

THRIVING

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You and Your Body: How to Turn Self-Loathing into Self-Loving

“Throw out your scale! It can’t measure passion, ability, strength, compassion or potential.” — Rebekah Borucki

Belinda weighs 135 pounds and is 5’ 4.” Her hair is the color of chestnuts. She has square shoulders, lips with corners that turn up in a smile, and a little pooch at the edge of her thighs that comes from her mother’s side of the family.

When she stands in front of a full length mirror, this is what she sees: a too-short, overweight woman, whose hair is dull and boring and whose lips are too thin. She turns away in self-loathing when she views her thighs.

Belinda’s mother looks in the mirror each morning and pulls back the skin on her cheeks and throat, trying to get an idea of how much better she’d look with a face lift. Are the wrinkles around her mouth deeper this morning?

Meanwhile, Belinda’s friend, Lily, is counting calories and adding up fat grams. She’ll skip breakfast again this morning. Go to the gym instead.

A woman’s relationship with her body may be the most important relationship she has. How sad that in our culture it is primarily not a loving relationship, but rather a relationship that causes insecurity, fear, self-doubt, shame, guilt, low self-esteem, and all too often, self-hatred.

In the U.S., at least 5 million to 10 million girls and women and 1 million boys and men are struggling with eating disorders—anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or compulsive overeating. The odds of finding a person who doesn’t have at least some body image issues are slim.

Ours is a nation that starves, diets, purges, binges and exercises to the point of creating serious health problems, sometimes even causing death.

And most of us are at least dissatisfied and, at worst, even hate some parts of our bodies. This is especially true for women, but men have body image issues, too.

How to turn the self-loathing into self-loving? Like all good and lasting things, it won’t happen overnight. It begins with small, positive steps. Here are just a few:

- Find at least one thing you like about your body. Write it down. Tomorrow, find another.
- Practice good posture, hold your head high, straighten your shoulders.
- Tell your body how much you appreciate its wondrous abilities.
- Get rid of all the clothes that you don’t like.
- Challenge the media’s definition of beauty.
- Nourish your body with a healthy diet, regular meals, lots of water.
- Slow down; remember to breathe.
- Move your body; not just exercise, but play, dance, skip, stretch.
- Pamper yourself with comfortable clothes, soothing beauty rituals.
- Post signs telling yourself how beautiful you are, inside and out.
- Tell your friends how beautiful they are, inside and out.

The way to a positive self-image begins with a conscious choice to make peace with and accept and love your body. However, eating disorders can cause serious health risks and may require professional help.

If you’re concerned that you or someone you care about might be suffering from a debilitating eating disorder, please don’t hesitate to call. *

10 Ways to Grow and Maintain a Healthy Attitude

Attitude can affect how we feel and how others respond to us. A positive attitude can impact our physical health and emotional well-being, make hard things easier and easy things more fun. This is not to say that a positive attitude is a magic potion that will ward off any problems, but an optimistic outlook helps people work through the rough times with a belief in themselves and trust in the ultimate good.

Try these suggestions for building and maintaining a positive attitude.

1. **Associate with positive people** and it becomes a way of living.
2. **Take some action every day** toward accomplishing a goal.
3. **Eat fresh, healthy food;** exercise your body and your mind.
4. **Make a gratitude list.** Practice being aware of all you HAVE.
5. **Do something kind for another human** or the planet.
6. **Notice something beautiful** every day.
7. **Turn off bad news**—radio, Internet, television, newspaper.
8. **Look for what’s right** instead of what’s wrong.
9. **Celebrate the ordinary things.** Start with the fact that the sun rose.
10. **For every no, say five yeses.** Except when saying no means saying yes to yourself!

And one bonus suggestion:

Remember to laugh! *

A Letter From

Margaret Hood Black



Issues of body image affect some people year round, but become especially present during the warmer months.

While it may seem you are waging a battle with your waistline, the page 1 article suggests that the real struggle—the one most worth winning—is trying to love yourself no matter your size.

The page 3 article on nondefensive communication describes another battle we may be waging without even knowing it: the way we speak to each other. The sidebar examines ways we can improve our language so as not to provoke defensiveness in others.

Other features in this issue—assessing your ability to manage daily stress, developing a healthy attitude and setting limits—relate to the notion that taking good care of yourself is an essential ingredient in a happy life. For instance, a positive attitude does wonders to prevent and manage stress. And, setting limits is an important way of caring for yourself as you live your daily life.

You're welcome to pass along this newsletter issue to others.

If you have questions about any of the articles, or would like more copies of the newsletter—or if there's anything else you'd like to talk about—please don't hesitate to call.

How Well Do You Manage Stress?

The impact of stress accumulates, and, beyond the ongoing, regular stress that comes from living in our high-impact culture, specific life events can really knock us for a loop. Even happy changes can cause bumps in the road, which we register both physically and emotionally. While we can't eliminate stress from our lives, we can learn where our hot spots are and how to best reduce and manage the stress we do experience.



True False

1. I set the pace for the day by beginning with peaceful thinking either through reading an inspiring passage, sitting quietly, or acknowledging the gift of a fresh, new day.
2. Throughout the day, I live in the moment. I don't brood about a past event or fret about the future.
3. Each day I do something physical, even if it's just a walk around the block or a 20-minute workout.
4. I eat healthfully and take the time to enjoy my meals. I set aside all other activities while I eat. No multi-tasking.
5. I view problems as challenges and obstacles as opportunities.
6. I can say no when I need to.
7. I leave open time in my day for doing something spontaneous. Or doing nothing.
8. When I sense tension in my body, I practice progressive muscle relaxation, beginning with my face and moving down to my feet. I remember to breathe.
9. My daily "to-do" list contains only that which can be accomplished in a day—even if it's only part of a larger project.
10. I am willing to settle for "good enough." I don't make constant demands on myself to have perfection (the cleanest house, finest yard, best meals).
11. Throughout the day, I create peaceful images in my mind where I can retreat for a moment to rest and refill. A sunlit beach, a shady forest, a quiet stream.
12. When I am aware of feelings of anger, irritability, cynicism beginning to build, I replace them with thoughts of peace, hope, patience, joy.
13. I use my time and energy to make changes where I can and accept the things I cannot change.
14. I use a journal not just to write about stressful events and problems, but to express my thoughts and feelings.
15. I plan time off regularly. A weekend away. A long vacation. One day a month, just for me.
16. I talk to my friends and family about what's going on with me. When I need to, I seek guidance and counseling from professionals.

*If you're going through an especially stressful time or experiencing difficulty dealing with stress in your life, don't hesitate to ask for help. **

Language and Violence

How Your Words Can Create Peace and Empowerment

You're sitting down to dinner with friends, when one looks over and asks, "Do you always butter your bread that way?"

Ha, ha, you laugh. But inside, your story is going like this: *Who does he think he is—Mr. Manners? What's wrong with the way I butter my bread? Jerk. He's always so critical.*

If something as minor as buttering bread can provoke such feelings of defensiveness, imagine what can happen with emotional issues at home, boundary issues at work or ethical issues in our larger community.

What happens, says Sharon Ellison, M.S., is essentially war.

Ellison, founder of Powerful Non-Defensive Communication, teaches that the way we communicate with each other uses the same principles and tactics we would use in physical combat, based on the belief that we must protect ourselves by being defensive. As soon as we feel any threat, either of not getting what we want or of being harmed or put down in some way, we choose from among the three basic defensive war maneuvers: surrender, withdrawal or counterattack.



"It's a sad commentary on our use of human imagination," Ellison says, "to realize that for centuries we have essentially used a war model as the foundation upon which we have built our entire system for spoken and written communication."

O.J. Harvey studied this connection between language and violence when he was a psychology professor at the University of Colorado. Using random samples of pieces of literature from countries around the world, he tabulated the frequency of words that classify and judge people—the types of words that often provoke defensive reactions. He found a high correlation between the use of such words and the incidence of violence.

The myth, says Ellison, is that defensiveness will protect us, that to be open is to be vulnerable and weak. On the contrary, it is being defensive that weakens us. Consider this: When you are defensive, do you feel safe? Competent? Confident? Do you learn well? Power struggles and unnecessary, destructive conflicts are the more likely outcome.

Ellison estimates that we use 95% of our communications energy being defensive, and describes the six most common defensive reactions as follows:

Surrender-Betray. We give in but defend the person's mistreatment of us, taking the blame ourselves.

Surrender-Sabotage. We cooperate outwardly but undermine the person in some way. Passive-aggressive behavior falls into this category.

Withdrawal-Escape. We avoid talking to someone by not answering, leaving the room or changing the subject.

Withdrawal-Entrap. We refuse to give information as a way to trap the other person into doing something inappropriate or making a mistake.

Counterattack-Justify. We let someone know she is wrong to be upset with us, explaining our own behavior and making excuses.

Counterattack-Blame. We attack or judge the other to defend ourselves.

Changing how we communicate as individuals—learning that we can protect ourselves and have greater influence without using a war-based language—will not only shift our own personal and professional lives, but can ultimately lead toward a more peaceful world. *

6 TIPS TO HELP YOU AVOID PROVOKING DEFENSIVENESS

1. Make clear requests for specific actions.

"I just want you to treat me fairly" is likely to cause the other person to deny (defensively) ever having been unfair. Clarify exactly which actions you would like for the other person to take, such as: "I would like you to give me as long a break as the other employees."

2. Avoid blaming and judging others. The more people hear judgment and criticism, the more they tend to invest their energy in self-defense or counterattack.

3. Ask questions to gather information.

The goal is to understand accurately what the other person means, feels or believes. Come from a place of true, neutral curiosity. Avoid assumptions and questions that serve to convey your own opinion.

4. Verify your observations and assumptions.

Avoid stating opinion as fact or trying to persuade others to agree. For example: "When I hear you saying you are in a good mood, and at the same time I see you rolling your eyes, I imagine that something is wrong but you don't want to tell me. Then I feel frustrated, and I'm not sure if I should ask more questions or leave you alone."

5. Avoid exaggerations using words such as "always" and "never." These often provoke defensiveness rather than understanding. Try simply describing actions. For example, rather than "You never do what I want," try "The last three times I initiated an activity, you said you didn't want to do it."

6. Listen to the expression of feelings and needs beneath defensive statements. For example, if your teenager says, "Back off! I'm doing my best," he may be feeling worried and needing acknowledgment for his effort. When we understand a person's underlying needs and feelings, it is a lot easier to find compassion in our hearts. *

Setting Limits: A Vital Component of Self-Care

Read any magazine article or book about parenting and the author will advise the necessity of setting limits for children. "Set limits and stick to them," parents are counseled. Limits create the structure and discipline that every child needs for healthy upbringing.

But for adults—especially those who tend to view other people's needs and wants as more important than their own—setting limits is more than an exercise in discipline; it's a vital component in good self-care and impacts every part of life.

Consider Georgia. Her calendar is filled with one family event after another. A niece's graduation followed by a great-uncle's 75th birthday party followed by a tea her mother planned for an old family friend. Much as she loves her family, enough is enough. After a day at work and meeting her immediate family's needs, she has hardly any time left for herself.

Or Burke whose boss scarcely gives him time to complete one project before he lays on another. Then another. Work is so backlogged Burke stays at the office every night till past nine and goes in on weekends as well.

Stephanie's husband helped her build a studio for her photography in the garage, then stored his fishing gear willy-nilly in whatever cabinet or cupboard he wanted.

By not setting limits Georgia, Burke and Stephanie are letting the needs and wants of others come before their own well being.

Sometimes it's difficult to learn to care for ourselves as much as we care for others. Especially if we feel uncomfortable or guilty saying "no." We may fear losing someone or something if we set limits on how much time we can give or work we can handle or if we claim space for ourselves.

But always giving in to the requests or demands of others is to plow a field where resentments take seed. And failing to assert our needs and wants or to stand up for ourselves is to disregard our physical, emotional and spiritual well being.

Far from being selfish and mean, setting limits is a healthy act of self-respect.

Taking a firm stand might be difficult at first. But by being calm, clear and direct—and without intentionally stepping on anybody's toes—you can learn how to set limits and create the kind of balance in your life that honors your own needs and wants.

For Georgia, it meant coming up with compromises—she'd attend the great-uncle's birthday party but drew the line at the niece's graduation and her mother's tea. Burke had to explain to his boss that it was impossible for him to do the kind of job he expected if he wasn't

allowed ample time to complete a project. Stephanie offered to help build additional storage space in the garage for her husband's fishing equipment.

In each of these scenarios, far from losing something or someone they valued, by setting limits Georgia, Burke and Stephanie got what they wanted or needed, took good care of themselves, and, in the process, gained a healthy amount of self-respect. *



For more information on her services, please feel free to call: 713-562-7819.

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

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