

Letting Go

by Lisa Browning

I have talked a lot about the “dark night of the soul” experiences I have had, more so during the past year. Each time it happens, I try to figure out why. What has to change? What piece of the puzzle am I unable to find?

I discovered that puzzle piece unexpectedly, after a visit to my amazing Energy Healer, Jocelyn Kinch.* I missed the sentence of her confirmation email stating that the front door of her office would be locked, and to call her when I arrived so that she could let me in. Of course, I didn't have my cell phone with me as I'd left it at home to charge.

I was annoyed, and I was snippy when she (luckily) did hear me banging on the door and came down to let me in.

This type of thing had been happening a lot. I didn't go into rages or anything, but got annoyed, usually at the most minor things. I told Jocelyn about this, and she suggested that, the next time I felt that anger, I should find a way to release it. “Pound on your bed, scream into a pillow, yell in your car.”

I found this odd, because I've done those things before. And still the anger persisted. But I kept the advice in the back of my mind. A few days later, when I had just awakened for the day, thoughts of anger, at people who had hurt me in the past, and situations that were unfair and out of my control, seeped to the surface. And I screamed. And I swore. And in less than a minute, I felt a release like I had never felt before.

Again, I found this odd. It wasn't the first time that I had screamed or swore. But it was the first time that I felt an undeniable release, and a lightness of being. It was only when I was describing this experience to a friend that the answer dawned on me.

Jocelyn had given me permission to get angry! You see, when I was growing up, my parents did not allow me to get angry. So, not only was there a lot of built up anger as a child ... as an adult, any time I did try to let that, or any other, anger out, I felt guilty.

This time, there was no guilt! Because of Jocelyn's advice, I was able to express my anger freely. And I was able to let it all go, rather than hold on to a piece of it that was fed by my guilt at being angry in the first place.

It's amazing to me, how just that one little adjustment created such a huge shift ... and I will be forever grateful to Jocelyn for serving as the catalyst for that adjustment.

**Please check out Jocelyn's website at www.jocelynkwellness.com.*

CHILDREN, COVID AND MENTAL HEALTH

by Christine Nightingale

Abraham Maslow, the grandfather of modern psychology, wrote that mental health means you are comfortable with life's ambiguities. There are no guarantees; uncertainties are a part of life.

Yet every parent knows that young children and teenagers need structure, order, predictability and a feeling of safety in order to feel secure. The ability to cope with uncertainty and even making choices is best developed in a structured, safe environment.

For most children in the world, this ideally means a home which feels safe, and a predictable, safe school experience to help them socialize with their peers and find a place and a role within a group of peers (athlete, serious student, artist, friend, playmate, joker, etc.).

During the time of Covid, much of that security and structure has been swept away from children around the world.

In Ontario, lockdowns and on and off school closures have been a particular hardship. For single parents, or anyone who has to work on site, childcare is a source of concern for both parents and youngsters.

A high percentage of parents are not comfortable being their child's educational guide in addition to parenting and trying to put food on the table. Many children greatly miss the routines and friendships of the school setting, which have in some cases been switched on and off from one week to the next, with little advance warning of whether school will be in session in person or only online.

Only about half of Ontario's teachers claim to be comfortable with managing online instruction. At school teacher attendance has sometimes been as low as 60%, and schools are so desperate to find replacements that the teacher's college students are now allowed to take supply assignments.

My son teaches about 30 private school students online each week, in small groups of between 1 and 4 kids. One of his main subjects is actually teaching computer skills. You can imagine the difficulty of teaching a 6 year old who is brand new at computer learning when you are not in the same room with the child. I can hear my son in the room next door to my office...he is amazingly patient with the children. But having to teach someone who is not physically with you has its own challenges.

My daughter feels that my 7 year old grandson's teacher is not comfortable enough with computer learning to do an adequate job. Luckily he has been read to since babyhood, so he picked up reading quite naturally. He is also fortunate enough to have older half siblings to play with.

Research has shown that older children are more impacted by the disruption to their lives than younger ones. A Canadian Association of Mental Health survey was done with teenagers back in April of 2020, when the effects of Covid had only begun.

- Over 60 percent of youth reported feeling a combination of worried, upset, sad and angry about the abrupt end to the school year, ability to see their friends, and uncertainty about the future.
- Almost 30 percent said they felt sad nearly every day in the two weeks prior to completing the survey; one quarter of respondents reported feeling lonely every day in that time period.
- Over two-thirds of respondents reported experiencing mild to moderate levels of anxiety, while just under 20 percent reported severe levels of anxiety.

In a time of life when young people are usually defining themselves by peer group membership, it can be a serious emotional hardship to be denied the camaraderie of others their own age.

It has also been found that domestic violence has tripled during the pandemic, which is bound to have serious repercussions on the children in troubled relationships. Overflowing shelters now house women and children in motels, which may not be near their home schools. Overburdened shelter staff are not able to provide as many services as they did before Covid.

It is difficult to speculate when we may expect a return to “normal.” The best estimate seems to be that when all Canadians who wish to be are vaccinated (perhaps September, perhaps later) that will be a start. But it seems likely that variants of Covid will continue to be part of the environment, just as new strains of flu necessitate a flu shot every year.

For all adults who care for children, whether parents, grandparents or teachers, providing a sense of safety for the children impacted by the epidemic will be an ongoing issue.



Dark Clouds Can Have Silver Linings

By Bill Brubacher

So you're feeling low and you've been knocked down by life. You can't see past your tears or your fears, or feel anything through your pain, frustration or embarrassment. Life sucks!

And if you're lucky a friend or friends might give you some support and if not, you're alone, feeling pretty miserable. Besides it's also winter, January and we're in the middle of an ongoing pandemic! Since I don't know what's specifically bothering you and since we know ourselves best, may I kindly offer you a few of my own self-help 'aids' to see if any of them might be of use of you?

First, when I feel down, it always feels like the first time.

So I like to remind myself that that's not the case. And since I'm a writer, I'll go back to a particular note book where I've written about previous down times to compare. This does two things, first, it reminds me I was 'down' at least once before and secondly, I obviously didn't stay in that condition. Both are helpful. Mind you, it doesn't entirely change how I'm feeling in the present moment. But it is a beginning.

And secondly, as I said, collecting my feelings into words on paper gets them from the inside of me to the outside, where I can see them and control them. This gives them some distance and me a sense of safety. And if I'm open and lucky, a new perspective might appear somewhere between the lines that I didn't expect. One can always hope.

Thirdly, I bravely remind myself that life would be pretty boring if nothing changed and that things are always changing, in good ways and bad. Consequently, we'll all to a certain extent victims of life's often unpredictable ups and downs. No one is excluded from painful or unexpected outcomes. Moreover, since I'm a bit of a romantic, I try to imagine that without the ups and downs of life, as in music, there would be no melody. Furthermore, life plays itself in both major and minor keys and there's also been some beautiful music written in the minor keys as well. We need to be open to them in the bitter-sweet moment, to experience the richness of their feeling and depth – even if it's the soulful melancholy of sadness. But remember, without the shadows of dark we wouldn't know the sparkling of light.

Another thing about being down is it feels like we're the only one. Well, that's only partially right. It's true no one else can be feeling exactly the same way we are in the moment and yet, the world is a big place and we can't be the only one feeling the discomfort of psychological pain at any given time. (And as an aside: I try to remember when I'm feeling all right, to send out my strong and warm empathy to all those people who are struggling in the world. And then I also remind myself to feel grateful.)

Next, I try to remember that no one else can actually change my low! You see, pain is something private and no one else can feel it quite the same way. It's ours alone to bear and only we can choose when or what we can do about it. And in that sense it's good to know we always have options. Another feeling I often have in such situations is that I deserve whatever state I'm in! And I try to remember, that that too, is just not the case and certainly not to the extent I'm feeling the blame! It's far too easy to be hard on ourselves – to discipline ourselves like children. It's at those times in particular we need to give ourselves our greatest and tenderest love! And also to say the words, "I love you" as often as you can. Just do it!

This will lay a pretty good foundation for when you really need to give those words to yourself and mean them! Get some practice!

And when it comes to self-blame especially where others are involved, I also find it helpful to remind myself that people are pretty self-centred. In fact, it's just the way they are and far more than we realize. And for as much as we're spending time and energy blaming ourselves far too harshly, they aren't thinking of us at all. It's a paradox. You see, we're far more important in our own minds than in anyone else's. That's because our ego tells us so at the same time as it's hurting us! It's not really fair, is it? So we've got to be stronger than our ego. And we can with dogged determination and belief in ourselves.

And just knowing that can give us that precious momentary break in the grip of our thoughts to crack the cycle of self-condemnation. All it takes is a moment of truth to buy us the time we need to stop our racing mind ... and see what comes of whatever it was that was bothering us. You'll often find yourself in that 'calm' in the middle of the storm, and in that time you can plan how to better handle the situation – or choose to let it go! And here's the 'gold', sometimes, the best plan is no plan! In other words, simply to let whatever was bothering you go. Be courageous! Be patient! Try it once in a while and see what happens. You may be wonderfully surprised! It's definitely worth a try.

Thing is, people have already made up their mind what they think of us. That's important enough to say again: people have already made up their mind what they think of us: good, bad or otherwise, long before this; so whatever we've done has likely upset us more than them; so it really doesn't matter all that much what they think of us after all! And if it does, then maybe we should re-evaluate the relationship, friendship or the circumstances.

And finally I want to assure you the absolute best remedy for a bad or low day or mood is a good laugh!

Learning to laugh at, and with ourselves is probably the very best gift you can give yourself. All stress and tension is automatically relieved. And that's something we all deserve when we need it! Always, keep some laugh material on hand for such times – perhaps like now. You'll be glad you did!

Why not start today? Put a smile on your face, and if that doesn't help change some of the low you're feeling right now, well, start reading this again from the top.... :)



Setting Healthy Boundaries for Your Mental Health

by Anne Porteous

The topic of how to set boundaries seems arise with increasing frequency. I think this is related to the amount of stress many of us face, and the sense of being overwhelmed with the uncertainty that lies ahead. It is natural for us to want to help others, but we must also take care of ourselves. Just yesterday, a client said to me “what a week, everywhere I turned I was faced with negativity. By Thursday I felt like I just wanted to hide away by myself!” We cannot always be in the right headspace to help others and there may be times when instead of pushing through, you need to take a step back.

It is up to you who you invite into your circle and how close- boundaries can be flexible depending on the person and the environment or occasion. You need to choose who and when they are to be in your circle of comfort. If setting boundaries is a new concept for you, and it is for many, you may have to do repeatedly. Key here is that you must believe in your boundary and mean it. The intention behind your action is especially important and it takes practice.

Clients who come to my facility and work with the herd can experience establishing and maintaining their boundary. First, they establish how large or small the boundary needs to be for their comfort. I then ask the person to keep the horses outside of their boundary. I am amazed how some of the horses will respect and stay clear of the person, but I do have one horse who is the “do you mean it?” character. This exercise demonstrates that you can expect people to test your boundary; friends and acquaintances may push on your ‘new boundary’ testing you to determine if you really mean it. Know in your heart that this is the boundary you have established; practice seeing the person outside your circle and stand firm. If people will not take no for an answer, do not get meaner, rather get firmer by increasing your energy. See the result you want, feel that result and then work to that result. Now if you can protect and maintain a healthy boundary with a horse, you can certainly accomplish this goal with people.

Understanding health boundaries can help you to make good choices in your personal and work-related relationships. Forget about trying to control other people; setting boundaries is about YOU. It is about setting limits on what you can tolerate and what you need to protect your mental health. Keep in mind when others do not respect you saying “No” they are telling you that you do not matter; your feelings do not matter to them. I believe everyone matters! Perhaps if you have people in your circle who will

not respect your boundaries, you need to consider how far you let them in to your circle. Notice I am not saying 'unfriend' them rather keep them at arms length.

Some comments about boundaries from my clients: "You can be a good person, with a kind heart, and still say no;" "a lack of boundaries invites a lack of respect;" "you are not required to set yourself on fire to keep other people warm."

Be clear and concise and remember you do not need to justify your reasons for setting your boundary. Remember the Golden rule? Do on to others as you would like them to do to you- this is a two-way street, meaning others respect your boundaries and you respect theirs. Check in with yourself which will help keep your relationships healthy from both ends.

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*Publisher's Note: Be sure to visit our Events page
for information on Anne's 100 Minutes of Wisdom series!*



TURN IT AROUND
by Colleen Heighington

Thinking and being positive is a choice but during these most difficult and challenging times during Covid 19, it is easier said than done. It is my hope that this little poem will help you out when needed ...

WHEN YOU ARE ...
feeling tired ... go and lie down and get some much needed rest ...
feeling defeated ...
give yourself a pat on the back knowing that you did your very best ...
feeling down and out ...
put a smile on your face and you will look and feel much better ...
feeling bored ... get out some stationary and write someone a nice letter ...
feeling pain ... try not to dwell on it too much.
Think on happy thoughts and maybe your pain will subside or even go away ...
feeling lonely ... go out and do some volunteer work in helping others
and find purpose to your day ...
feeling miserable ... count your many blessings and be thankful
for them in your life and keep them by your side ...
feeling anxious ... relax, take some deep breathes and take things in stride ...
feeling fed up ... keep your chin up high and always hold onto hope
and you will see it through ...
feeling resentful ... start to forgive others as some have forgiven you ...
AND FINALLY
feeling fearful and hitting a brick wall ... now is the time to TURN IT AROUND by
putting your Faith and Trust in God for His Love Conquers All!!!!

WHAT PEOPLE TALK TO ME ABOUT by Clay Williams

I've probably said this to people a couple hundred times: "I'm not a counsellor or therapist". When people learn that I'm doing something to raise awareness and funds for mental health issues, many are comfortable enough with me that they open up to me. After all, I am a mental health advocate, and I encourage people to talk about how they feel. So they often talk with me. At first I was terrified when someone started to open up to me. Do they want me to help them? I'm not trained to help anybody. It's in my make-up to try to fix things that are broken, but I have no tools that can fix what I'm being told is broken or injured.

It didn't take long to figure out that most of the time, people aren't asking me to fix anything. They're just asking me to listen, to be present, to help carry their burden, even if it's just for a few moments. I don't have to fix anything in order to do some good. I just have to listen and hear and understand.

And I have heard some heartbreaking stories over the years. Far too many people have told me that they have lost a loved one to suicide.

Many have told me about their own struggles, no, battles with depression, anxiety, PTSD and how it has damaged their lives. Some have told me about the things that they have found have helped them when they were struggling.

There are some specific stories from some specific people that will always be with me, partly because these people are such good friends, but also because when I heard these stories I was in the process of having the veil lifted, I was just getting to understand the extremes of emotion and feeling that people are struggling with. The following stories are just a couple of those special stories, the names have been changed, you know how that goes.

Cliff is a friend of mine in the running community, I think I've spoken at his running group get-togethers a couple of times. One time while we were out for a group run, before covid when we could run as a group, he told me about the time that he was at work, close to the end of the work day at the end of the week, when there was nothing stressful going on. He and a co-worker were just winding down near the end of the day when he started to feel a little anxious, and the anxiety quickly built until his heart was racing, he felt tension in his chest, physical symptoms that were telling him he was about to die. Of course that just made the anxiety worse. I remember him telling me he was sure he was going to die that day. I don't recall him telling me how it ended, but it was his first "panic attack", not a heart attack. I think that was really the first time that I started to understand anxiety disorder. It wasn't an event that made him tense, escalating into an anxiety attack. It started with anxiety. It wasn't caused by something, it existed on it's own.

Sheila told me about her youth; the anxiety she suffered in her late teens into her late 20s that affected her evenings and nights, the times when it's quiet and there's nothing to distract you from your thoughts. The panic feeling as she fell asleep, then waking at 3am became a normal part of life. The exhaustion that came with that. She also suffered from arthritis, was just married, had a child and was bringing a second child into the world in a short time. As the years progressed it became more and more difficult to just press on and put one foot in front of the other. The days become darker, the nights considerably longer and the thoughts of suicide started swirling. Friends and family tried to be supportive, but it wasn't until she sought medical help that she started seeing better days, but even then struggling with the stigma of seeing a psychiatrist. She encourages people not to give up hope, to reach out because you are NOT alone.

My friend Evelyn grew up with a disability, and suffered some pretty poor treatment as a child that severely affected her self esteem. She wrote me a letter a few years ago, to encourage me when I was in a really difficult place:

"The big struggle is knowing you aren't going to explode just because you admit you've got this voice in your head. We deny ourselves the space to admit anything. .. Let alone accept and simmer in the thing, the feeling that we are admitting.

I'm sad seems like a placeless pity party instead of a beginning. It could be this glorious pinnacle of acknowledgement in our lives to stop and breathe and say out loud; I'm sad. The words get stuck in our throats. But if we released them? If we yelled them from the roof, in the shower, in front of the kitchen window.? Well then things change. From there you get to make choices. From there you're no longer 'stuck'. Do you like being sad? Do you know why you're sad? Do you know what might change things? Work less? Work more? Play more? Earn less? Have less? Pray more?

But no... We can't get there. We're all stuck on this island of stuck. Floating off in the sea. Heaven forbid we acknowledge our feelings, albeit unconventional or inconvenient. The nerve... Having feelings.... Feeling stuff... No! Society screams no! You're to be stuck! Float there! Fit in! Say nothing.

You can't make choices here. You can't think here. The small becomes insurmountable. The fear becomes overwhelming. And why does everyone else not feel this way?

When I was little, 5 maybe 6, I used to stand in the door of my bedroom wanting to call out to my mother. For water, for a hug, for whatever. But stuck. Words caught in my throat, feeling like I had no right to voice them. No place to feel anything. Not many I've told; I had one rather bad babysitter around that age who ensured I had nothing to say to anyone... About anything... I don't remember much about that ... But I remember being stuck after. I feel sad. I feel scared. I feel alone. Lots of the time. Yelling out my kitchen window ... In silence. Praying on the bathroom floor in tears to make the voice in my head quiet, because I hated being stuck. Can't make choices here.

Can't move anywhere from here.... Standing in the door of my childhood bedroom... Words I had no right to speak, no ownership over, caught in my throat.

“Thank you for being a voice. Thank you for granting us permission to speak.”

These stories have value and great power, and are the basis for the People Talks series that will be featured on [instagram/canalpursuit](#) starting in March. I'm honoured that I was trusted enough by my friends that they were willing to open up to me.

To all of you who are advocates for mental health, THANK YOU for what you do.
To all of you who are struggling; please talk with someone you trust. Someone wants to help.