

October 2020: Emotions

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As I drove to work today, I was listening to a playlist of music, and thinking about this blog about emotions. With each change of song, I noticed I experienced a different emotion based on the song that was playing. Music has always been one of my favorite ways to cope with emotions. During quarantine, I made a playlist that captured some of the emotions I was experiencing. This particular year has given all of us a playlist of emotions to navigate through.

The one aspect I most love about mindfulness is the concept of not judging our emotions, and looking at our emotions with curiosity instead of judgment. Judging our emotions often only makes us feel worse. Mindfulness teaches us to observe our emotions and label our emotions. Sometimes just labeling the emotions takes some of the power away from the emotion. How often do we as humans experience an emotion, such as sadness for example, and tell ourselves we should not feel that way? Sometimes others tell us not to feel certain emotions.

What if we allowed ourselves to feel whatever it is we are feeling, and just identified that emotion? What if we looked at that emotion with curiosity instead of judgment? What if we noticed where in our body we felt a particular emotion? What if we used self talk and said to ourselves, “ That conversation I just had with that person made me feel really mad. I wonder what about that conversation is making me so mad? “ What if we were able to pause, take a breath, and decide how we want to respond to our emotions.

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” -Victor Frankl

When we take time to stop and breathe, it signals to our brain that we are not in danger and can reduce the symptoms of the fight, flight, freeze response.

I had the privilege of seeing Austin Eubanks speak at a conference a few years ago. Austin Eubanks is a survivor of the Columbine school shootings. At the conference, Austin told his story of being a student at Columbine, losing his best friend, and being shot in the leg. Austin explained that the emotional pain he experienced that day was more difficult than the physical pain of being shot in the leg. Austin told his story of struggling with his emotional health and addiction for years as a result of that experience. My favorite quote from his talk was, “You have to feel it to heal it.” He is right. The only way to work through our emotions and move past them is to acknowledge them instead of trying to ignore them. Sometimes our emotions can even guide us to healthy solutions to our problems.

Sometimes when it comes to our emotions, humans do everything we can do to avoid feeling them. We scroll through our phones for hours, we binge watch tv, play video games, or we use food, alcohol, or substances to avoid our feelings. What if, instead, we got to know them? What can you do this month to become friends with your emotions?