

Know Thyself, Love Thyself



Be happy alone before pairing up with someone else BY ERIKA GROTTO

Valentine's Day is 24 hours devoted to love. Although the celebrated traditions are generally reserved for couples, everyone deserves to smile on Feb. 14. This Valentine's Day, whether you're coupled or not, don't be afraid to show some love to the lady in the mirror.

Mariah Fenton Gladis, founder and clinical director for the Gestalt Center for Psychotherapy and Training in Malvern, Pa., says a healthy self-relationship is the key to being half of a healthy couple.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

"Every time you criticize yourself, your body takes a hit," Gladis says. "And the accumulation of self-criticism results in very low self-esteem, which translates to, 'I am not worthy of a good healthy partner.'"

Someone with poor self-esteem runs the risk of partnering with the wrong person, and may "tolerate partners who are a match for your negative feelings," she says.

A person's self-relationship provides the foundation for other relationships she has. If that foundation is not healthy, the person's relationships with other people will not be healthy.

COMMUNICATION FOR THE COUPLED

Maintaining a healthy self-relationship is equally as important as obtaining it, and partnerships can suffer if the maintenance is not done. Being in a relationship does not mean a person cannot experience self-growth. Gladis recommends taking your partner along for the ride.

While improvement of one partner's self esteem is likely to improve a relationship, the other partner may sometimes feel left behind, making the relationship suffer. Always include your partner in your self-improvement activities, Gladis says.

"Keeping a partner informed about what you are learning is important," she says. "Constant open communication is critical."

DO I NEED HELP?

Self-improvement doesn't have to begin at rock bottom, though

Gladis says most of her clients start treatment because they have gone through, or are going through, a tough time.

Many times, it takes a nudge from a friend, family member or doctor to seek help in setting one's life back on track, she says.

"Sometimes a person can be the last one to realize their problems long after those around them have been affected by their pattern of unskilled loving and unhealed wounds," says Gladis.

Because deciding whether to get help may be so difficult, Gladis recommends people ask themselves the following questions:

- Am I enjoying my life?
- Does the life I live match the values I hold dear?
- Am I having difficulty sleeping or with eating habits?
- Am I able to manage any addictions?
- Are any childhood wounds impacting my present life?
- Do the people in my life feel well loved by me?
- Do I feel well loved by me?
- Am I alone too much?
- Is my inner life compassionate and emotionally rich and loving?
- Do I consistently give myself positive regard, encouragement and appreciation?

HOW DO I BEGIN?

Formal therapy may be daunting to people who have never considered it, but books can provide valuable insight, as well, Gladis says. She recommends the works of John Gottman and Sue Johnson. Gladis's own book, *Tales of a Wounded Healer*, tells of her own struggles with healing and self-empowerment.

For those who want to try formal therapy, Gladis suggests interviewing a few therapists, and choosing one with whom they feel a personal connection. Or, seek out workshops, and get feedback from people who have attended.

FAST FACT

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