

August 27, 2015

Self-Care is needed in the Midst of Helping Others

Taos News Article

The Taos News has committed to implement a weekly column to help educate our community about emotional healing through grief. People may write questions to Golden Willow Retreat and they will be answered privately to you and possibly as a future article for others. Please list a first name that grants permission for printing.

Dear Ted,

This last week was filled with many deaths within our community and I know many of the people as well as having other losses in my life. I feel overwhelmed, burnt-out and this is only week one. Any suggestions on how to maintain my sanity during a stressful time of trying to help others that are hurting so badly? Thanks, Air Please!

Dear Air,

Wow, it sounds like a little space and air will do you well. It sounds like you were hit with many losses at the same time. A very important rule in being of service is to administer self-care before reaching out to others. This can go against your first impulse, as you may have been trained to attend to others and dismiss your own needs. This can be a conscious or unconscious teaching and modeling that began very early in your life. You may have been taught that you were being disrespectful, defiant, not listening, as a child if you didn't jump to the need of others, especially those in authority. At times you may feel defiant, but often it is that those in authority do get their wants and needs met before your own.

To go against childhood training can be difficult and it is probably one of the reasons that the airlines make sure they make it clear that in the case of an emergency, "Place your own oxygen mask on before you attend to others." Some of the ways your emotional and mental body let you know you may be "burning the candle at both ends" is by having you feel overwhelmed and burnt out. If this is the case, please stop for a second and make sure you are getting what you need before you go out and help others.

I often think about the days I used to take cross-country skiers back country and I always had to make sure all of my equipment was together and my winter gear had me well protected before I attended to my clients. If I was to get hypothermia or some other situation arose, and I was ill-prepared, I could actually become a potential danger to my clients. This same idea correlates to emotional work in which, you want to make sure you have your own supports in place. Are you rested, have you eaten, do you have the professional support, the family support and/or the pastoral support you need?

It is important for you to be conscious of your own personal grief or vicarious grief. When you take care of your own needs, you will be better suited to help others in their time of need.

It is important to be capable of asking for help. You do not have to be a one-person show, share the care with others and allow others to nurture you.

Thank you for the question and I wish you well as a care-giver and a care-receiver.

Until next week, take care.

Golden Willow Retreat is a nonprofit organization focused on emotional healing and recovery from any type of loss. Direct any questions to Ted Wiard, LPCC, CGC, Founder of Golden Willow Retreat at (575) 776-2024 or GWR@newmex.com