

Healthy Futures

News + Views

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A treat for Halloween!

Be true to your ‘authentic self’

For some, Halloween can be the one time per year to show an aspect of themselves that otherwise remains hidden. For example, someone who is naturally shy and reserved can don a superhero costume and – for one night, at least – express traits of boldness and bravery.

While dressing up and amplifying an out-of-the-ordinary character trait can be harmless fun, Healthy Futures team member Jeanne Phillips advises everyone to become more true to themselves every day of the year, not just Halloween.

She calls it the “authentic self.”

Phillips says finding the authentic self can be especially challenging for those struggling with eating issues. Often those struggling go out of their way to please everyone else, Phillips says. She describes it as someone wearing different hats to accommodate others.



“He or she puts a hat on to match the opinion, or feel special or close to another person,” Phillips says. “What happens with that is, you lose a sense of who you are and who your true authentic self is.”

“Oftentimes what happens is I become a counterpart and not my authentic self. So coming home I really don’t know who I am when I look in the mirror and that really affects one’s self esteem,” she says.

For those not accustomed to being true to the authentic self, Phil-

lips warns that it can be unnerving at first: “One probably will become very uncomfortable. It’s learning how to say no when typically you want to say yes. You’re taking the risk of not being that perfect person,” she says.

Strategies

Phillips says one of the best strategies to being true to the authentic self is slowing down, especially when others make requests of you.

“Give yourself time to think about it – maybe journal about it – and

feel what it feels like to go into your body for the answer instead of the head,” she says. “It’s my belief that the head is full of all sorts of rules and things we learn growing up and influences that we learned growing up. But if I go to my body, my body tells me every single thing I really need.

“So I challenge my irrational beliefs and I go to my body where I find peace in order help find my answers.”

Once you become true to your authentic self, Phillips says, you should expect some changes.

“Some people are going to be pleased with getting to know the authentic Jeanne, some people aren’t going to be so pleased, but that’s really OK because I don’t have to be loved by everybody,” she says. “If I can find self love, that’s good enough for me.

“We have to learn to accept self, and have self love, create healthy boundaries and know our authentic self.”

Ideas for coping with life's big changes

Poets have long used the fall as a metaphor for change. After all, the temperature breaks from hot to cool, the leaves go from green to gold (not so much in the Phoenix area, actually) and the world gets ready for a cold, dark winter (luckily, we dodge that one, too!)

Despite this area lacking colorful leaves drifting from trees, everyone – here and everywhere – must go through life changes. How we adjust and cope with the changes can make a real difference in our happiness.

Healthy Futures team member Dena Wombolt is no stranger to life changes. She's been through several recently, including a pending move, and says one of the best strategies is visualizing the other side of the change in a positive light.

As the “mom” of two energetic standard poodles, Wombolt says when she's feeling overwhelmed, she envisions watching her dogs playing in their new yard once the move is complete.

In fact, her dogs often play a role in her ability to cope with major life changes.

For example, walking her poodles has become a way to maintain balance.

“When I'm out walking my dogs, it's like I can get into a meditative state,” she says. “All my worries of the day are not there, or what I may be stressing about with bills, or



Healthy Futures team member
Dena Wombolt.

just normal, everyday life. None of that is there.

“The only thing I think about is just those dogs and I watch them walk. I see what's out there – the trees, the ground, if there's a pebble I might step on, or a cactus the dogs might walk on – I'm actually free of my thoughts and feelings for 30 to 45 minutes and it is very calming to me,” says Wombolt.

Of course, it's not necessary to adopt a pair of

poodles to reach the same Zen-like state.

Some other suggestions include taking a relaxing bath, deep breathing, getting lost in music or in a book, meditating, going for a walk or going through an orienting exercise (see this page).

“It's all about self-care and making sure you're taking care of yourself. You have to take care of yourself to be happy and to help take care of other

people around you,” she says.

Taking the time for quiet reflection and listening to that inner voice is invaluable.

“I always need to step back and remember to honor my body, to listen to my body,” she says. “My gut will tell me exactly what I need to do. It will be more truthful to me more often than not, more than what my brain is trying to tell me.”

Looking for calm? Try orienting technique

When life gets hectic and overwhelming, a calming exercise called “orienting” can be invaluable. As Healthy Futures team member Kim Lipsman explains, orienting, which is a Somatic Experiencing technique, is designed to help people rebalance and heal.

“Orienting is engaging in the environment with our five senses,” she says. “It works for anyone, even

when you're trying to rebalance into the present.”

To do this, Lipsman suggests noticing where you are in relation to the four corners of the room. Look at the shadows, your distance from each wall and from the ceiling.

Notice the sounds inside the room and any coming from outside the room.

Notice the aroma in your nose and the taste in

your mouth – even if it's none.

Notice what's at your fingertips, even if it's your other hand, or whether it's touching a fabric.

“Notice what's happening with your body system when you engage the environment with your five senses. You're tapping into your parasympathetic nervous system – the one that calms and soothes,” she says.