

Psychologically Speaking!

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Editor's Note

Psychologically Speaking is a newsletter published by the Counseling and Psychological Services Center for the North Campus community. This newsletter will be published each semester to provide psychological tips and strategies to enhance your life and well being. *Psychologically Speaking* features articles of interest to those who work to improve their life using the most current information available.

The Counseling and Psychological Services Center provides individual, group and couples counseling to registered students at the University. In addition to providing counseling services, the Center provides a variety of other services including psychosocial educational programs, consultation, evaluation and referral, relaxation techniques, psychological testing, and biofeedback services. All services are confidential. The Counseling and Psychological Services Center is accredited by IACCS. Located in WUC 139, & UP GC 211.

Another look at Stress

In our society, stress has a bad reputation. However, if you think about it, is this really true? What if you could use stress to help you achieve? After all, no one who has ever been alive has eliminated stress, so we might as well use it! In order to use it, we have to first define it and understand it.

What is stress?

Stress is neither bad nor good. Thoughts which we superimpose on the actual or imaginary demands we face in life determine whether or not we feel stressed out, freaked out or worn out! These internal thoughts of being unable to rise to the challenges lead to the common definition of stress.

Understanding Stress

It is not the challenges we face that create the stress but our internalized negative messages and

fears that are the problem. It has been said that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. Our messages and our fears belong to us. And since these are ours, we CAN control them. Often when we feel fear, we interpret that emotion to mean "stop." However there may be other interpretations which will be more useful in controlling and eliminating fears. Another example is that when faced with a difficult challenge we may feel inadequate or incompetent. We often interpret this to mean "Give up," or "Get someone else to do it." One of the most common negative messages is "I'm not good enough." This is interpreted to mean "Find someone else, no need to try, I'll only fail." So it is easy to see that to control stress we need to learn how to reinterpret our negative messages. For example, fear may not mean stop.

It may mean proceed with caution. You might be good enough, but you might need more information.

Steps for Interpreting Messages

The first thing you need to do is become aware of your interpretations. What are your fears? What situations or events trigger feelings of inadequacy? After you have achieved some awareness, ask yourself the following:

1. How have you exaggerated the consequences of not achieving this event in your mind?
2. Have you overestimated your ability to control all the events or circumstances in your life? Are you controlling those areas where you do have control?
3. How else can this message be interpreted?
4. What makes you think that you are the only one with this problem and that there is no solution?
5. Is there ever a perfect answer?

The second step is to provide rational interpretations of your negative messages and fears. The goal is to dispute your irrational messages and identify and use the new rational interpretations.

For example, many students suffer from test anxiety. The student who suffers from test anxiety may have negative messages that are something like, "I'm too stupid" or "The program is using this course to weed people out", or "If I fail this test, I'll flunk out of school and become a bag lady! All of these messages are not only negative but are also irrational. Using the above questions, we CAN choose rational messages.

1. The student has definitely exaggerated the consequences. If the student fails the test, there will be other chances to raise the grade. Or if the student fails and is dismissed from school, the student can pursue other career options.
2. The student cannot know in advance the test questions, so therefore the student may study but not achieve a good grade. The student cannot control which questions are on the test. However the student can control how they study and what they study.
3. The underlying message is "I'm going to fail." This message can be interpreted as "My goals are very important and attainable, if I take the appropriate actions to succeed."
4. Test anxiety is a common problem which most people have faced at one time or another, and can be resolved.
5. *No one and nothing on planet earth is perfect!*



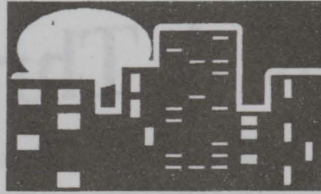
From this example it is easy to see that any negative message can be disputed and rational alternatives generated. Try it. It works! If after using this system you still have difficulty in managing your negative messages, call the Counseling and Psychological Services Center and meet with one of our professional staff who can help you learn to control your negative messages.

Campus Stress: A Threat To Health

To compare levels of stress, experts have assigned points to various events. As a rough guide they estimate that a student who must cope with events worth 150 points or more in one year has a 50-50 chance of an adverse health change.

| Life Event | Points |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Death of spouse | 100 |
| Unwanted pregnancy | 92 |
| Death of parent | 80 |
| Father in unwanted pregnancy | 77 |
| Divorce | 73 |
| Death of a close relative | 70 |
| Death of a close friend | 65 |
| Parent's divorce | 63 |
| Jail term | 61 |
| Major injury or illness | 60 |
| Flunking out | 58 |
| Marriage | 55 |
| Loss of a job | 48 |
| Failing important course | 47 |
| Sexual difficulties | 45 |
| Argument with partner | 40 |
| Academic probation | 39 |
| Change in major | 37 |
| New love interest | 36 |
| Increase workload | 31 |
| Outstanding achievement | 29 |
| First semester | 28 |
| Conflict with instructor | 27 |
| Lower grades than expected | 25 |
| College transfer | 24 |
| Change in sleeping habit | 21 |
| Change in eating habits | 19 |
| Minor violations of law | 15 |

Ask the Expert - Dreaming



Q. Why do we dream? Why don't we often remember our dreams? Do dreams have psychological significance?

Where can I find additional information that is accepted by the mental health community?

A. You are raising questions humans have asked for thousands of years and which no one has successfully answered. Dreams are the accompaniment of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, and some would say they are simply a by-product of that stage of sleep. Even though we tend to think of sleep as an inactive state, this is not so; REM sleep, in particular, is actually a time of intense brain activity, with dreaming as one by-product. REM may serve as a kind of restorative function for the brain, particularly when we are very young. (Infants get much more REM sleep than do adults.) The fact that adults with certain brain injuries seem to do fine without much REM sleep raises additional questions about its functions.

The fact is, we don't really know. Moreover, there is a fair amount of controversy about the "meaning" of dreams. Some years ago, Allen Hobson and Robert McCarley came out with a provocative thesis arguing, to oversimplify greatly, that dreams are really nonsensical eruptions from deep within our nervous systems. It is only after the higher centers of the brain try to impose sense and meaning on these eruptions that we begin to see any real pattern or symbolism.

According to this model, attempts to "interpret" dreams are sterile academic exercises. (Even Allen Hobson, however, acknowledges that dreams often do reflect the fears, wishes, daily events and personality of the dreamer in a very general sense.)

On the other hand, the entire psychoanalytic tradition (pioneered by Freud) saw dreams as the "royal road to the unconscious." To Freud, dreams reveal fundamental things about our deepest wishes and fears. In the Freudian view, dreams often reveal terrifying truths about us, and so we suppress the memories of them, leaving them accessible only through hypnosis or psychoanalysis. A simpler explanation is that dreams are simply not imprinted in the long-term memory apparatus of the brain.



A little sharing...to empower ourselves

Please do not worry.
We cannot bring back the past...
The future is yet to come and
many doors may open
that we may think are closed
today.

Help others as much as you can,
but remember they have
the responsibility for their lives.
We cannot control how others
think, feel, or choose to behave.
Empower them with your
respect.

The only reality we have is today.
The only string we can pull is
ours.

Choosing how we act in response
to today's circumstances
is under the control of our string.

We have the power to change the
meaning of our experiences
and what we learn from them.
We are the only ones who decide
what to do with the string...

So don't worry my friend,
everything will be fine.

Anonymous