

Choosing Mental Wellness: Therapy by Christy Allen

“I don’t need help, it’s not like I’ve ever thought of killing someone”, “I would never talk to a therapist, I’m not crazy”, “Therapy is for people with real problems, I just have the normal problems that everyone deals with”. All of these statements or some variation on them are things that I hear all the time when I talk with people about my profession; psychotherapy. Without turning a friendly conversation into a lecture, I try to educate people on the true nature of mental wellness and the purpose of psychotherapy.

The first thing that is important to identify is: what is our personal definition of happiness, of doing well? For so many we are “doing well” when stress at work is low, our kids are behaving surprisingly well, and we find time to clean the house or grab a drink with friends. Now we are good! Life is full of joy, and fulfillment; but for how long?

Stress at work, misbehaving kids, not enough “me” time, frustrating family relationships, all of these are things are normal and common, they show up in a variety of ways in nearly everyone’s lives. These are the problems that “everyone deals with” so there is no need for therapy, this is manageable, right? Not everyone can have it all under control all of the time, right?

Therapy, in its historical roots, was developed as a method of treating severe mental illnesses, behaviors that science previously could not explain. Over the past couple of decades with major advances in brain processes, and other physiological explanation therapy has also advanced. It is no longer a last-ditch attempt to “fix” the inexplicable, unusual, or dangerous behaviors that medicine could not.

Brain science has enabled major advances in theory, approach, and intervention. It becomes increasingly clear to scientists that a large player in health, wellness, and happiness is the thinking and feeling systems in the body. Science has found direct ties between mental wellness and decreased stress, decreased risk of cancer and heart disease, increased life enjoyment, and increased ability to end the day feeling “good”.

Therapy is a tool. The ability of an individual to manage “normal” problems depends on a person’s ability to manage thinking, feeling, and behavior. A therapist is a person that has been trained to help you to figure out the best strategies and skills to implement in your life to manage thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and as a result, you find yourself a happier and healthier person in every way.

What if after a day of feeling like nothing went your way or feeling like you were everyone else’s punching bag you could go home and fall asleep in the midst of hopeful, motivated, joy filled thoughts. What if? What if you woke up to your alarm and smiled at the thought of your life and the day ahead in place of the familiar feelings of dread and instant exhaustion? What if?

Having been through many of these experiences myself and having been through therapeutic processes, I can personally attest that it is within the realm of possibility to get what you want out of your life. We, mental health clinicians, are in this field because we believe that people who want more or better in their lives can have it. Therapists in our contemporary world are a resource that every person can benefit from interacting with. A prerequisite for therapy is not having large problems that are unmanageable.

A good therapist will help you to find the right balance between work, family, and yourself. They will help you to become empowered in better control of the brain processes that often leave us feeling exhausted, defeated, and hopeless at the end of the day, and you can soon find yourself feeling excited, hopeful, and motivated!

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