sense of humor) find a way to share it with others. Do volunteer work, or just look around your neighborhood for someone whom you can help. Is there a single mother who could use an occasional babysitter? Is there a lonely dog that needs to be walked? Do you know a teenager in need of encouragement during their rocky hormonal years? Or a parent of a teenager who could use some reassurance that they will get through this time as well?

Notice how uplifting kindness is to you as well as to the recipient of your kindness. Develop an appetite for being of service.

Develop your intuition. Listen to that part of you that knows without knowing how it knows. Deepak Chopra says "Your gut is just as smart as your head, only it doesn't second guess itself." PS: that voice of intuition is easiest to hear in silence.

Pay attention to the company you keep. When you are feeling stressed or unhappy, avoid people who bring you further down. Seek friends who are generally content, happily married or happily single, emotionally secure and do not constantly use their time with you to complain. Of course we all occasionally need to vent, but limit your time with people who continually vent and do not engage in change.

Don't take my word for it! Try these suggestions out for yourself. Give them a thirty day trial period and see if your overall sense of joy hasn't blossomed and grown!

If you would like to make an appointment to learn more ways to enhance your emotional wellbeing and overall sense of satisfaction, my number is 206 375-7690 or send an email to therapistseattle.net. Mention this article for \$20.00 off your first appointment.