LOOKING AFTER your MENTAL HEALTH

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CHAPTER 1

LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

POSITIVE THINKING

"Reflect upon your present blessings - of which every man has many - not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some."

Charles Dickens

"Life's battles don't always go to the stronger or faster man. But sooner or later the man who wins, is the man who thinks he can."

Vince Lombardi

"Dream as if you'll live forever. Live as if you'll die today."

James Dean

Norman Vincent Peale knew it a half century ago, and wrote about it in "The Power of Positive Thinking", which first appeared in 1952, but research shows that optimists live longer than pessimists - about 19 per cent longer, as a matter of fact. Pessimism can sap our vigour and energy and make you old before your time.

Research also shows that individuals with positive outlooks do better in school, their careers, and personal lives than pessimists.

The fact of the matter is that we are each allotted only a certain number of days on this earth, so you can use time by thinking over all the negative things life throws at you, or you can look at things and make up your mind not to have a bad day.
Have you ever been in the company of someone who is always procrastinating about their life? Have you ever asked someone how they were doing only to have them reply “I’m having such a bad day, I tripped over and stubbed my toe, then I missed my train, I hate it at work, I can’t get on with David”, etc. What do you feel like? My guess is that you really want to make a backward exit from them - fast!

Before you crinkle your brow in disbelief, try the following suggestions. Perhaps they could help you change the way you view your life - so you can make the best of it.

Treat every day as if it were your last. If you had 24 hours to live, how would you spend these hours? At the start of each day make a ranked list of what matters to you most, and the attitudes necessary to accomplish them. Then, let that dictate how you will behave for the day.

Conserve energy. It takes considerably more energy to be mad and upset than it does to be happy. If you find yourself always dragging around consider checking how is your attitude, today. And, as you know, attitude is a choice! No matter what happened to you yesterday, your attitude is your choice today.

• Compose positive notes and put them in places you frequent.
• Set small daily goals and meet them. Perhaps you may feel better achieving these goals and giving structure to your day.
• How about challenging your thoughts. Ask yourself these questions:-
  - How true and reasonable are my thoughts?
  - What proof do I have to support my thinking - is there another possible explanation or conclusion I can draw? If so, what?
  - Do I think worrying about something is necessary to my success?
- Is there someone else I can ask to test the reality of my thinking?
- Does it help - or hurt me - to think this way?
- So, even if I am right, is it something I can deal with?

- If you had a best friend, and she was treating herself this way you wouldn’t berate her for thinking like this. So why treat yourself like this!
- Look for the ‘silver lining’ in life. Psychologists call this ‘reframing’. It’s about learning new ways to look at things. Instead of being discouraged by criticism, look at the positive aspects and consider this useful feedback.
- If you are experiencing trouble with developing a positive attitude, start to practice on what you would say to your best friend if they were having negative thoughts. Begin to practice this and spend energy doing this for yourself.

We all have bad experiences in life - but could you use these to your advantage. Research has shown that when people have been asked about the worst things in their lives - ranging from divorce, death to job loss, it has been found that most people are able to salvage something positive from their most traumatic experiences. Some learn how strong they are, others may learn what wonderful friends and resources they never knew they had. Some thought that their bad experiences made them better able to cope with other problems.

A positive attitude can be contagious, if thinking positively becomes a habit, you will find that the things you say spontaneously will also be positive. There is a saying ‘starve problems, feed opportunities’, so start on a new diet today!

Finally remember, John Lennon’s wonderful phrase. “Life gets in the way of other things you had planned”. This can turn out to be good as well as bad.