



Less Stress Press

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Dedicated to hope and help since 1984

Minute

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"The Midwest Center is committed to providing the individual with cost and time efficient cognitive behavioral based solutions - solutions that foster strength, character and self-empowerment."

GET IT IN WRITING!

"Whatever coaxes us out of hiding, to write, record, and express, is a revolutionary act. It says that we believe our lives count: our lives do count." Sark

From one of my current favorite books: FRESH-BREWED LIFE, Nicole Johnson writes: "We have the opportunity to learn from life or to ignore its teaching. Most of us don't see the lessons because they are racing by us at the speed of life. We barely notice the passages of time. The school bus coming by for another pickup, the notches on your door-frame marking the kid's growth, the sunrise signaling another day, your haircut appointment reminding you six or eight weeks have flown by. We are not paying attention to our lives when we are merely reacting to the tasks required of us. When our souls ask deep questions, such as, "Are you making a difference?" We try to answer those questions with our "to do" list. "See," we say as we show our list, "we're getting a lot done."

Our lives have so much to teach us, and journaling gives us the opportunity to learn. By writing what's happening and what we are feeling, we can look at the pieces and study them. We can hear what our lives are saying to us, if nothing else by the time or lack of time that we spend listening. When I open my journal and I haven't written in it for three weeks, that says more to me than someone telling me, "You're too busy." When I see that last entry and realize that I haven't commented on one sunset or written one reflection or talked back to anything I've read in three days, I am aware something must change."

Children in their thirties, grandchildren, awards for years of employee loyalty, pictures... all give witness to time passing. Am I really alive every minute? Am I paying attention? Am I participating in MY life? Am I making the most of my PPM's? (Precious Present Moments) I can preach it; I can teach it. Am I walking it?

DON'T PANIC!

- Accept the feeling, it can't hurt you.
- Give yourself permission to feel anxious.
- Don't over-breathe. Breathe slowly through your nose.
- Calm yourself with positive self-talk.
- Let go. Just float and flow.
- Distract yourself, it is only anxiety.
- Use the adrenalin in a positive pursuit.
- Don't let a bad day scare you.
- Let time pass. IT WILL GO AWAY.

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I have been happily busy for the last 16 years. I haven't cleaned out a closet thoroughly in a very long time. I have promised myself that my house will be in order before summer. I found a hank of hair my mom got tired of brushing from when I was six years old. I found my Aunt Rosemary's fur hat. And I found dusty time had passed quietly in my closet. I don't regret not having a look at that hat in such a long time, but I really should tell someone about Aunt Rosie. I will make the time.

Keeping a journal is something I get lazy about. It is so good for us; I don't know why I'm not more diligent...perhaps I can improve.

In *LETTERS TO SCATTERED PILGRIMS*, by Elizabeth O'Connor, she writes about journaling: "Among our primary tools for growth are reflection, self-observation, and self-questioning. The journal is one of the most helpful vehicles we have for cultivating these great powers in ourselves. We all have these powers but we need structures that encourage us to use and practice them. Journal writing is enforced reflection. When we commit our observations to writing we are taking what is inside us and placing it outside. We are holding a piece of our life in our hands where we can look at it, and meditate on it, and deepen our understanding of it."

Nicole Johnson encourages us to make an adventure of purchasing a journal. "Take yourself on a creative date to find a journal. Don't rush! Look for a great pen and small candle. Smell every candle until you find the right one. Get a cup of coffee, or tea, or hot chocolate after your purchases and sit at a table. Watch people and think about their lives. Then open your journal and make your first entry."

Get it in writing, Carolyn

LETTERS:

Dear T, You asked how to go about lowering your expectations for a speedy recovery. Part of the answer is ACCEPTING where you are at any given moment. That is part of living in the 'precious, present moment.' Why is this person in front of my face? What is this experience supposed to teach me?

If today you had an anxiety level of 6 (high being 10), one might say: "I would rather have had a less anxious day, but I understand why I was more challenged today. I have skills to lower my stress level. I am intelligent and will use my skills. I'm worth treating well. I respect myself. I learned a lot today. I can make a difference in my tomorrow."

What good does it do to whack yourself over the head with, "I shouldn't still be anxious." YOU ARE! Accept it and deal with it and learn from it and make it less by using the skills you have learned in the program. I believe in you.

LETTERS cont.

I received the following: "I am trying to help my 16 year old son...against the wishes of his father, who believes mental illness is a sign of weakness..."

I answered: "Dear Mom, IF "mental illness" (anxiety and stress responses are not in the category of mental illness) is a "weakness," (which I don't believe...I think the strongest and most tested may have a more severe response than someone who hides from their life experiences) if we go with the argument that it is a weakness...my response is: THEN LET'S HELP THIS YOUNG MAN GET STRONG!

The life management tools in the Program, ATTACKING ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION, will help. If he needs to talk with someone, I am sure there are resources at school, church and in the community. I know it is difficult to see our children in pain...it would be easier to brush it off...but to tell them to just 'toughen up,' is really not what "fixes" it. This tactic merely drives the reaction underground. It WILL show up in another way. Would dad rather that his son self-medicate at the next party? It takes a real man to listen/hear and guide a child.

You are on the right track, Mom."

Well...if you didn't have any one to hold in your heart this month, since we have no control, let's pray this child up.

Extra Help for Lesson 8

Write out your plan. What is your goal today? (Make it realistic!)

Take your list of coping skills, and carry along-cards when going for some practice.

Break your goal into very small pieces. Small steps lead you to the same destination. (Practice going to the store? Just drive by and wave! Next time, park, turn off the engine, turn it back on and leave. Give yourself and 'atta-boy/girl.' Continue adding small steps. Do them until the worst of the fear subsides.

As quickly as possible, identify your first body symptoms and thought that leads to more severe reactions. Implement the six steps, immediately.

Practice frequently and regularly. Schedule your practice exercises. You are building emotional muscle. Use the same principles as you would for bodybuilding.

When practicing a new small step, expect some anxiety. See if you are ready to re-label it- "excitement."

Beware of perfectionism! Beware of "butting." (See article at end of Chapter 8)

Stack the deck in your favor. Go out of your way to take the easier (not easy) way.

Push a LITTLE.

Consult a trusted friend if you are unsure about how small to make the small steps. I have a friend, Susie; she spent many years as an emergency R.N. and is now a massage therapist. (I know, what a combo. I bet you are all jealous now.)

Susie knows how to take care of others and herself. At first when I was practicing being good to myself, I had to mentally consult Susie. Would Susie soak in a hot bubble bath? Would Susie massage her feet? Yes, yes, then and only then was it all right to do that for Carolyn...I don't have to ask any more.

Be good to yourself, Carolyn