

Filling Your Cup: Not So Random Kindness

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The holiday season is a roller coaster ride of emotions. We love seeing our extended family and friends. The stress of interacting can be overwhelming. We want to provide nice gifts for those in our inner circles, but the burden of cost weighs on us. The days are shorter, our patient inboxes and schedules are longer. Any experience of trauma or grief creeps its way into our psyche and appears without warning.

Recently, I have had several people share with me challenging experiences, such as loss of a loved one, challenging family member relationships, and the dissolution of a marriage. As I listened to them, I could not help but think how sad I felt for folks feeling such despair during a time when we should feel joyful. My thoughts focused on the value of being kind to everyone.

When we have an interaction with someone that is difficult, such as being criticized, the initial reaction is to return a similar sentiment. I always remember the saying “hurt people hurt people”. In other words, anyone suffering projects that suffering onto others, as misery loves company. However, matching someone else’s energy is not always productive. This is where conflict arises, and can be very difficult to delay our reactions. The ego will direct us to fight back. We lose our grasp on self-control, which results in anger, hurt feelings, and miscommunication.

I find it helpful to listen and then pause. The silence is a blessing sometimes, and we can respond, rather than react. I also have a personal method of stopping the interaction when there is a hint of harsh emotion involved. This also is helpful if a patient has an expectation that isn’t met, for example, when I do not prescribe an antibiotic for a

viral infection. I use this as a time to explore what the root of the emotion is, and I like to identify what I see. I don't like labels, like "angry" or "upset", but, I will acknowledge there is some dissatisfaction with the result and explore what the other person would like to see happen. My intention is to help the other person feel seen and heard. I also can continue to stand my ground on the decision.

It is easy to get pulled into the stress and anxiety others feel. The vortex of negative energy is powerful. However, we are powerful. Our kindness and our compassion empowers us. When we are motivated by kindness, we pause, make a quick mental assessment, and respond. It is similar to an affiliate response when a threat is present. The hopeful outcome is peace and a relief of the various burdens we all carry.