



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

supplement!

As I thought about this column a phrase from a song from *The Sound of Music* came to mind: “These are a few of my favorite things!” Mental health “supplements” are the things that make us happy, that bring joy to our lives. Here’s my short list!

FINDING PEOPLE TO LOVE

We are happiest when we love someone! Being loved is of course wonderful, but research confirms that we are actually happiest when we love and give to others. Family, friends, clients, people in our spiritual communities, professional associates—the list goes on and on; there are so many people to love.

If you have a shortage of people to love in your life, begin sending love out to your favorite checker in the grocery store, your pharmacist, and your auto repair person, anyone in your life who is helpful. These are the easy people to love. If you want to really develop your capacity to love, then start trying to love the more difficult people—the people that drive you crazy, the irritating people that you dread seeing.

Then if you want to move to the Olympic level, follow the Biblical injunction to love your enemies! This does not mean saying empty words; you have to really feel love or at least compassion for them. This does not mean that you have to like them, approve of what they do, or be a doormat to them. You may need to stand up to them, speak back, say your own truth, but you come from the power of love, rather than anger and fear. While we may not be able to reach the level of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, in our own small ways we can work towards this goal.

MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE

Feeling that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, feeling that our life has meaning and purpose is vital for thriving. Meaning can come from many things: our work, our families, our values, our passions, and our belief systems. The meaning in my life flows naturally from the importance I place on loving others. I believe I am here to make a difference, not in some dramatic, extravagant way, but in an ordinary, day-to-day kind of way. I believe that God is Love and that each of us has “that of God within.” I also believe that any of us can tap into the source of all love and radiate that outward in our words and deeds. Again, MLK, Gandhi and others show us the way. When Mother Theresa was asked how she

kept working with the homeless and destitute of India, she replied, “Our job is not to be successful, but to be faithful.” Being faithful to whatever gives our life meaning and purpose is a worthy goal.

MIND QUIETING ACTIVITIES

Our minds often spin in ways that increase our unhappiness. We waste time thinking about the past or worrying about the future. We go over past hurts, bringing the hurt into the present instead of letting it go! We are indeed the source of much of our unhappiness.

Mind quieting activities can include Tai Chi or Yoga as well as meditation. The Triangle Area is an absolute Mecca for help with meditation. Google meditation and related words like mindfulness and hundreds of entries will pop up. Duke and UNC both have classes on mindfulness as a path to stress reduction. There are lots of varieties. Meditation has wrought profound changes in my life, even though I am not at all “good at it.”

READING

Reading for fun as well as to learn brings me much pleasure. Two of my favorite self-help books are:

Try to See it My Way: Being Fair in Love and Marriage by B. Janet Hibbs. I must say that B. is a friend of mine, but this is an excellent book. It is well written and full of very helpful, practical information for couples.

Yes, *Your Teen is Crazy! Loving Your Kid Without Losing Your Mind*, by Michael J. Bradley. David and I feel like this book saved our lives during a few particularly hard years! All of our years of training went out the window when we were dealing with our own teen!

Happiness psychology is a growing field of research that offers a wealth of ideas about how to increase your personal happiness. Google: happiness psychology research and start reading.

This is a short list; other things that bring enormous joy to my life are hiking, camping, kayaking, NIA, singing in a chorus, working with teens, preparing and eating nutritious and delicious food, yard work and housework, and lots of other things. I am easily entertained! Try this exercise for yourself. Make a list of all the things that are important in your life and make sure it continues to grow and grow and then find ways to make time for them all! lol

Karen Stewart, MA, and David Stewart, PhD, are psychologists who work with individuals, couples, groups, and organizations in their Durham practice at Suite 220 at 811 Ninth Street in Durham. Reach them at (919) 286-5051. www.stewartpsychologists.com