

West County Psychological Associates

The WCPA Newsletter

1215 Fern Ridge Parkway, Suite 110 St. Louis, MO 63141

Website: www.wcpastl.com

Phone (314) 275-8599

Email: info@wcpastl.com

Spring, 2021

Patience

Bryan Duckham, Ph.D., MSW, LCSW

“Hurry, hurry, no blessings.”
Swahili Proverb

“Patience is a virtue.”
Old time colloquialism

How often have you been told, ‘patience is a virtue’? In Swahili, wise elders cautioned, ‘hurry, hurry, no blessings.’ All cultures promote patience as an antidote to anxiety and unease. Still, the pandemic has stretched the patience of all of us. It has forced us to think about patience in new ways, even as we anticipate the end of the pandemic.

We are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We can see some kind of end to the severe limitations the pandemic has created. Increasingly, vaccines are becoming available, leading to a sense of promise that life can return to some kind of normalcy - there is greater hope for the return of seeing friends and family, to return to class or work, and to resume going to clubs, gyms, and participating in other activities. There is talk of this happening as early as July. Yet, at the same time, we hear of new variants to COVID and the need to continue to observe limitations. Some say that it will be fall or later before enough of the population will be vaccinated for the return to normalcy and, in the meantime, we should continue to wear masks, socially distance and refrain from participating in groups. To some degree, uncertainty persists.

Given that character development and the pursuit of happiness and the good life is an ongoing project, this challenge to develop patience requires vigilance and persistence throughout life. So, in the face of this uncertainty and as a general approach to building character and experiencing happiness, how do we develop patience? What does one do if they have the opposite of patience – in the form of excessive impatience, frustration, or anxiety, and cannot manage on their own?

Years ago, when I would meet with my mentor for supervision, he would challenge me with what I came to call “Jerry-isms” (his first name was Jerry). He would share a saying that would leave me bewildered at first, only for me to come to understand its meaning later, after much grappling. One of the things he used to say was that impatience and its cousin, frustration, are forms of anger. They occur when we don’t see that our anger has an outlet, when we don’t see that we have a way of expressing the anger and moving toward getting our need met. So, when one feels impatient or frustrated, it may be an indication that there is an unmet need or anger lurking in the shadows.

Another “Jerryism” was that “anxiety can be fuel or undoing.” Similar to anger, anxiety often is a signal that a need is not met and that one has feelings tied into this need. These feelings can be used to get the need met or, conversely, can lead to negative consequences. The best definition I have heard for anxiety suggests that when we don’t understand what we are feeling and needing, our emotions become diffuse and take the form of anxiety. Anxiety can point to feelings of guilt, hurt, and anger, related to needs.

We all feel anxiety, frustration, impatience, and anger - they are the fuel for growth. Anxiety propels us to do well on a test, achieve our goals, and to care about relationships. Righteous anger informs us when we - or others we care about - experience an injustice or slight, when the integrity of the self is under attack, or when one is unfairly criticized or has unrealistic demands placed upon them. Impatience and frustration occur as we pursue those things we care about and require others to care about and for us. All these emotions are the normal everyday occurrences that can be engaged and can lead to greater intimacy and achievement. These are all emotional muscles that require ongoing workouts.

There are also strategies to help us manage anxiety, anger, and impatience or frustration. Research has shown yoga, mindfulness, and meditation to be powerful practices as we deal with anxiety and stress. Many who are religious find prayer and church service helpful. A strong body of literature correlates physical and mental health to religious experience. A strong support system, where one can share their feelings related to the ups and downs of everyday life, is essential. Adequate sleep, exercise and healthy eating also contribute to wellness. Sometimes, however, these strategies are not adequate in bridling anxiety, impatience, frustration, and anger, and more support is needed.

What are the signs that more support is needed? When the opposite of patience, such as frustration, impatience, anger, and irritability, consistently come out in a harmful way, towards oneself or others, it is a sign that greater intervention is needed. For example, when we consistently take out these feelings on a partner or child, it may be a sign that help is needed to explore the root of the feeling(s) and unmet needs. Frustration, impatience, and anger can also be signs of depression and addiction - they can be a sign that one has been involved in a long-standing pattern of internalizing feelings and needs.

When anxiety cannot be used as the fuel for life and, instead, becomes overwhelming, it is an indication that help is needed. This inability to harness anxiety and its subsequent build-up can take the form of panic, fear of places or people, obsessions and compulsions, or general dread. Help is needed to parse out the feelings and needs behind the anxiety and symptoms.

Excessive frustration, anger, anxiety, as well as depression, are like the electronic warning systems in our cars - they let us know that there is malfunction in the system.

Excessive frustration, anger, anxiety, as well as depression, are like the electronic warning systems in our cars - they let us know that there is malfunction in the system. The dysfunction in the system can be understood in many ways. Cognitive-Behavioral therapists see faulty thinking and behavior. Those who work out of a Psychodynamic or Emotional-Focus lens tend to focus on feelings. Existentialists tend to see these symptoms as an indication that one is not living a fully authentic life. Each of these frames can be part of the picture. Symptoms can be indications that one needs help in understanding the unresolved feelings and beliefs that fuel self-diminishing or self-defeating patterns, throwing one off course.

Self-help, in its many forms, can be useful and transformative. While I am a strong proponent of self-sufficiency, and I believe it is a goal - to produce happy and successful individuals. I also know our culture's overemphasis on self-reliance keeps too many people from getting help. Sadly, our society does not fully value the power of healthy dependency. Over my thirty years of practicing therapy, I have come to marvel even more fully at the power of the therapeutic relationship. It helps raise awareness of what symptoms are communicating to the client, and helps transform feelings, beliefs and patterns into a more purposeful and happy life.

Let's do what we can to maintain patience, joy and contentment; let's harness anxiety, frustration, impatience and anger, and use them to grow. Self-care in the form of adequate sleep, healthy eating, exercise, social support and intimacy, are all part of the equation to maintain this equilibrium. Spiritual and religious practice, yoga, mindfulness and an examined life can also assist in the achievement of well-being. However, when our best attempts to manage these experiences fail, it may be time to accept the limitations of self-care and get help.



Bryan Duckham, Ph.D., MSW, LCSW has decades of experience in the treatment of depression, anxiety and addictions. He believes that often, people's religion and spirituality are essential parts of their recovery and sensitively integrates his clients' beliefs into treatment. In addition to maintaining his practice at West County Psychological Associates, he is an Associate Professor of Social Work at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and teaches theory and practice courses in the undergraduate and graduate social work program.

From the Director

I have always eventually loved working with children. I say “eventually” because, at first, some children are hard to like. Of course, we all love out-going, verbal, and well-mannered children. They make loving sons and daughters, great students and good friends. But there are other children who are more difficult to be with. They can be angry, rude and power-seeking. They can be aggressive and defiant. I think many parents of adolescents may think that I’m identifying their child, but most of our children do behave more appropriately outside of home. The child that I’m describing behaves badly at home, at school, on their sports team and, maybe, with their friends. They are the children who test our patience - the children we may even find hard to love.



Then there is the other type of child whom we may find to be difficult but for different reasons. They behave in the opposite way. They are quiet, very well-behaved, but very, very passive. It is difficult to communicate with them because their responses are limited. They are not disliked. They are just not seen. Conversation with them can almost be painful because one feels as though they are pulling the words out of this child. We don’t necessarily find them hard to love. We just don’t see them.

Both of these types are the children that demand more from us. But, because of our frustrations, we tend to give them less. We have no patience. We don’t understand why they can’t behave like other children and “just do what we want them to do.” We wonder how many times we have to repeat the same thing. They never seem to get it. We find ourselves becoming more controlling of their behavior. We tell them exactly what we want them to do. But it seldom happens. The children who most need us turn us away from them.

Being able to like, or even love this child, is the work that parents and teachers are called to do. But how do we approach these children? The first thing is to attempt to connect with them. Easier said than done. This means developing a real interest in the things that they connect to. I once dealt with a sixteen year old who was very difficult. She could be extremely rude, unkempt and difficult to like. However, her great passion was snakes. She talked a lot about her snakes. One day she asked if she could show me some of them. I knew that I was being put to the test. It was fortunate that I don’t necessarily have an adverse reaction to reptiles. I even admired how beautiful they were --- and I meant it. It was the beginning of a strong relationship - one that she and I truly appreciated. In time her difficult behavior changed and since then she’s done well in adulthood.

Another way to form that connection is to ask questions that show your true interest in the child. But, just as importantly, sharing yourself with him or her. This means sharing your own honest feelings about areas that have meaning for you. The important part of this exchange is the authenticity of your feelings. I believe that the deepest impact that we have with others is by telling the other what is really honest and true for us. Probably the behavior that allows us to get to the source of those authentic feelings is listening. In fact, I am finding that, especially in situations when I am with someone I deeply care about, that listening without advice has a stronger impact than sharing all of my “worldly wisdom.”

However, our tendency with these children is to make demands. As good parents, we give endless advice in hope that in time this child will pay attention and do what we want them to do. It seems that our theory is that the more we talk, the better chance we have that they will hear us. That sounds good in principle, but it doesn’t work. Teachers find themselves repetitively telling the same students to behave but we see no change on the child’s part. Or, we tell the passive child to speak up or go make friends, get involved. Of course, there’s no change. One of the reasons neither of these children are changing is that they haven’t bought into the idea or they are too afraid of not being able to change.

For change to occur, the child has to want it for him or herself. It is not good enough that we want it for them. So how do we help them develop those positive behaviors? How do we help them want the best for themselves?

First of all, we have to learn to honestly like them. But the child has to actually feel this. This forms the connection. Caring, sharing, and listening are the ways that we develop the ability to like this child. It is not through advice giving, unless it is asked for. Secondly, the child has to want these changes for himself. We ask questions such as, “What do you want in this situation?” “How do you want others to see you?” What will you have to do in order to make these changes?” “Are you willing to do what needs to be done to change?” “Is this what YOU want, not your mother, father, teacher or coach?”

We seldom ask children or adolescents what they want for themselves. However, neither do adults ask themselves what they really want. In a recent conversation with a friend, I asked, in making decisions, who do you want to please. She said, “Others.” When I asked what she wanted for herself, she said, “I’ve never asked myself that question.” The next question was, “What do you do to make yourself happy?” She said, “I don’t think about myself. I try to make others happy.” This, obviously, is a very caring person. But how do we come to know ourselves if our goal is to always in pleasing others? I strongly believe that in work or play, we need to do what makes us feel good about ourselves.

Let’s go back to the difficult child. In order to help this child transition from being angry, aggressive or passive to loving, caring, and possessing a good sense about himself, he needs to want to do the “right” thing because, in the long run, this will make him happy about who he is. He has to feel that when he makes the right choices, and this is done out of his own choosing, he will have a much better sense of his self-worth. He does the “right” thing because he wants to do the ‘right’ thing. This creates an inner strength that can become a lifelong process.

I believe that anyone who is in care of a child, whether it be parent, teacher or coach, has the obligation to like and even learn to love that child with a caring that is real and authentic. It is work. It is not easy. But it is life-giving to the hard-to-love child and to ourselves.

~ *Mary*

Our office has moved!

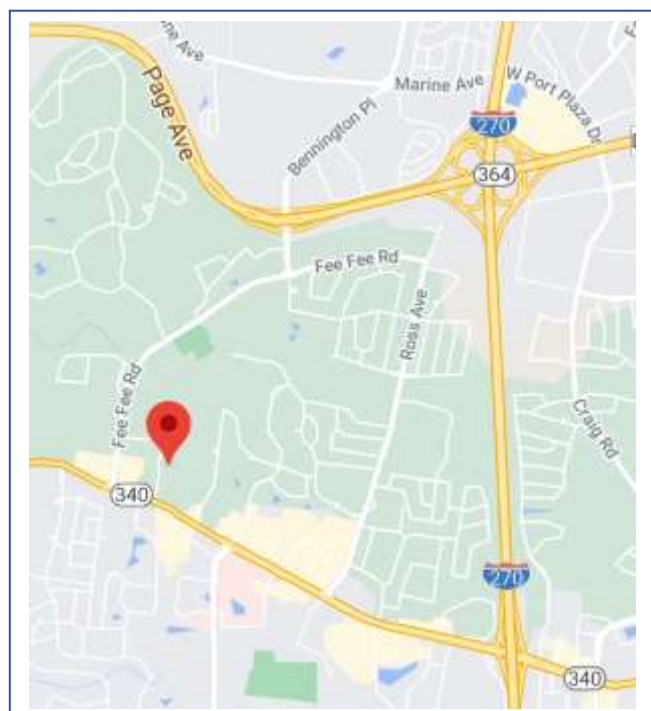
(But not very far.)

Our new address:
1215 Fern Ridge Parkway
Suite 110
Creve Coeur, MO 63141

Ph: (314) 275-8599

On the web: www.wcpastl.com

Email: info@wcpastl.com



What to Do If You're Not Ok Right Now

Amy V. Maus, MSW, LCSW



Earlier this year, I was scrolling through Facebook when a post caught my eye. An old colleague shared an article titled, *Check on your teacher friends right now, because we are not OK*. I found myself taking the (ever less frequent) step of actually reading the article instead of continuing to scroll. The article described what many teachers are going through right now, including teachers with in-person classrooms, fearing for their health and safety, those with online classes, feeling woefully inadequate and frustrated, and ones with, as the article states, “some unholy hybrid” of online and in-person learning, described as creating *a crushing sense of failure*.

I am not close friends with the woman who posted, but I commented and asked how she was doing and what manner of instruction her own school district is currently using. Of course, she replied it was the unholy hybrid. This fantastically talented woman, who once won Teacher of the Year, shared how she has been reduced to a feeling of incredible inadequacy. This award-winning teacher described her current job as nearly impossible.

We may not all be teachers – though some of us are playing one at home these days – but my guess is that many of us can relate to this woman. If we can be honest, for so many of us the last year has been really, truly, and incredibly *bad*. There have been scary times, like last spring when basic supplies were missing from store shelves and doctors were crying on TV. There have been heartbreaking times, when we’ve seen family and friends pass away or lose jobs or hard-fought family owned businesses. There have been so many deep disappointments this year, with lost graduations and sports seasons, postponed weddings, losses of vacations and celebrations, and funerals that had to be attended by immediate family only.

How long do we have to put off the wedding? When will the family – all the family – really be able to gather together to mourn dad’s passing? When will we sing out in church again? When will we be able just to see a movie at the theater, cheer on our team at the stadium, send our child to school without a mask, or get to hug that friend that we see in the store? When will we be able to sleep through the night again?

The answers aren’t complete yet, which may be the hardest part. We are deep in a sense of mourning, of coping with abnormality, and the light is only now beginning to appear at the end of the tunnel. Most of us were prepared to give “fourteen days to bend the curve,” but those two weeks have never entirely ended. It feels as if it has simply gone on too long, and a lot of us are starting to reach the ends of our ropes.

So what do we do if we are, as the article said, really *not OK*? First, and this can’t be overstated, remember that you are not alone. Everywhere we go, we encounter people who are not OK right now. We aren’t sleeping, or we’re sleeping way too much. We say to our friends how incredibly exhausted we are of it all. We cry when no one’s looking. We try doing something that feels normal, only to feel worried afterward that we took a risk with our health. Anything sound familiar?

Knowing that you’re not alone, have compassion for yourself. We have all learned to have compassion for others when they’re in pain. Right now, you are in pain. Be kind to yourself. Give yourself credit for getting this far in the terrible, awful year that seems to have no end. You are still here, still fighting for normalcy, still trying to be kind or patient or responsible, still wanting good things for yourself and your family. You get credit for this. Take a deep breath and know that anyone in your shoes would be sad, worried, or overwhelmed. You are a good and normal person, living through some really hard times.

At the same time, think about some of the good things in your life right now. What are they? Can you name two? Or ten? The human brain experiences negativity bias, where we readily notice, focus on, and remember the negative things in life more than the positive. This isn’t just true for pessimists, all of our brains work this way. Engaging in an intentional practice of gratitude can counteract this bias, encouraging us to look for the lovely, loving, funny, or nurturing parts of life so that we can add it to our gratitude journal or focus on it for a moment of positive meditation.

Sometimes, one of the most helpful things we can do for ourselves when we feel overwhelmed and depleted is simply to return to the basics. Did you get some exercise today? Did you get to bed at a reasonable hour? Did you take a break from social media and/or the news, if either is becoming unhealthy for you? If you are like most people, thinking about “getting into an exercise routine” or “eating healthy” can feel overwhelming and undoable. What about just planning a 20 minute walk after lunch tomorrow? Or adding a piece of fruit to your lunch instead of cookies? Maybe you intentionally take a two-day break from social media. It’s two days – not forever. It’s do-able. Small victories can feel like major accomplishments these days. Sit with and savor that feeling of victory that comes with a small act of self-care.

Lastly, don’t forget to reach out to your resources. Is it time to see your doctor and get real about how low you’ve been feeling? Maybe it’s time that you reconnect with that counselor that you used to see, or to find a new one. Or perhaps it’s time to ask your pastor or mentor for some help with spiritual renewal. Look out at the stars, or over the budding trees, and with prayer or meditation remember that your universe, perhaps your faith, is immensely bigger and grander than any one nation’s time of crisis. This time is but the blink of an eye.

We have all done this before. We have all lived through hard times, losses, fears and disappointments. We can do it again, and come out the other side. If you are not OK right now, you are normal. Be extra kind to yourself and muster your resources. This, too, shall pass. It’s going to be OK. Say it to yourself: *It’s going to be OK.*

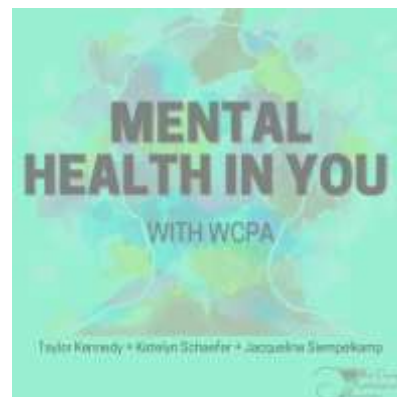
We are pleased to announce our new **PODCAST!**

Mental Health in You

Hosted by three WCPA therapists: Jacqueline Siempelkamp, Katelyn Schaefer, and Taylor Kennedy

~ New episode every Monday ~

Mental Health in You is a weekly podcast covering mental health topics for YOU. Therapists Taylor Kennedy, Katelyn Schaefer, and Jacqueline Siempelkamp discuss material that is relevant to what we are all going through at this very moment to break the stigma surrounding mental health. Expect in-depth conversations, mental health tips, interviews with professionals in the community, involvement from YOU, and more.



Follow us on Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthinyou/>

SUBSCRIBE:

<https://linktr.ee/mentalhealthinyou>

**April topics
out NOW:**

April 5: Coping with a loved one’s mental health disorder
April 12: The significance of the therapeutic relationship (Ask the Therapists episode)
April 19: How to set boundaries with people you love
April 26: Why depression is different from just feeling sad

Yes, Your Loss Matters: Accepting the Experience of Grief

Amy Neu, MSW, LCSW



“We are all dealing with the collective loss of the world we knew. The world we knew is now gone forever.” – David Kessler

Lately in my practice, I have been hearing clients describe their surprise in feeling mixed emotions upon reunification with their loved ones. Yes, they are experiencing happiness from first hugs, appreciation for healthcare providers and vaccines, and relief that they have made it through to this point. Yet other emotions are emerging too: feelings of anger that they have been separate for a year, sadness for lost time and everything they missed, guilt for what was done or not done, and questioning if things could have been handled differently. Put simply they, like many of us, are experiencing grief.

“Wait, I can’t be grieving, because my loved ones are alive!” you may be thinking to yourself. When the word “grief” comes to mind, the word “death” is often labeled as the root cause. Yet grief is a reaction to much more than death. Anytime there is a major change or loss in our lives (for the better or worse), a period of grief often follows. There is a general consensus among therapists that there are five traditional stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. A sixth stage has been proposed recently, by grief expert David Kessler, which he calls “finding meaning.”

Many people hear about these stages of grief and expect to move through each stage individually and gradually end at acceptance. However, grief is not structured as we would hope for it to be. The stages of grief were not proposed as a linear experience, and are not meant to be experienced as such. Rather, these stages are meant for people to better understand each emotion in greater depth and give language to the emotion they may be feeling. It is also common to hear people identify several emotions they may be experiencing at once during any given day of mourning.

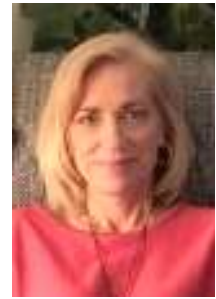
Grief is unique to each individual; there is no right way to grieve. There are, however, helpful messages to keep in mind as you move through your grief:

- **Your loss matters.** It is tempting for us humans to compare our grief and situation to another’s, often in an attempt to minimize our own grief or deny ourselves the “right” to grieve. We long to think ourself out of our grief in order to fast-forward or skip the pain that grief brings to us. In these situations, remind yourself that YOUR loss matters. Your feelings are valid, and you deserve space to heal.
- **Practice self-compassion.** We are worthy of care and kindness. Many of us are much more compassionate to others than we are to ourselves. Self-compassion is essentially giving ourselves the same support and understanding we would extend to someone else. For example, practicing self-compassion can look like treating yourself like you would treat your best friend. Ask, “What would I tell a friend if they were going through this experience?” Then, apply that message to yourself.
- **Take care of your physical needs.** Often when we are experiencing changes and grieving, taking care of ourselves can feel like an effort. Furthermore, appetite and energy are often affected in the short-term. While we may not feel up to caring for ourselves as we usually do, it is important to be sure we are eating, drinking water, exercising, and getting rest regularly. Many people find a simple schedule helps them stay on track with meeting their self-care needs.
- **Be patient.** It is so hard for many of us to stay present while we grieve. We wish either to go back and be able to change things in the past or to skip ahead to a future time when the pain doesn’t hurt us so much. When you catch yourself wishing for one of these options, please remind yourself to stay patient. We must give ourselves permission to stay in the present; the only way to move through the grief is by experiencing it and honoring what we need in the present-day.

We have been through so many changes and challenges the past year. As we begin to reunite with those we love, we also uncover the grief in transition. It is necessary to be patient, supportive, and understanding with ourselves as well as others. If you or your loved one would benefit from speaking with a professional, please contact us at 314-275-8599 to discuss your needs and how therapy can help.

STRUGGLING WITH OCD? WAYS TO HELP YOURSELF

Angela Cook, MSW, LCSW



You've been struggling with the symptoms of OCD. Now what? What can you do to help yourself? You might have already reached out for professional help, which is a great first step. The hard news is that symptoms often get worse before they get better, which is why people start getting overwhelmed, frustrated and sometimes even depressed. The good news is that there are plenty of tools you can use to manage the unwanted, intrusive thoughts, images and sensations that seem to be taking over your life. The question I like to hear in therapy is, "What can I do to help myself get better?"

EDUCATE YOURSELF The more you know about OCD, the better. However, that doesn't mean go down the 'rabbit hole' on the internet. Regardless of whether or not someone is in therapy, the first step is to have a clear understanding of what is going on by learning the basics of OCD, your subtype, triggers and treatment protocols. In addition to learning from your doctor or therapist, you can go to a reputable website such as Medscape or the International OCD Foundation for pertinent information. You can also listen to inspiring stories of OCD recovery on the podcast OCD Stories.

PRIORITIZE SELF CARE by getting enough sleep, engaging in physical activity, and fueling your body with nutritious food. Try to keep your blood sugars stable by eating at regular intervals. Consume a variety of fruits, vegetables, protein and whole grains. Foods high in Vitamin C & D, Magnesium, Zinc and Omega 3's—such as almonds, avocados, eggs, salmon and citrus fruits—have been correlated with raising serotonin levels, to help manage anxiety. Limit caffeine and nicotine because these can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety.

BUILD YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK with people you feel comfortable confiding in and with whom you're comfortable sharing what's going on inside your head and body. It takes the average person with OCD over 15 years to seek help due to feeling so much shame, guilt and frustration over compulsions like ritualized hand-washing. "I can't tell anyone that I have frequent disturbing images of doing violent acts to strangers because they will lock me up!" It's important that your loved ones know what's going on because they need to know how not to reinforce your compulsions; for example, a spouse who spends several hours cleaning the house every day at the expense of caring for the children. Get support from peers through the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, ADAA's Free Peer to Peer Support Community.

MANAGE STRESS AND ANXIETY by adding tools to your coping kit, which helps one feel better and less distressed when life becomes challenging and difficult. Practice a wide variety of strategies to self-soothe when needed to calm the overactive part of the brain. This part, the amygdala, is like the brain's smoke detector. Learn how to flip the switch so that you can activate the parasympathetic nervous system (the calming part) and combat the unwanted reaction of fight, flight or freeze, because it is a false alarm.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS to help quiet the continuous inner chatter in your head. This brings your focus to the present through raising awareness of your senses. Download and try the Mindfulness 2021 app.

MEDITATION and BREATHWORK exercises have been proven to create new neural pathways in the brain that are calming, while quieting the overactive part of the brain responsible for excessive anxiety. Become more efficient at learning how to self-soothe and relax. Explore different forms of meditation, and practice it on a regular basis. Access phone apps, such as Smiling Mind, Calm, Sanvello and Headspace to help find the right fit for you.

PRACTICE EXPOSURES Exposing yourself to the anxiety-provoking trigger while sitting with negative feelings, sensations and thoughts can help to prevent the negative response from the usual compulsion. This is called Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) and is an important piece in being able to manage OCD. This is often when a trained professional is most helpful, to individualize the hierarchy of fears in order to titrate up slowly, starting with the least distressing trigger.

EXPLORE THERAPY AND MEDICATION if the symptoms persist and are interfering with your work, home life, self-care and socializing.

GIVE YOURSELF COMPASSION Above all else, be kind to yourself and show yourself compassion. Use positive self-talk in order to shut down the shame response when the symptoms don't decrease at the rate that you want them to. The main component of getting better is you and the effort you put in to managing the symptoms. And keep in mind the goal is not to eliminate all obsessions and compulsions but to learn how to shift the focus.

So, What Exactly is This Thing Called “Balance”?

Taylor Kennedy, MSW, LMSW



As humans, we are all striving to achieve “balance” in some capacity. Balance, or the lack thereof, involves all aspects of an individual’s physical, emotional, and mental health. A few examples include work/life balance, self-care/care for others, social life/personal life, and productivity/relaxation. Generally speaking, one can think of balance as finding a state of calmness and serenity within themselves. Many of us understand balance in very broad terms, such as the examples above. But, in regard to mental health, what exactly is balance?

Balance is commonly known for its physical meanings, in regard to a person or object’s physical equilibrium. Think of a balance beam in gymnastics. The beam is meant to test the gymnast’s physical balance, as well as their ability to equally distribute their weight to prevent falling. When finding an equal distribution of weight, whether it is for measuring, riding a bike, or landing a trick on a balance beam, balance is achieved when there is an equal amount of weight.

In the world of mental health, striking balance involves weighing competing needs, feelings and values. This looks different for different people, and it changes over the different phases of life, as well. Picture a balance scale. Take a second to think about two of your own core values. For example, take the values of family and financial stability. As Americans, many of us can relate to the struggle of finding the work-life balance. Put a single core value on each side of the measuring instrument. Appropriate amounts of weight or priority have to be put toward each core value, in order to create balance. Of course, there are going to be situations in life that test an individual’s ability to honor competing core values and find that balance.

Here are a few strategies for creating balance in our mental health:

Prioritizing: Prioritizing is key when it comes to feeling in control and balanced throughout the day. It is extremely hard for an individual to lay their head on the pillow at night and feel a sense of peace if personal priorities have not been met. It can be helpful to take the time and write down or brainstorm what is most important. Using this list, start reworking schedules and making time for what matters most. Prioritizing allows individuals to invest more time in the present so there is an increase in quality time. Effective scheduling and actively engaging in prioritizing daily, weekly, and quarterly tasks is a great strategy for creating balance in this hectic life.

Boundaries: Taking the time to set and maintain personal and professional boundaries is a great way for individuals to find balance. Enforcing and upholding these boundaries isn’t always easy though. For example, if an individual is trying to prioritize sleep, they might set a boundary for shutting off electronics at a certain time. It is not always easy to turn off the television or put the phone away. However, it’s undeniable that these devices have an impact on the human body’s ability to decompress and fall into a deep sleep. Setting this boundary and upholding it allows one to learn self-accountability and create changes towards achieving that desired sense of balance.

Self-Care: Self-care refers to practices in which individuals engage in actively caring for themselves. These practices relieve stress and promote an individual’s general wellbeing. Self-care aids an individual in achieving positive outcomes, such as a sense of balance. As humans, we are extremely diverse and thus, our self-care will be too. What one person might consider to be self-care another person may think produces stress. It can be helpful to spend time thinking of things that assist in alleviating stress, fostering positivity, and contribute to a general sense of happiness and well-being. And remember that self-care (e.g. a balanced diet) and treating yourself (e.g. that hot fudge sundae) can look very different!

Grace: Human beings are not designed to be flawless. However, there is often a sense of pressure to strive for perfection. Individuals are extremely hard on themselves and often try to uphold unrealistic standards. Grace is a great tool to use when striving to create balance. Grace is needed in life before balance can be achieved. Giving grace simply means that an individual is allowing themselves permission to forgive for mistakes, lapses in judgement, hurtful choices, etc. Learning to give grace – to ourselves as well as to others – is not always easy. However, once an individual starts rewriting the inner script to allow for grace, balance is easier to achieve, as there is not the need for perfection.

Reaching balance is a learning process and there is not always an easy answer. At times, the scale may teeter too much in one direction and there must be a re-footing to achieve balance again. The juggle to find balance can be a lifelong journey, but the rewards make the journey worthwhile.