

# THRIVING



## First Step to Change: Accept What IS

Imagine you are standing in front of a full-length mirror. Naked. You have been asked to gaze at yourself for two full minutes.

Now take a quick inventory of the feelings this suggestion aroused. Did you feel curious or afraid? Interested or hesitant? Willing or unwilling? Or did you reject the whole idea as something you would absolutely never do? Imagining the experience gives you an indication of your level of self-acceptance; actually doing it will tell you even more.

Self-acceptance is an action; it is something we do, not just something we feel. To say "I value myself" is an act of self-affirmation that provides a base from which self-esteem develops.

When we practice self-acceptance we don't have to condone or even like everything about ourselves. In fact, it's almost certain that we won't. What it does mean is that we recognize and accept our thoughts, our actions, our emotions, our bodies, our dreams—everything about us—as our own.

"But I don't want to be insecure (or afraid or judgmental or angry or fat or old or alcoholic or any of a dozen other things)," someone might say. "If I accept that about myself, it means I don't want to change. Or I won't change."

The paradox is: without acceptance of what is, it is impossible to change.

When we deny any part of ourselves we name that part alien or outside. To say, "I don't want to be \_\_\_\_\_, therefore I won't accept that I am," is self-rejection, the opposite of self-acceptance. To say, "I don't want to be \_\_\_\_\_, but I am and I'm willing to change," is self-acceptance that gives birth to transformation.

Healing and growth can enter only when awareness and acceptance open the door. According to Nathaniel Branden, author of the classic *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, "Nothing does so much for an individual's self-esteem as becom-

ing aware of and accepting disowned parts of the self."

Here's another exercise: As if it were a sweater or a pair of shoes, try on any emotion that is difficult to face—insecurity, jealousy, anger, fear. Breathe into it, focus on it, feel your feelings. Notice how, as you accept and experience it, the feeling begins to melt away.

**"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."**

—Marianne Williamson

If you are resisting—tightening your muscles, holding your breath—accept your resistance. If you deny the resistance, it will only gain in strength. But, like the feelings themselves, if you embrace the resistance, it will dissipate.

It's not only negative feelings or thoughts we sometimes don't accept; we refuse our positive sides, too. In fact, some of our bright side can seem more frightening than the dark. What a loss to refuse to accept our excitement or joy, our sensuality or our beauty. How sad to be frightened of our brilliance, our ambition or our dreams.

It has been said that the greatest crime we commit against ourselves is not that we deny and disown our shortcomings, but that we deny and disown our greatness.

Self-acceptance keeps us alive. It is the strength that keeps us moving; it is what gives us the courage to finally say "No!" or "Yes!" It is the hand that reaches out for help.

To be self-accepting is to be for yourself, not against yourself. It is the birthright of you as an individual and of every human being. \*

## 10 Tips for Big Talks with Your Children

Our world has grown more complex and the media, including the Internet, has swung wide the doors to information and misinformation. Talking with our children about difficult and often disturbing issues has never been more critical. Following are some tips that may help.

**1. It's never too soon to start.** Kids are hearing about issues at an earlier age. But use age-appropriate terms.

**2. Don't wait for them to ask.** Just because they haven't asked about something doesn't mean they don't want or need information.

**3. Tackle subjects even if you're uncomfortable.** Set aside your own feelings and initiate dialogue.

**4. Be open and encouraging.** Create an environment in which any question can be asked at any time.

**5. Be clear about your values.** Children want and need moral guidelines from their parents.

**6. Don't just talk, listen.** You'll get information about how to approach an issue while building your child's self-esteem.

**7. Be straightforward and honest.** You don't have to give all the details, but you do need to be honest.

**8. Take time, be patient.** Unlike lunch, digesting new information can take time.

**9. Don't wait for the "right time."** Be ready when opportunities arise. Daily life presents many openings for even a short dialogue.

**10. Keep talking.** Small doses of information over a period of time is the best way to have that "big talk." \*

## A Letter From



### Gale Denning-Mailloux, MA

Marriage and Family Therapist  
Director & Supervisor

*It's one of the biggest paradoxes: that accepting yourself as you are—accepting what IS—is a prerequisite to change.*

*As discussed in this issue's page 1 article, self-acceptance doesn't mean you have to condone everything. It doesn't mean you stop striving. But healing and growth can enter only when awareness and acceptance open the door. Read the full article for insights into this sometimes confusing paradox.*

*Perfectionism, the topic of this issue's quiz, is one of the traps that leads to never accepting yourself. It's like a mirage. The closer you think you're getting, the more that elusive "perfection" moves into the distance. And like a mirage, it's not real. There's no there there, as the writer Gertrude Stein said.*

*The page 3 feature article offers some guidelines on excessive drinking and questions that will help you discover if this is a potential problem area for you or perhaps for a loved one.*

*And, finally, a list of 10 tips for having "big talks" with your children about important issues and a look at where resentments come from and how to get rid of them round out this issue.*

*Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. Feel free to ask for more copies and don't hesitate to call if you have any questions or want any more information about any of the articles.*

## Is Perfectionism Holding You Back?

Everybody has some "built-in" perfectionism, especially in our achievement-oriented, competitive culture.

But there's a difference between doing the best job you can or maintaining high standards or working hard to reach your goals. Harmful perfectionism is a long, maddening drive down a never-ending road for flawlessness; it provides no rest stops for mistakes, personal limitations or the changing of minds.

This kind of perfectionism can cause feelings of anxiety, fear, and self-doubt; it can cripple self-esteem, stifle creativity, and put a stumbling block in the way of intimate friendships and love relationships. It can even create or aggravate illnesses such as eating disorders, manic-depressive mood disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and substance abuse.

Take this quiz to discover whether perfectionism is holding you back.



True False

- 1. I never do anything halfway; it's all or nothing for me. Everytime.
- 2. I believe there's a certain way to do things and they should always be done that way.
- 3. I get angry or defensive when I make mistakes. I hate to make them, and I hate to admit them.
- 4. I often procrastinate on starting projects. I seldom meet deadlines. Or if I do, I kill myself meeting them.
- 5. I feel humiliated when things aren't perfect.
- 6. I don't like to admit not knowing how to do something or to being a beginner. If I can't do something well, I won't do it.
- 7. People say I expect too much of myself. Or of them.
- 8. In my family, you could never completely measure up to expectations. There was always something "better."
- 9. I'm hard on myself when I lose, even if it's only a friendly game or contest. I'd just as soon not play.
- 10. I often withdraw from others and from group activities.
- 11. Even when I accomplish something, I feel let down or empty.
- 12. I criticize myself and others excessively.
- 13. If I can't be in control then I won't participate.
- 14. No matter how much I've done, there's always more I could do.
- 15. I don't delegate often and when I do, I always double-check to make sure the job is done right. It never is.
- 16. I believe it is possible to do something perfectly and if I keep at it, I'll get there.
- 17. I don't like to admit not knowing how to do something or to being a beginner. If I can't do something well, I won't do it.

There is a difference between excellence and perfection. Striving to be really good is excellence; trying to be flawless is perfectionism. If you're concerned about your perfectionist behavior, don't hesitate to call. \*

# Drinking More: When Does It Become a Problem?

Office parties, social gatherings, family celebrations. The holidays are often a time of more drinking. More drinking and driving occurs during the holidays than any other time of the year, too. And sometimes people who don't normally drink much may indulge in more than they intended and trouble follows.



It's not true that increased drinking causes alcoholism. Alcoholism is a disease with many "causes." Just because someone drinks more frequently, or consumes more alcohol than they usually do, doesn't mean he or she has become an alcoholic.

But there are warning signs that drinking may be a problem, for example:

- starting to drink earlier in the day
- increased drinking (drinking every day or every few days, or drinking increased quantities)
- continuing to drink when you've "had enough"
- denying you've "had enough"
- urging others to "have one more" when they've said no thanks
- including alcohol in every activity
- always making sure there's "enough" alcohol (buying excess liquor for gatherings)
- refusing to discuss it when anyone expresses concern about their drinking

Alcoholism is a family disease. That means it affects not just the person who drinks, but everyone in the family—they're called co-alcoholics, and they may need help as much as the alcoholic.

Answer the questions to the right to see if you might have a problem with alcohol or to determine if you're affected by the excessive drinking of someone close. If you answered yes to three or more of these questions, you may be affected by someone else's use of alcohol or you may have a problem with excessive drinking yourself.

The most common symptom of alcoholism is denial that there's a problem; the first step in recovery is to admit there might be a problem. If alcohol caused a problem during the holidays and you'd like to talk about it, don't hesitate to call. \*



## Problem with Alcohol Yourself?

1. Do you lose time from work due to your drinking?
2. Is drinking making your home life unhappy?
3. Do you drink because you are shy with other people?
4. Is drinking affecting your reputation?
5. Have you ever felt remorse after drinking?
6. Has drinking gotten you into financial difficulties?
7. Does drinking make you careless of your family's welfare?
8. Has your ambition decreased since drinking?
9. Do you crave a drink at a definite time daily?
10. Do you want a drink the next morning?
11. Does drinking cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
12. Has your efficiency decreased since drinking?
13. Is drinking jeopardizing your job or business?
14. Do you drink to escape from worries or troubles?
15. Do you drink alone?
16. Do you drink to build up your self-confidence?
17. Have you ever been in a hospital on account of drinking?

## Affected by Excessive Drinking of Someone Close?

1. Do you worry about how much someone else drinks?
2. Has someone else's drinking caused you money problems?
3. Do you tell lies to cover up for someone else's drinking?
4. Do you blame the drinker's behavior on his/her friends?
5. Do you feel angry, confused or depressed most of the time?
6. Have you said, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll leave you"?
7. Do you secretly try to smell the drinker's breath?
8. Are holidays and gatherings spoiled because of drinking?
9. Have you been hurt or embarrassed by a drinker's behavior?
10. Do you search for hidden alcohol?
11. Do you often ride with a driver who's been drinking?
12. Have you refused social invitations out of fear or anxiety?
13. Do you sometimes feel like a failure when you think of the lengths you have gone to control the drinker?
14. Do you think that, if the drinker stopped drinking, your other problems would be solved?
15. Do you feel that if the drinker loved you, he or she would stop drinking to please you?
16. Are plans frequently upset, or cancelled, or meals delayed because of the drinker?
17. Are you afraid to upset someone for fear it will set off a drinking bout? \*

# Forgiveness vs. Resentment: An Opportunity for Joy

*"Of all the futile and destructive emotions to which human beings are prey, perhaps the most universal is resentment."* —Theodore Dalrymple

Some people can spend hours dwelling on the wrongs done them, the injustices, the slights, the snubs, insults, indifferences, slurs, and just plain bad treatment. They can think of a particular instance and, sure as Pavlov's dog, up comes the same feeling the original occurrence caused, and they get mad all over again. They hold onto their resentments with the same tenacity that dog's hair might cling to a cashmere sweater.

Resent comes from the French word *sentir*, to feel or experience. To resent something or someone is to feel again the fear, the anger, the hurt, the humiliation, the pain of the original experience—real or imagined.

Carried along with us, this feeling gets packed away in a bag labeled grudge or blame. It's a bag full of judgments where other people are always wrong and at fault, and, after a while, it can be a pretty heavy load.

Resentment eats away at self-esteem and peace of mind. It replaces hope with bitterness and opportunities for growth with stagnation. If a person can blame someone else, then they don't have to take responsibility for themselves.

Of course, we can't always have control over what happened to us, especially if we were children, but we do have control on how we choose to respond to it today, and how we will deal with it.

A life filled with resentments chains the one who would be victim and stifles any change that could make life easier, more productive and joyful. "Resentments," as the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* puts it, "keep us from the sunlight of the spirit."

Getting rid of old resentments isn't as easy as simply saying, "Resentment, be gone." Judgments, the need to be right, not taking responsibility for certain actions or behaviors, a feeling of being special or entitled, vindictiveness or a need for

revenge, a simple (or not so simple) misunderstanding, or an inability to forgive— all these might be in the way of releasing resentments.



Along with causing a "re-feeling" of the original emotion, resentments give a person an opportunity to re-look at the event or situation. Sometimes holding onto a resentment is a way of avoiding pain, and this re-looking can unlock the doors that have held it at bay.

How to deal with old resentments? Write them down; talk about them, not in a blaming way, but with a willingness to see all sides.

Determine what the lessons are, what needs to be let go of, what needs more work. You may begin to see where empathy can create wholeness and where forgiveness can heal. \*

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Here to There:*

*www.bonsallcounseling.com*

760.726.1625

Bonsall, CA 92003

P.O. Box 665

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