

J a n u a r y 2 0 1 9



## The Evolving Self ...when growth is the only option.

The Evolving Self is an e-newsletter that reflects the belief that growth is a choice that can bring an ever deepening and expanding awareness of who we are and what we are here for. The reader can expect affirmations, quotes, book reviews, insightful commentary and tips that support the growth of the individual.

### Repetition Compulsion By Jaqui Duvall, MA

Have you ever noticed a sense of familiarity in your life experiences? Have you ever found yourself saying, "How can this be happening to me, again?" Especially in our relationships, it is a very common occurrence that we recycle through the same pattern, attracting people with similar personalities and behavior, different face, but basically the same kind of person showing up repeatedly in our lives. This is not exclusive to romantic relationships either; friendships, work associates, people on the PTA, all walks of life.

There is a psychological term for this: Repetition Compulsion, a psychological phenomenon in which a person repeats an event or its circumstances over and over again. Sigmund Freud first wrote about it in 1914, saying Repetition Compulsion "describes the pattern whereby people endlessly repeat patterns of behavior which were difficult or distressing in earlier life". What's more, according to Freud, people are often unaware they are doing this.

There are many psychologists since Freud who have studied and written about this phenomenon, posing their theories as to why and what is really going on. But from a strictly biological perspective, you could say that because our brains were developing when we had the original experiences, our neurotransmitters formed pathways that they continue to follow. In other words, we developed an emotional program for what relationships are supposed to look like, feel like, etc. and we are now simply following that program, even when it's a painful pattern that isn't working for us. Even when that program involves abuse, it is what feels familiar to the brain.

Harville Hendrix has developed a whole theory around repetition compulsion which he calls Imago, stating that the purpose of repeating past traumas provides an opportunity to complete or correct what was unfinished in childhood. The challenge, of course is to bring awareness to these patterns and intervene on them while they are happening. This is not necessarily an easy thing to do. The nature of compulsive behavior is, after all, unconscious.

Repetition compulsion shows up in our own behavior as well. Despite having had painful experiences that don't go the way we would like them to, some people continue to make the same poor choices relative to the people we associate with and how we associate with them.

And I notice that a lot of people, maybe even most people have a really tough time taking responsibility for their own behavior patterns. It is much easier and maybe less painful to blame others for abusing or mistreating us. Who wants to admit that the choices they make in their lives are responsible for their own pain? Especially when they continue to make those same poor choices over and over again?

Recognizing and owning this truth is the first step towards changing this behavior. It is a huge move to step out of being a victim and to take 100% responsibility for our lives. The only way this is truly possible, is to forgive ourselves for making those poor choices and to work at bringing presence into the moment to make intentional and deliberate choices that are in our highest good.

An example of a person repeatedly making poor choices comes from the hit TV show, *Breaking Bad*. The show follows the story of Walter White, a high school chemistry teacher who has been diagnosed with Stage III, inoperable lung cancer. Because his doctor gives him two years to live, he wants to make sure his family is taken care of as well as pay for his very expensive cancer treatment, so he decides to go into the business of manufacturing and selling methamphetamine. Regardless of the repeated disastrous events related to this plan, Walter continues on a path through five seasons to his eventual death at the hands of a neo-Nazi gang.

Walter is a great example of a person who seems to be his own worse enemy. In spite of all of the evidence that his decisions are creating destruction in his life and those he loves, he continues to make decisions that are reactive rather than proactive.

**Making Conscious Choices** Many people operate from their heads, which means that their decisions are a reflection of their ego and fear-based thinking. Making conscious choices requires that we are intentional about tuning in to the body and getting into our hearts. Debbie Ford has a guided exercise that I find really powerful. If you close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and imagine a flame inside in the area of your heart. Consider the decisions you've made in the past 24 hours, do they cause the flame to grow into a robust burning fire? Or do they cause the flame to diminish and shrink. Those decisions that we make in our lives that cause that flame to grow are the ones that feed us and contribute to our highest good. What is the condition of your flame?

**Affirmation:** I choose to be present and make conscious choices.

**Quote:** *“From where we stand the rain seems random. If we could stand somewhere else, we would see the order in it.”* — Tony Hillerman,

Jaqui Duvall works as a coach, mentor, trainer, facilitator and public speaker developing and delivering workshops, leading mentoring groups and working with individuals to help them identify and express their inner spirit and live a life of consciousness and intention.



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### **Tortured from Within** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me.” This childhood chant was intended to bolster courage against verbal attacks. They are only words after all, how we respond to them is what matters. The truth is however; words can hurt, especially if you are a sensitive person. But possibly nothing is more painful than the ongoing, pervasive barrage of critical self-talk going through the heads of many people.

In the classes I teach, I often ask if anyone can relate to “being their own best friend.” Every now and then a person will raise their hand, but nearly everyone in the room raises their hand when asked if they can relate to “being their own worst critic.”

Studies show that everyday we have between 5K to 50K thoughts going through our heads. That's a whole lot of ouch if your inner self-talk is negative and self-critical. How did we get this way? Well, there are a few things to blame it on...

First of all, the default thinking of most human beings is biased to negative. This is simply for survival reasons. To survive as a species, we had to be prepared and aware of anything that could go wrong. Therefore, we had to be looking and watching and assessing what was ok and what was not ok and potentially dangerous in our environment.

Secondly, and perhaps more relevant is our inner voice(s) are simply repeating the pattern of parenting we experienced as children growing up. If you had nurturing parents then your self-talk is likely to be more supportive and compassionate. If you were on the receiving end of a lot of criticism, then your self-talk is likely to be more critical. The truth is: the voices of our parents are alive and well and living in our heads!

In addition, your parents didn't even have to use words for you to develop negative self-talk. As children, we often see ourselves as responsible for what is happening around us, especially if no one is helping us to be objective in our conclusions. We pick up a lot from the non-verbal language people use, how we're treated and the feelings of others. The end result is we tend to be unforgiving and sometimes relentless in beating ourselves up for not being “perfect.” Finally, just observing how our parents interpreted events and what type of self-talk they demonstrated influences the pattern we develop for ourselves.

Interestingly, all of these influences on our self-talk are environmental and experiential. We aren't born with negative self-talk; we develop it in response to our life circumstances. In addition to this ongoing self-talk filling our inner space with constant chatter, we also have thoughts driven by our brains.

Interestingly, our brains are kind of like computers. When we encounter problems, the brain works to solve those problems. It can only solve problems based on its experience and if the problem doesn't have a clear solution, the brain can get stuck like a needle in the groove of a scratched record (if you can relate to that older technology analogy.)

Unfortunately, there are a lot of problems in our society today that fall into the category of "unsolvable problems." A lot of relationship issues, family challenges, health challenges and financial issues are not so black and white as say, what to have for dinner or what movie to see. When a problem is perceived as interfering with your well being and ability to function in the world, it becomes a top priority and our brains will constantly try to solve it, especially in the wee hours of the night, when we're not distracted by work and daytime activities.

**Managing the Brain** Modifying critical self-talk and our brain's tendency to obsess about problem solving can both be addressed by learning to manage the brain. Recognizing these tendencies as patterns of thinking can raise awareness and bring an opportunity to re-direct thinking (distraction,) and reframe thinking (aka CBT.)

Distracting the brain is often a temporary solution but can make the difference between getting a few hours of sleep or not at all. It starts by taking some deep abdominal breaths while counting silently to yourself. The breathing helps your body relax and the counting helps to re-focus your thinking. If you maintain this for 64 seconds, studies show that you can pop the needle out of the groove and choose your next thought. Have something to think about ready for that moment or simply focus on your breathing.

Reframing involves choosing a different interpretation. This can apply to negative self-talk or really anything that has you upset. There's always another way to look at a situation. For instance, the person who didn't respond when I said "hi" may not have heard me because they were deep in thought, not because they don't like me.

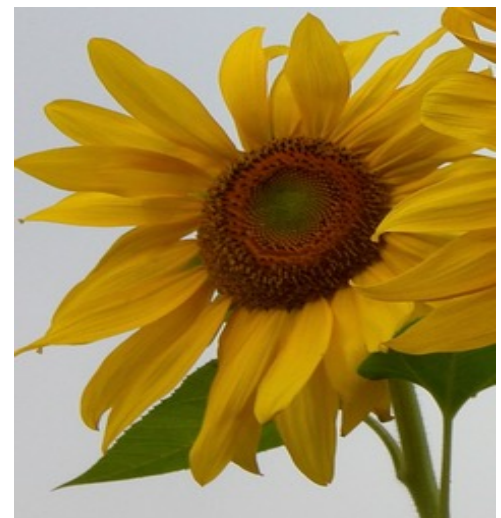
Finally, using positive statements, known as affirmations can help direct the brain to the positive rather than the negative and can relieve anxiety. It is important that the statements be close enough to your beliefs about yourself so that you don't completely reject them. It can lead to a better relationship with yourself in which you are more gentle and loving. "I'm doing the best I can."

"Today, I can begin again."

**Affirmation:** I choose to focus on the positive.

**Quote:** "I never thought I was a bully, until I listened to how I speak to myself. I think I owe myself an apology."  
Unknown

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## Losing Things

By Jaqui Duvall, MA

A police officer comes upon a drunken man intently searching the ground under a streetlamp. He joins the search after learning the man is looking for his keys. After several minutes of searching and finding nothing, the police officer asks, "Are you sure you lost them here?" The drunk replies, no, I lost them across the street, but the light is better here." (Source unknown)

I too, have spent many an hour searching my house, purse, car, etc. for my missing pair of glasses. When I ask my daughter if she has seen them, she'll point to me in a funny way, at which point I realize the lost glasses are actually hanging from my shirt. Unfortunately, I need glasses to find my glasses.

When we are young, it is common to forget things. Many people pin notes to their child's clothing, so that the teacher will actually get the note. When my daughter was small, I spent many an hour searching for her lost jacket, lost toy, lost retainer. Perhaps there is a golden zone for memory when we mature and set up a plan for how to manage our stuff so that we remember where we put things. But then, there seems to be a decline again when we lose track of our plan to remember.

It is also a common experience to go from the bedroom to the kitchen for a specific reason, however upon arriving in the kitchen, forgetting what that reason is. Sometimes if I just stand there, my brain will re-sync with my body. Other times, I have to return to the bedroom to re-remember why I needed to go to the kitchen. I don't need to exercise anymore; I spend my days going back and forth inside my house.

Perhaps memory issues are a factor of aging but I also realize there are so many things over which we have no control and the best thing I can do is to simply surrender to that fact. Surrender is not the same as giving up. It is actually a conscious choice to let go of the crazy making that goes along with trying to make things happen the way I want them.

It is all fine and good to surrender when I'm letting go of glasses or a Bluetooth, but what about when the lost item has great value? I recently misplaced (intentionally not saying "lost.") a wooden bead bracelet. While it has very little monetary value, it has significant personal value to me as it was given to me by my late and very dear friend, Dan.

**Re-Ordering** On the other side of frantically looking for a lost item there is a field of quiet, calm and peace where a voice is saying, "It's going to be ok." It's also saying, "They are only *things*." Losing the bracelet doesn't mean I have lost my friend all over again, it may simply mean I need to find a different way to remember him.

Another possibility in losing things is that the universe may simply be making room for something else. I call this *re-ordering*, when the universe is actually responding positively to my request or prayer or vision, but has to remove some things or some people to bring about the new state. It often feels like loss when it is happening.

My best example of this is when I let go of my house. I loved the house and had lived there for over 12 years. It was painful and sad to feel I had no choice but to sell it, however, keeping it would have significantly conflicted with my desire to live within my means. In fact, I believe the universe was bringing my *financial* house back into balance, an effort that took many years to accomplish.

Because we can't predict the future or know why something has happened when it is happening, we can't always realize that re-ordering is taking place. Sometimes it is a test of faith. Trusting that it will become clear at the right moment and choosing to stay in the moment rather than choosing to take it all personally is not always easy, but usually results in more peace.

**Affirmation:** I choose to trust that the universe acts in my highest good.

**Quote:** *"If you're not careful you can spend your whole life looking for what you've lost."*— Moira Fowley-Doyle, [Spellbook of the Lost and Found](#)

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### **Incivility** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

I was at the grocery store one day pushing my cart up and down the aisles, when I paused to wait for a couple who were deciding on an item. As the man reached in front of me to pull an item off the shelf, he said, "Excuse me."

I was so delighted with his politeness that I commented to him, "Thank you so much for acknowledging me." He turned to his companion and said, "See? I'm not the only one." We laughed and high 5'd.

In the grocery store or any store for that matter, I often find myself feeling frustrated that people aren't more polite when they reach in front of you or block the aisle, or even clip your heel with their cart. Of course, the battle in the parking lot is even worse. The bottom line: I think there is a general increase in incivility in the world.

Here are few contributing factors.

#1 People have different training. While I was raised during a time when manners and etiquette were very important and were frankly, hammered into my head. Not everyone has the same standards of behavior. It doesn't necessarily mean that one way is right and the other wrong. However, manners are not taught formally as they once were.

#2 I don't know if you've noticed it, but people are totally checked out. I don't think the average person is lacking in intelligence, however there is strong evidence that some people aren't employing the intelligence they have. They're not paying attention. You typically won't use your best manners if you just don't see the other people around you because you are preoccupied with something else. Need I bring up the subject of the phone/tablet trance that many people are in?

#3 Many people just don't care. Yeah, I see you, but you and your needs are so unimportant to me that I just blocked it out. I am way more important than you anyway; therefore, you should wait for me. This is called entitlement.

#4 The Toothache Syndrome: People are so focused on their own pain that they don't care about or even see anyone else. People seem to be angrier, more afraid and more depressed than ever. I can't say whether that is a symptom of what's going on in their personal lives or a reflection of the world as a whole, but it shows.

I have been spending a lot of time lately on personal growth efforts, specifically, to connect with my needs and feelings. The more I find ways to honor my needs and to love myself, the nicer I am to people I encounter in my day.

**Becoming the Monster** Years ago I encountered a person who told me about the serious childhood abuse she had experienced at the hands of one of her brothers. When she went to her parents looking for help, she got no support. Not only were they not receptive, they denied her claims despite the physical evidence.

Many people have experienced abuse of one form or another. We are all human, of course, and I believe we are all doing the best we can under our unique circumstances, however, some people are unable to avoid *becoming the monster*. In fact, a very high percentage of people who commit abuse were themselves abused as children.

In the name of justification and rationalization, some people put themselves and their needs before anything and anyone else. This was definitely the case with the person I mentioned above.

One minute she would humbly ask for help, in the next minute she would take advantage of others both financially and otherwise by being sneaky and deceitful. Her behavior lacked integrity and just plain honesty.

This may be one of those instances that I refer to as the Human Dilemma. If you think about it, most people do not come out of childhood unscathed. Dysfunctional behavior and family dynamics are passed from generation to generation. While you may be angry and justifiably so, who can you really blame? Your parents? Their parents? All the way back through time, people were being abused and not getting their needs met. Perhaps this person needed to find a way to listen to herself.

I have long believed that a large part of the problem that many of us have, is that we don't adequately address our feelings. My dear friend, who recently lost his mother, was reminding me of this. When I asked him if he had gotten a chance to grieve, he said that he was trying to create the space to do that. There often isn't in our lives, space to just feel. We show up for work and have to be productive and "normal" which by definition excludes the opportunity to simply be real.

**Affirmation:** I am loving. I am loveable. I am loved.

**Quote:** "In a world where you can be anything, be kind." -Unknown

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### **Shame and Self-Esteem** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

I was just recently teaching Assertiveness for my long-term gig as an instructor at Kaiser. Throughout the class, I heard myself repeatedly saying, "You know, it really comes down to self-esteem." Just as Louise Hay said, "When you love yourself, everything in your life just works." In other words, to overcome your fear of being assertive, to believe you deserve to stand up for yourself typically requires raising your self-esteem.

This may not be new news. I honestly don't think many would argue with what I've said so far, however, knowing this and changing your level of self-love are two completely different things.

While I know there are many people who have a healthy level of self-love and esteem themselves highly, I would venture to say that they are a minority. The vast majority of people are swimming in a sea of shame. Brene Brown has written and spoken extensively on this subject and says that even talking about shame is difficult because people don't want to acknowledge they even have it. What exactly is shame?

Shame is not the same as guilt. Guilt is a reasonable response to a situation in which a person has acted against their better judgment. They made a mistake. Shame is believing your *are* a mistake, that you are inherently flawed and unfixable, not that people don't try to fix their shame, usually by trying to earn love and accolades. Others try to anesthetize their shame away with addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, shopping, eating, etc. etc. etc. Which, of course, only makes things worse.

When I first became a Life Coach almost 17 years ago I started using affirmations, some of which were specifically designed to address self-esteem. Don't get me wrong, saying, "I love and accept myself exactly the way I am," every single day for 17 years has had a positive effect. However, there are many aspects of self-esteem that you can't affirm your way around. While I will continue to use affirmations, frankly, I find inner child work to be much more effective when it comes to changing how I feel about myself.

## Inner Child

Many psychologists, starting with Freud, have discussed the psyche being made up of parts. Part of the psyche resides in a subconscious state, the vast majority, in fact.

In the subconscious live all of the thoughts and feelings we have ever experienced relative to our life circumstances. You experience them now when a current event triggers a reaction that is connected to a past event that was unresolved (unresolved meaning, you still have feelings about it.) And (here's the interesting part,) your conscious self-talk is directly connected to the meaning you gave to all of those events and circumstances buried in your subconscious mind. While some of that self-talk can be positive, typically, much of it is negative.

Most people relate to being their own worst critic. Not only that, but some people are merciless with their criticism of themselves. Guess what? That is a reflection of poor self-esteem. This is where connecting with your inner child can positively affect your self-esteem. By loving the inner child part of yourself, the one who originally experienced negative experiences it helps to rewire your brain to a positive experience.

Here is a simple exercise you can do that can start to change how you feel about yourself. First, find a picture of yourself when you were a small child of about 4-5 years old. If you can't find a picture, close your eyes and imagine yourself at that age. I took a picture of a picture so I could carry it with me on my phone.

Pull out the picture several times a day and imagine it is a child actually standing before you. Greet the child like you are happy to see him/her. Embrace the child. Laugh with the child. Love the child. And just notice if your mood and attitude change through the day.

**Affirmation:** I choose to love and accept myself.

**Quote:** *"I am not afraid of storms for I am learning to sail my ship."* -Louisa May Alcott

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### **Taking Things Personally** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

In the movie, *The Road House*, Patrick Swayze is the supervising bouncer of a rough bar. He is lecturing his staff saying, "Be nice," to every circumstance where they would interact with a customer. Escorting them out, "Be nice." Picking them up off the floor, "Be nice." Whatever the circumstances, "Be nice." What if they are violent towards you? "Be nice and *don't take it personally.*"

Taking things personally typically involves an interpretation that a person's behavior, attitude, or words are a direct attack on your value. Taking things personally is nearly a universal human behavior, what I call a human dilemma. It appears most people can relate to it. Not only that, even when you are aware that you're doing it, it's not really that easy to change.

What does it look like when someone is taking things personally? It is an over-reaction, out of proportion to the grievance. The person is typically deeply offended, even outraged. When someone says, "I was disrespected" I hear, "I took that personally."

Why do we do it? I think it relates to our early experiences. When things happened our caregivers didn't explain themselves or help us to understand events in an objective way...why you got in trouble, why the dog is not coming home, why Mom is so angry. As children we don't have any other context in which to interpret events other than that we're responsible, it is part of the developmental process. If the event has negative consequences to you and those around you and you believe you are responsible for it, you will typically feel shame as a result. Eventually, with experience, we are able to be more objective in our interpretations for many things. But some of these early interpretations are carried forward with us and show up as, "I feel responsible; "Those words hit my "I'm not good enough button"" and we *take it personally.*

What's really interesting is that 9 times out of 10, the person saying the offending words has no thought of you in their mind AT ALL. It's a completely impersonal act that has to do with their need fulfillment and often without any thought of how their behavior may affect others around them. Human dilemma.

Since, nearly everything I write about has something to do with me (don't take that personally,) I can honestly say that I have struggled with this issue myself. So, I started asking myself, "How can I stop taking things so personally? What would I actually have to do?"

## Presence

My first thought is I could start by making a *decision* to stop taking things personally. While this sounds good, simply making a decision just doesn't go far enough. There are many things I intend to do at the beginning of the day, but then life shows up, I get distracted, someone's being an xxxhole, or whatever and there I am taking things personally.

I realize that for me to change how I respond to people and circumstances in the moment would require *presence*. I mean, when something is happening, inserting awareness of my self, connection with my self and the bigger picture of detachment when the event is actually happening. It would also require changing my self-talk, coaching myself with a reminder to detach from the behavior of others.

I believe it is possible to do. Not necessarily easy, but definitely possible. After all, this is in essence what we teach in classes for Behavioral Health. Creating a pause between cause and effect, so that you can mindfully choose your response. So then I started asking myself, what would I have to do to create that pause, to bring awareness into the moment?

Like many things, it takes practice starting with a daily practice of mindfulness. Sitting for a few minutes in a quiet, uninterrupted space and focusing on input to the senses such as the sounds around me, or my very own act of breathing. With regular practice, it increases my ability to be present. Then, in the moment of the event, it may take several tries. I realize afterward, "Oh, this was one of those moments." Until a time comes when I'm able to see the opportunity before I open my mouth and then I walk away/drive away thinking, "I did it." And I feel good about myself for having retained my perspective.

Here's the interesting thing. I notice that when I feel good about myself. When I am right with myself and the world, I don't tend to react so much. I don't take things so personally. I'm less reactive. Working on loving and accepting yourself as you are is one of the best things you can do to contribute to your emotional health and wellbeing.

**Affirmation:** In the present moment, I am at peace.

**Quote:** "If they're not treating you right today, tomorrow will not be any different." -Susan Gale

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### **Belonging and Presence** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

Brene Brown has written extensively about the basic human need for belonging. She says that much of people's behavior in groups is to help them fit in. We do things like laughing at unfunny jokes, being loyal beyond reason, dressing like, acting like, eating like, not setting limits or criticizing in any way, etc. etc. These acts are all about fitting in rather than being genuine, authentic and real. Interestingly, once you really get this, you discover that the people who require you to fit in are usually not people you really want to be around. People who recognize the value of your authenticity are sometimes rare but very valuable. I have had a few experiences recently learning about authenticity by participating in equine therapy.

In the few experiences I have had at the ranch, I had never interacted with Moonshine who is the youngest member of the herd, one year old. I have been a bit shy and measured in my approach to the five horses in the herd I realize, because I want them to like me. This is a great example of the desire to fit in and it turns out, is just the sort of thing equine therapy can help with.

In my recent visit, Moonshine was tethered to the fence very loosely and a handler was there to ensure that he was ok because he wasn't used to being tied up. As I groomed him, noticing how soft and unscarred his coat is, he started to pull away and take a few steps back. I asked the handler if he was scared, she said "No." So, I stood there, waiting to see what Moonshine would do. I got the sense I was being tested, like he was thinking, "I wonder what she would do, if I backed away?" After a few seconds, he stepped forward again and I resumed grooming him.

Later when we were debriefing our experiences. I received confirmation that that is exactly what Moonshine was up to. I was elated that I maintained my presence of detachment and simply waited to see what Moonshine did rather than take it personally, which is what I would normally have done in the past.

Through my interactions with the horses I have become more keenly aware of my desire to be liked by the self-talk that goes through my head when I'm around them. Interestingly, when I meditate and move into "presence," I am much more authentic which is where I was coming from when I was "detached and waiting" for Moonshine to step back up.

A bit later, Moonshine crossed in front of the entire group to come straight to me and nuzzled me. Did I say that I am in love with Moonshine?

## Empathy and Presence

I have come to discover that many of the challenges I have encountered in my life have happened because of empathy. To clarify, I believe empathizing with others is generally a really good thing. It helps us to connect in an emotionally intimate way with others, and it often serves people's need to be heard and understood.

There is a difference however, from empathizing and being an Empath. Many people are born with the ability to empathize while some learn to empathize. Others, like myself are *Empaths*. As an Empath, I automatically start aligning myself with the needs of others when I'm around them. There are times when it is really hard to know whether I'm feeling my own feelings or someone else's. Just the way I was built, I guess. For Empaths, this can be a double-edged sword. While it has served me in my profession as a trainer, coach and spiritual counselor, in my personal life it has, at times, been challenging to determine where the lines are between me and other people. I often don't even realize I'm doing it. When I align myself with someone else's needs, I lose connection with myself. I start *servicing* and deferring to their needs. When interacting with the horses, they respond when I stay connected with myself.

As I entered the round pen with Levi, another horse I had only groomed up to this point. Trying to apply presence, I walked to the other side of the pen and stood with my eyes closed for a minute, simply asking myself, "What do I want?" This is an important question for me to ask myself and important that I separate myself from others when I ask it because of that Empath boundary issue.

I then, approached Levi and asked with intention, "Do you want to go for a walk?" I turned around and started walking. It took a few seconds, but he started to follow me. I walked the whole round of the pen with Levi very close at my side, feeling victorious because I acted on my own desires, was present when I did it and succeeded in connecting authentically in the moment.

**Affirmation:** I live in presence and take actions for my highest good.

**Quote:** *"I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person."* — Walt Whitman

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A u g u s t 2 0 1 9



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### **Rising Anxiety** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

I have been working in Healthcare for almost 17 years. I teach classes in Behavioral Health Education and most recently Workplace Violence Prevention. Over the past couple of years, we've seen a significant increase in the number of people experiencing anxiety to the point where they decide to get help for it. More and more people are reaching out because they simply don't feel safe in the world. Little wonder, given the significant rise in mass shootings and violence in public venues. Nearly every place that groups of people hang out there has been violence of late.

These events inspire a constant state of fear and powerlessness. There are so many things we are powerless over; the weather, the economy, and most anything that has to do with other people. Certainly, we have influence over other people at times, but we really don't have control over what other people do or say. So, when some people decide to use violence as a way to express their... shall I call it, dissatisfaction, their unhappiness, their distorted thinking? Whatever it is, the result is the end of other people's lives.

This is not leading towards an appeal for gun control or even a diatribe against guns; there are plenty of people writing about that. Nor do I plan to diagnose those who are committing these acts of violence. I simply want to talk about the anxiety it inspires.

Much of the anxiety we deal with in Behavioral Health has contributing factors such as genetics, body chemistry, substance use, and past trauma. While this is true of stress and depression as well, a major factor for anxiety is perception. Accurate or not, if you perceive that there is something to fear, your body will react with fear whether or not that event is happening right now. Unfortunately, in the case of active shooters, it has become nearly a daily occurrence; therefore fearing it will happen is not necessarily a distorted thought. However, walking through every moment of your life in fear is no way to live and sooner or later will have health consequences. This is not a level of stress the body can sustain.

So what can we do? Whether or not any efforts are made at the highest level to deal with this problem, in the meantime, we still need to live our lives to the best of our ability.

## Calming

First, we need to have a technique and regular practice that helps to calm our minds and bodies such as deep breathing. The act of changing our breathing from shallow to deep, shifts our physiology and with continued practice moves us to the parasympathetic nervous system. This is where calm energy lives and better decisions are made.

Next, we need to raise our level of presence and awareness. By tuning in to our own senses we gain access to the information that alerts us that there is something wrong in our environment so that we can take action to avoid or avert it. This can happen with a mindfulness practice. Deep breathing and mindfulness can be combined into a single practice by focusing on the act of breathing as it is happening; feeling the air enter your nostrils, feeling the expansion of your abdomen, being completely present with the entire process.

Third, we need to be as prepared as we can to deal with whatever we may encounter in our daily lives. Learning to be assertive has been a lifelong pursuit of mine, which includes speaking your truth with grace and love. It also involves listening. With practice, listening can become a way of raising your awareness about the people around you. Observing, noticing, registering what is going on with them enables us to respond intentionally and deliberately. It might also enable us to act on that information in an effort towards prevention.

Finally, there are many things we can do that help to raise our confidence with potential dangerous encounters with others such as martial arts and defense training. Even a regular workout program makes us feel stronger and more fit, all of which raises our confidence.

These practices can be combined to create a way of moving through the world with a sense of empowerment that can help counteract the influence of anxiety.

**Affirmation:** I move through the world with ease and grace.

**Quote:** *“Life is 10 percent what you experience and 90 percent how you respond to it.” ~Dorothy M. Neddermeyer*

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S e p t e m b e r 2 0 1 9

# Life mpass

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## Loving Yourself By Jaqui Duvall, MA

"When you constantly criticize your children they never stop loving you, they stop loving themselves." -brightside

As I observe the world and the people in it, I am constantly struck by behavior that I believe is a manifestation of people who don't love themselves. Hurting other people, whether that is physically, emotionally or financially is most often the act of people who have been hurt themselves. Hurt people, hurt people. When people are deeply hurt by people that are supposed to love them, they sometimes cut themselves off from their tender, vulnerable parts, so that they don't feel anything when they act against other people. It's not fair or just or right, but it is what it is, perhaps part of the human dilemma. I have believed for many years that the world would be a completely different place if people loved themselves.

For my own journey, I have put much effort toward the pursuit of loving myself doing daily affirmations, journaling, workshops, therapy, reading books and practicing inner child work. Even in the midst of all this work, the whole concept of loving self while important and valuable was still a bit elusive in practicality. How do I know this? My relationships. While I have some wonderful, healthy, loving relationships; when you love yourself you don't stay in relationship with people who use and abuse you.

One thing I know for sure, when I love myself, I am a nicer person. I'm more peaceful. While I don't react as much to the bad behavior of others whether that is people I know or not, I make better choices in who I hang out with, and I choose to be around people who are kind and caring.

Recently I found a process that I believe has directly affected my level of self-love. It involves connecting with your inner child in a very direct way. It comes from the work of Susan Anderson who wrote, "The Journey from Abandonment to Healing."

## Inner Child

If you were to encounter a child who was upset, sad, looked disheveled and uncared for, what would you do? Would you ignore or neglect the child? Would you judge or criticize the child? My guess is that most people would approach the child gently and ask if they could help. They would try to give the child what it needs. Just reading those words, does a picture come to mind?

What if the child in that picture was you? A part of you that has been present inside of you your whole life, but you didn't realize it was there or know how to listen to it.

Here is a process to connect with your inner child: Find a picture of yourself at the age of 4 or 5 years old. Take a picture of it with your phone so you can carry it around with you always. Pull it out a couple times per day and really look at the child in the picture. Imagine that child before you and simply love the child. Look lovingly, adoringly, tenderly at the child. Hug your phone while imagining you are hugging the child.

Ask the child how it is feeling and really listen to what it has to say. Write a dialog between you the adult and you the child. Ask it questions and allow it to answer. Ask what it needs and respond like you would to a child in need, lovingly, tenderly.

Within days of starting this process, I noticed a difference in how I behave and what and who I attract into my life. Well worth the time and effort.

**Affirmation:** I choose to love myself the way I always wanted to be loved.

**Quote:** "When people love themselves, life just works." -Louise Hay

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O c t o b e r 2 0 1 9



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### **Stress in Relationships** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

It's challenging as individuals to deal with the world being a scary place. When we deal with stress and fear on an individual basis however, our relationships may suffer as well.

Stress is an interesting animal. There have been so many things written about it and how it affects us. While there are all the physical effects triggered by the release of hormones such as raised heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory rate, there are also interesting things going on in our brains. The oldest part of the brain, sometimes called the reptilian brain is directing our actions. While this is an instinctual process designed to enable us to survive as a species, as individuals our perception of the danger determines what we do. Our perception of our level of personal power influences this.

If you perceive that you are more powerful than the danger, you will feel compelled to fight. Your blood and hormones will move to your upper body, your arms and torso. You will likely feel anger. If you perceive that you are less powerful than the danger, you will feel compelled to flee. Your blood and hormones will move to your lower body, your legs and you will likely feel anxiety.

If you perceive that you have no course of action to affect the danger, in other words you have no escape and there's no way to fight it, you will typically freeze. Your mind and body will shut down in a sense, and wait for instructions. Just like your computer does when it has received too much input too quickly.

If you are in a close relationship with another person whether that person is your spouse, children, friend, co-worker, etc. your brain may possibly fixate on someone close to you as the cause of your danger, pain or issue and suddenly you are flooded with hostility towards that person.

For example: One day several years ago, my daughter opened the back door and my cat ran out. My little dog, seeing the cat started chasing her. She turned and ran to the nearest "safe" place, which happened to be an Italian Cypress tree. If you have ever seen an Italian Cypress tree, they are like bushes that grow straight up, in this case about 50' feet. My cat is now 40' up one of these very tall bushes and is too terrified to come down. My first instinct is to yell at my daughter.

My brain perceived my daughter as being the cause of the stress and perceived me as being at least as powerful as my daughter. I was flooded with stress hormones, all of which equals fight. Fortunately, because I have worked at changing my reaction to stress I didn't yell at my daughter.

Through the course of the next 26 hours, we tried numerous strategies to get the cat down including calling the fire department (no, they don't do this anymore.) Long story short, eventually a couple of male friends hacked their way up 40 feet into that tree and physically grabbed the cat. All is well; all are safe (except for the tree.) Danger, stress, over!

Throughout that 26 hours however, I continually had to work on maintaining myself to avoid yelling at my daughter. My biology, my brain, my perception, my experience in life taught me that this is the way to deal with stress. As I'm sure you can see, yelling would not have gotten the cat down any faster. And while my daughter opened the door, it was an accident, not intentional.

I'm wondering if you can relate to this in any way? Have you experienced stressors in your own life that conveniently get vented on the people close to you? Do you find yourself feeling hostile and blaming others for things whether or not they are at fault?

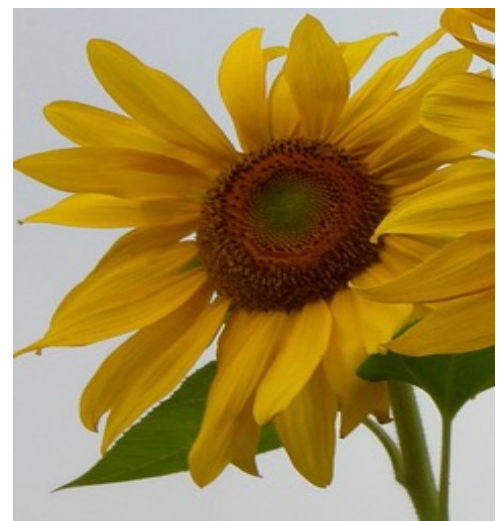
To change the way we deal with stress first requires calming the nervous system. In my August 2019 edition, *Rising Anxiety* I discuss several steps to calming.

**Affirmation:** I breathe and stay present in the moment.

**Quote:** *"It's not stress that kills us, but our reaction to it."*  
-Hans Selye

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N o v e m b e r 2 0 1 9



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### **Loving Kindness** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

A Veteran who was referred to me when I was working for the VA as a Health Coach arrived at my door. The chip on his shoulder came into the room before he did. When he sat down he stated that he was "sick and tired of being told what to do," and went on to mutter something about the latest "stupid" program he was being referred to.

I said to him, "I can't possibly imagine what you have been through in your life, but I am here now, wanting to hear and understand you and I will never tell you what to do." Hearing my words, his body language relaxed significantly. I worked with this Veteran for the last 6 months of my contract at the VA before the funding ran out. Unfortunately, he was very angry (the system failed him again) that the program that he felt benefitted him the most was being taken away. I was simply grateful that I had a chance for a brief time, to make a difference in his life and the lives of many other Veterans.

I tell this story in honor of Veteran's Day, but also to raise awareness that when we interact with people, we really don't know what's going on inside them. As much as there are commonalities to our shared human experience, we can't really know exactly how another person is feeling. Their feelings are a unique combination of their life experiences, personality and genetic make-up.

I often find that while people can be well put-together and look fine on the outside, there can be a very complex inner world that the outside world is unaware of. When we see people behaving strangely or doing something we don't understand, we are often quick to judge.

Brene Brown says that when you get close enough to another person to see and understand what's going on with them, your compassion is often inspired. But even without getting close to a person, when we choose to be in the present moment, we can step out of our heady thinking and get into our hearts enabling us to engender loving kindness toward others.

## Be Here Tomorrow

Another Veteran I worked with showed up one morning looking downtrodden and depressed. I asked how he was and he said, "Do you really want to know?" I said that I did and then he proceeded to tell me of several very challenging things going on in his life. Later, he told me that I was one of only two people that he felt really listened to him. Sadly, he ended his life a few months later.

While I would like to be able to say that listening alone could save a person's life, the truth is, many people have very complex issues that take time and professional help to sort out. Suicide is often referred to as a "Permanent solution to a temporary problem. Depressed people often feel they are alone and the only ones feeling that way. They work at keeping their inner world hidden from the eyes and ears of another, which is sometimes challenging to understand.

When a person is depressed and contemplating suicide, their whole body chemistry has changed. Along with that chemical change are thoughts that are often distorted and very convincing.

There is an amazing documentary about a young man who struggled with mental illness and attempted suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. He survived. His story is compelling and he has dedicated his life to helping others experiencing the same thing. Check it out by clicking [here](#).

**Affirmation:** I choose loving kindness.

**Quote:** *"Listening looks easy, but it's not simple. every head is a world."* -Cuban Proverb

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D e c e m b e r 2 0 1 9



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### **Prisoner in the Dark Cave** By Jaqui Duvall, MA

The Prisoner In The Dark Cave (A parable taken from "Healing The Shame that Binds You" by John Bradshaw)

There once was a man who was sentenced to die. He was blindfolded and put in a pitch-dark cave. The cave was 100 yards by 100 yards. He was told that there was a way out of the cave, and if he could find it, he was a free man. After a rock was secured at the entrance of the cave, the prisoner was allowed to take his blindfold off and roam freely in the darkness. He was to be fed only bread and water for the first 30 days and nothing thereafter. The bread and water were lowered from a small hole in the roof at the south end of the cave. The ceiling was about 18 feet high. The opening was about one foot in diameter. The prisoner could see a faint light up above, but no light came into the cave. As the prisoner roamed and crawled around the cave, he bumped into rocks. Some were rather large. He thought that if he could build a mound of rocks and dirt that was high enough, he could reach the opening and enlarge it enough to crawl through and escape. Since he was 5'9", and his reach was two feet, the mound had to be at least 10 feet high. So the prisoner spent his waking hours picking up rocks and digging up dirt. At the end of two weeks, he had built a mound of about six feet. He thought that if he could duplicate that in the next two weeks, he could make it before his food ran out. But as he had already used most of the rocks in the cave, he had to dig harder and harder. He had to do the digging with his bare hands. After a month had passed, the mound was nine and half feet high and he could almost reach the opening if he jumped. He was almost exhausted and extremely weak. One day just as he thought he could touch the opening, he fell. He was simply too weak to get up, and in two days he died. His captors came to get his body. They rolled away the huge rock that covered the entrance. As the light flooded into the cave, it illuminated an opening in the wall of the cave about three feet in circumference. The opening was the opening to a tunnel, which led to the other side of the mountain. This was the passage to freedom the prisoner had been told about. It was in the south wall directly under the opening in the ceiling. All the prisoner would have had to do was crawl about 200 feet and he would have found freedom. He had so completely focused on the opening of light that it never occurred to him to look for freedom in the darkness. Liberation was there all the time right next to the mound he was building, but it was in the darkness.

"I love the end of Fall when it gets dark at 4pm said no one ever." -Unknown

Except maybe me. I included the quote above and the parable of the prisoner in the dark cave to simply say; while I value, embrace and rejoice in the light, there is value in the darkness. It serves a very important purpose. It is a time for silence and stillness. It is a time for rest. "Turn, turn, turn..."

In fact, the concept I had when I started this newsletter, "The Evolving Self," is largely dependent upon moments of silence and stillness when a person stops to reflect upon their life. It is these moments that enable us to process our life experiences, both positive and negative.

In addition to the natural turn of the seasons from light to dark, at this time a year ago, I was experiencing a time of personal darkness as a consequence of a painful breakup. It seemed like several areas of my life imploded all at once and I struggled to be effective in all areas of my life. As a result, I sought help, I researched information that applied to my circumstances and I used my tools. I also went into the darkness. I spent time writing and using guided imagery to invite the parts of me that needed healing to speak.

As a highly sensitive person, I tend to be over-stimulated by a lot of noise and activity. In the darkness, I find silence. It is these times when I can hear myself think, feel my feelings and make sense of all that happens in my life.

**Affirmation:** The light gives me hope, darkness gives me wisdom.

**Quote:** *"In the dark night of the soul, bright flows the river of God."* -St. John of the Cross

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