

A Time to Play

The holiday season has arrived. Some of you feel elated by that; others feel a deep sense of dread. This time of year can be a stressful time because of added responsibilities for shopping, decorating and getting together with family and friends that you may not often see. Depending on your point of view, these things can excite or stress you. Most of us are already experiencing heightened emotions due to pandemic effects.

What if we all agree to take a step back and focus on what's truly important? Building relationships with those we care for is priority one. The things that last are memories that make us smile.

The intent of the holiday season is to reflect on and celebrate the good. We may have to look a little harder this year, but chances are we all can find things for which to express thankfulness. As you hone in on this list, share it with others and have them do the same with you. In this way, we can shift our focus from being disgruntled to being grateful.

Another way to build relationship and ease anxiety is to simply play. Recreation, like creativity, elevates your self-esteem and life satisfaction. Playing games outdoors, or card and board games indoors is a simple way to have fun and refresh the mind and body. The root word in recreation is create or re-create. Do you need to create something new this holiday season?

Recreation has actual health benefits in addition to being a good way to spend time with others and relive tension. Recreation usually involves laughter, and when you laugh you take in more oxygen, muscles are contracted which stimulates your heart and lungs and the feel-good hormones called endorphins are released. During laughter, your heart rate and blood pressure increase, then relax, leaving you with a greater feeling of calm.

In the long term, recreation and laughter help strengthen your immune system. Functioning under constant, negative stress can cause chemical reactions in your body that eventually lower your immunity to viruses, bacteria and disease. Choosing to focus on positive interactions and outcomes releases neuropeptides that ease stress and diminish the risk of illness. Pain-relieving chemicals are also released in response to exercise, excitement, expressions of love and laughter. There are so many mental and physical health benefits associated with recreation!

In conclusion, I leave you with a verse from the song "Give to Us Laughter" by Walter H. Farquharson. May it help guide your perspective as you navigate this holiday season.

*"Give to us laughter, O Source of our life.
Laughter can banish so much of our strife.
Laughter and love give us wholeness and health.
Laughter and love are the coin of true wealth."*

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