

January 2016 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames Practicing Emotional Hygiene!

"Health is the quality of life, involving social, emotional, mental, spiritual and biological fitness on the part of the individual, which results from adaptations to the environment." (Rene Dubos)

Recently, a mental health professional (Guy Winch) was interviewed on NPR about emotional health and what we do and don't do to enhance this aspect of our well-being. He noted that we promote the practice of physical hygiene (e.g., wash our hands, brush our teeth, physical exercise, etc.) but do little, if anything about practicing emotional hygiene! Do you spend more time each day brushing and flossing your teeth than you do promoting your emotional health? Are you able to break out of a cycle of brooding?

Emotional health is generally defined in the lexicon of health educators as the ability to express emotions appropriately, to control emotions and to feel comfortable expressing emotions.

Suggestions by Guy Winch for practicing emotional hygiene include: (1) recognize emotional pain when it happens (e.g., feeling rejection or being sad for some time) and take action; (2) redirect your gut reaction when you fail instead of dwelling on the failure (e.g., list factors that can be controlled and improve your preparation for the next time); (3) monitor and protect your self-esteem (e.g., avoid putting yourself down and practice self-compassion); (4) when negative thoughts begin to be played over and over in your mind, disrupt them with positive distraction (e.g., "Studies show that even two minutes of distraction will reduce the urge to focus on the negative unhealthily."); (5) find meaning in loss (e.g., "Loss is a part of life, but it can scar us and keep us from moving forward if we don't treat the emotional wounds it creates."); (6) do not let excessive guilt linger (e.g., guilt stresses your emotional and mental health and can be toxic to overall well-being; apologies do help); (7) and pay attention to what works for you in handling emotional wounds and practice these regularly. Silence the critical voices in your head and focus on factors in your control.

We need to give ourselves a pat on the back! It's up to us to give ourselves recognition. If we wait for it to come from others, we may have to wait a long time. We may get resentful if it doesn't come. When it comes, we may not believe it. We all love praise, but have you noticed how quickly the glow from a compliment wears off? *But when we compliment ourselves, the glow stays with us!* Try completing one or more of the following statements. You've probably done each one of these at some time or another but have forgotten that you did. We tend to forget our strengths and remember our failures. Describe a time you did one or more of the following:

1. I tried something I thought would be difficult.
2. I stuck with a job that was hard to do and I finally finished it.
3. I avoided making excuses or blaming someone else for what I did.
4. I told the truth even though I was afraid it would cause trouble for others.
5. I controlled my temper in a difficult situation.
6. I tried to get along better with someone in my family.

Sources: Winch, Guy. *Emotional First Aid: Practical Strategies for Treating Failure, Rejection, Guilt, and Other Everyday Psychological Injuries*. Hudson Street Press, New York. July 2013.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201412/5-steps-better-emotional-hygiene>

<http://ideas.ted.com/7-ways-to-practice-emotional-first-aid/>



Happy, Healthy, Feel Fantastic; Boy am I enthusiastic!