

Winter 2009

THRIVING

A JOURNAL OF WELL-BEING from
MARGARET HOOD BLACK, MA, LPC
Licensed Professional Counselor
Adolescent, Adult, Family & Marriage Counseling
281-268-6304

Changing Relationships

Caring for Yourself While Caring for Your Aging Parents

With people living longer than ever before, more and more individuals find themselves sandwiched between caring for their children and caring for their aging parents.

Coping with our fast-paced, always-connected world is stressful enough, but when you add double or triple the family responsibilities, well, it quickly gets overwhelming.

You're probably losing time and energy worrying about things that aren't getting done or things you have to do next. You may not realize just how much physical and mental stress you are under, or how much that has been sapping your effectiveness at work and at home. Guilt may be a constant companion. While you take care of your parents, you may feel that you're not doing enough for your children, and vice versa.

You may experience feelings of grief and loss, as you see your parents changing and the roles of your family shifting. You may also feel fearful and anxious about your parent's mortality, and that gets you thinking about your own.

With all of the extra time you need to take care of others, there is less time—if any—to spend on yourself and the things that recharge you. Here are five ways to take care of yourself while taking care of your aging parents.

1. First, meet your own needs.

You can't help anyone else if you are so sapped of energy and joy that you are miserable and lifeless. Block out time every day for something that's just for you. Give equal attention to your emotional, spiritual and physical needs. Protect that time as your most important appointment—because it is!

2. Get support for your parents.

Seek out government and community resources for home care, medications, support groups, mobility aids and adaptive equipment. Keep organized records of your parents' medical history, as well as the contact information and recommendations of everyone you consult with. You will rest easier knowing that professionals are involved and you're not trying to make decisions that you're not qualified to make.

3. Get support for yourself.

Reach out to supportive friends or family members; even a short phone call can give you a much-needed lift. Also, seek out a support group, or individual therapy or counseling.

4. Banish guilt.

Accept that you're doing your best and acknowledge the efforts you're making. Actually list them on paper if you need to! If you notice yourself feeling guilty, ask yourself if you would want someone in the same situation as yours to feel guilty. The answer, certainly, is no.

5. Celebrate life and family.

As your family changes, focus on remembering and sharing positive memories of your life together. Also, create new rituals and traditions that everyone can participate in, such as sing-alongs, games, crafts or nature walks.

Start right now with even one of these strategies. It will feel like a breath of fresh air, loosening the grip of your tightly packed life and infusing your entire family with renewed energy and joy. ✱



Barriers to Self-Growth

Change can be scary as we feel new things, entertain different thoughts, perhaps leave old ways behind. Here are 10 obstacles that can hinder self-growth.

1. Denial. It's difficult to grow when you don't see the need. Listen to the quiet voice inside and to what your loved ones are saying. Get the support you need to see the truth.

2. Seeing yourself as a victim. If you're always one-down, you can't become the empowered person you are meant to be.

3. Substance abuse. Whether you're self-medicating or seeking escape, the problems just don't go away without the willingness to face them.

4. Self-loathing. Nothing banishes self-hatred faster than self-care. Choose in any moment the kindest path.

5. Blame. If we always point the finger at another, we never see our own role.

6. Defensiveness. This is a racket we swing against anything that suggests we might be at fault. Try to see "faults" as opportunities to grow.

7. Fear. Acknowledge the frightened parts of yourself, praise your courage, and be gentle.

8. Rage. Rage is a call for attention to our triggers, but sometimes we get stuck there. Accepting and working creatively with the feelings can help free you.

9. Busyness. Constantly moving allows no time for the reflection that lays the foundation for self-growth.

10. Unwillingness to admit error. As with defensiveness, if we stop judging "error" as wrong, an ever-expanding life awaits. ✱

A Letter From *Margaret Hood Black*



Much has been written about the so-called "sandwich generation": those who find themselves caring for both parents and children, on top of career and other responsibilities. The resulting, unrelenting schedule can take its toll. And yet, so many respond with guilt to the extraordinary pressures they face. The cover article explores the unique stresses faced by those who are caring for aging parents, and then offers several strategies for taking care of oneself. Remember, we have to take care of ourselves in order to care effectively for someone else.

There are few things more horrific than the sexual abuse of a child, and its damage often extends into adulthood. But, as the article on page three explores, it is possible to heal. The article addresses some ways that, in addition to seeking therapy, the survivor can aid the healing process. Among them, befriending one's body again, claiming one's body as one's own and working creatively with feelings.

Also in this issue are 10 barriers to self-growth, as well as the quiz, which asks how well you maintain balance in your life. Rounding out this issue is an article about the self-limiting beliefs that many people hold about money. We can't fix the economy, but we can improve our relationship with its medium of exchange.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

Best wishes for a season of healing, self-care and inner peace.

How Well Do You Maintain Balance?

If trying to maintain balance in your life makes you feel like a tightrope walker, you're not alone. Most of us have so many demands on our time and energy, life can feel like a three-ring circus. Take this quiz to see how well you are meeting responsibilities, while also recognizing and fulfilling personal needs and wants.



True False

- 1. The only way I can successfully manage my life is to take care of myself physically and emotionally.
- 2. Nurturing myself enlarges my capacity to help others.
- 3. I eat healthfully and exercise regularly.
- 4. I get check-ups, go to the dentist, and take preventative precautions.
- 5. I set aside personal, quiet time for myself, whether I'm meditating or simply letting my thoughts drift.
- 6. I experience the gifts of each season: ice skating, sledding, bundled-up beach walks; gardening, hiking, more time outside; camping, swimming, barbecues; harvesting the bounty, gathering wood, spending more time inside.
- 7. Creativity nurtures me, too. I do what I love, whether that's cooking, drawing, painting, writing, dancing, singing or another creative pursuit.
- 8. Reaching out to others enriches my life. I spend quality time with family and friends.
- 9. Contributing to the world provides connection and purpose, so I give my time, energy and experience where it is most useful.
- 10. I notice and heed the emotional signals that tell me I'm out of balance: irritability, overwhelm, resentment.
- 11. If I feel that I'm catching a cold, I realize I may have stressed my immune system with overactivity, so I stop and take care of myself.
- 12. When I need or want to, I say no to requests for my time.
- 13. I listen to and honor the requests my body makes for such things as a nap, a walk, green vegetables, hot soup.
- 14. If I have something planned for myself, I don't just toss that aside when someone makes a request of me.
- 15. I'm busy, but I find time to do the things I want to do.

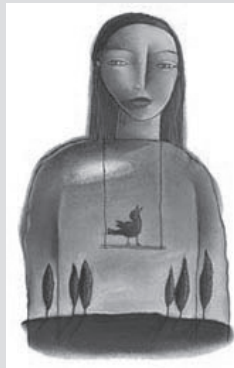
If you answered false more often than true, you may want to take a look at the questions to which you answered false and see if you can incorporate something of its message into your life. Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like to explore this issue further. *

The Journey of Healing from Sexual Abuse

During the 1980s, the topic of childhood sexual abuse reached a zenith in the media, and we all heard the horrifying statistics. Sexual abuse affects as many as 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys. While the press has died down, the problem hasn't. Sexual abuse still impacts children, their families and adult survivors.

The sexual abuse of a child is a profound betrayal of trust. Well into their adult life, survivors typically experience a wide variety of persistent and often debilitating symptoms.

In addition to suffering from the actual physical sexual abuse, the survivor often carries the painful burden of the terrible secret and/or internalized shame. The journey of healing sexual abuse always begins with telling the truth—firstly to oneself, then to another. Tell a trusted friend. Tell a therapist.



The Healing Journey Moving Forward with Professional Support

Talking to an empathic professional, especially one who specializes in recovery from sexual abuse, is an important step towards healing. Bodywork can also be helpful for healing trauma that has lodged in the body as chronic pain or habitual patterns. You may also want to join a therapy group with other survivors. Sharing stories with others who have had similar experiences dispels the illusion that you are alone in your suffering.

Moving Forward On Your Own

In addition to receiving professional guidance, here are some things you can do to foster wholeness:

1. Take time to nurture your relationship with your body. Survivors often feel loathing for, or dissociation from, their bodies, so an important step can be to tenderly befriend your body again. Light a candle and rub your feet with oil; sit in front of a mirror and stroke your face, slowly, lovingly; look at your hands and marvel at all the things they can do.

2. Consciously claim your body as your own. Find a safe place where you can shout, expressing all your power, until you feel complete, "This is MY body!" You may want to add, "It's not YOURS, _____," adding the name of your

perpetrator(s). If you want someone with you for support, ask a friend, or do this with your therapist.

3. Find ways to nurture yourself. Getting in touch with the wounded parts of yourself can be scary. Feelings of fear, anger and sadness can seem huge if they've been suppressed, but loving attention to yourself brings wholeness.

- Let yourself cry. Find a safe place to speak out loud to yourself, reassuring yourself that you deserve caring.

- Be aware of when pleasure is felt. It is not only the negative emotions that get lost when we shut down parts of ourselves, but also the joyful, powerful parts of us. Welcome them.

4. Be creative. Creativity is a great way to access unconscious feelings and to explore and express the feelings that arise.

- Use pastels or crayons and just "mess around," allowing your hand to move freely. Or start with a feeling you already have (shame, anger, joy) and just let yourself express it.

- Write. Start anywhere. Use single words or write what you feel right now. Begin with "I feel..." or "I remember when..." Or write down a negative belief you have about yourself, and then explore the answer to the question, "What would I rather believe?"

5. Welcome your triggers. These automatic responses may feel uncomfortable but need not be avoided. See them as emotions that invite your attention, as opportunities to heal by integrating unresolved feelings. Experience the feelings with support. Draw them. Write about them.

6. Read books written by or about survivors of sexual abuse.



Reading portrayals of your experiences by people who have found a path for healing can offer a model of recovery. *The Courage to Heal* by Laura Davis and Ellen Bass has helped millions of survivors, and has just

been updated in a new edition. *Miss America for a Day* was written by Marilyn Van Derbur, a former Miss America who survived 13 years of incest.

There is light at the end of the tunnel for survivors. Commit to your wholeness and, as the past is healed, a life of healthy balance, choice and pleasure unfolds. ✨

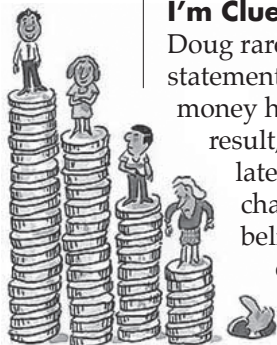
Are Your Attitudes about Money Sabotaging You?

There's no denying that the economy is in bad shape. Companies are failing; the government is providing or denying bailouts; the housing market is flooded with foreclosures and people are losing their jobs. In the face of such dire news, it can be tempting to throw up our hands in powerlessness or blame others for the problems we face.

Yet, if we're willing to look at our own beliefs about money, we may find that they're getting in the way of a sense of well-being and security in our lives. Here are a few common attitudes about money:

I Don't Like Money; I Don't Care about Money

This attitude is held by people at all income levels. It can have its origin in religious beliefs, political beliefs or guilt at inherited privilege. Pam is a child of the 60's who says she doesn't really like money. She never



allows herself to have what she truly wants and always buys the cheapest version. She's a landscape designer, but regularly underbills her clients. A classic underearner, she sometimes relies on credit cards for basic expenses such as rent.

I'm Clueless about Money

Doug rarely balances his bank statements, doesn't know how much money he has or spends and, as a result, finds himself saddled with late fees and bounced check charges. People like Doug may believe that they're not skilled enough to handle their money or may think that money is uncouth. Doug makes a good income, but

his unwillingness to pay attention to it also makes him vulnerable to theft, fraud, debt he can't afford and bankruptcy.

I Don't Have Enough Money

Sarah worries often about money. Although her income is twice that of her friends, she talks to them often about how hard it is to pay the bills. At the root of Sarah's fear may be

a belief that she can't take care of herself or that the world is a harsh place with scarce resources. People like Sarah sometimes fear that they will lose everything and end up homeless.

I'll Never Have Enough

Mike also feels that he doesn't have enough money, but rather than feeling that the world is a harsh place for everyone, he believes it is especially hard for him. Other people will do just fine, but he'll always be poor. If you try to encourage him, he'll list the many strikes against him. People like Mike are often underearners, blind to the opportunities that are available.

If any of these attitudes resonate, you may want to explore them with compassion for yourself and support. As you bring awareness to self-limiting beliefs and adopt a more empowering stance, you expand into a larger sense of personal freedom. Also, healing our personal relationship with money helps build a solid foundation for weathering economic storms. *

For more information on her services, please feel free to call: 281-268-6304.

*Bellaire (Galleria Area)
at: 1960 & SH 249 (NW Houston) and in
Margaret has two offices conveniently located
in marriages, families and women's issues.
In addition to working with adolescents and
young adults, Margaret has a special interest
couple, individual and group therapy.*

*Margaret is a Licensed Professional Counselor
and psychotherapist. Margaret provides*

281-268-6304

Kingwood, TX 77325

P.O. Box 5731

Licensed Professional Counselor

Margaret Hood Black, MA, LPC