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Managing Your Need in Relationships

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As a psychologist, I tend to hear the problem-side of relationships. And what I often hear when I speak with groups like this are comments such as "What do I do? My husband won't listen to me. He's tired of hearing about my problems."

I am not thinking just about husbands and wives: I am thinking about lovers, friends, children, siblings, and parents. I am also thinking about how the effects of post-polio syndrome can upset the balance in these relationships, and everyone has to get in balance again, often creating a new type of relationship.

In fact, one of the issues that we talk about in therapy is how to handle your dependency needs: how to have them and manage them in relationships; how to avoid letting them become a burden to you or to others; and how to avoid predicaments where anyone who says "I'm going to take care of you" gets into your life.

Another kind of relationship in which dependency plays a role that can cause conflict may occur when you are living with or caring for an elderly parent. In one such case, the person who had had polio started developing symptoms of post-polio syndrome as he aged. At the same time, his elderly mother was getting older and becoming more dependent. She began making more demands and did not understand that her child (now an adult) also needed some care. There may be people in similar situations here in this audience. We are all getting to that age where we are becoming caregivers of parents or older relatives. What do you do when all of a sudden your own functioning is being compromised, and yet you are expected to care for someone who does not understand or does not want to understand your new problems? There is no easy solution.

Relationships with children, of course, can be another source of stress. The direction that the stress takes depends in part upon the age of the child; but regardless of age, children — even if they are twenty or thirty

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Expanding Our Energy Spheres and Sources

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Are there days when you want to trade in your body? When I see children running around, I often comment, "I would pay for their energy," and think, "If only I had the energy, I would ..."

I struggle with fatigue, one of the most common characteristics of post-polio syndrome. It has interfered with my physical functioning, relationships, and career — the quality of my life. Although I have an energetic mind, feeling physically exhausted has forced me to make many adjustments in my lifestyle and aspirations.

Dealing with my body's limits has been depressing. When I feel discouraged or like a "victim of my body," I transform these self-defeating attitudes into productive strategies by focusing on what I 'want.' In this case, I want ENERGY — this intangible force allows me to do what I want and live my life in satisfying and fulfilling ways. Yet, unlike gasoline that fuels a car, unfortunately, I cannot purchase it directly.

This dilemma has provoked me to apply my professional skills to my own search for energy. As an employee assistance professional, I use a variety of approaches in coaching others with personal and career concerns. A combination of the following techniques has enhanced my resourcefulness and success in improving my health: Neuro-Linguistic Programming "Well-Formed Outcome" model's logical decision-making framework; Self-Acceptance Training's (SAT) emotional principles; and strategies employed by Masters and Johnson treatment program. They have transformed limiting aspects of myself into productive behaviors and desirable feelings.

These techniques recognize the value of looking at the big picture of life — of taking a holistic view — and searching for energy with the curiosity and imagination of a private detective. When I am distressed because of lacking energy, I assess the various parts of my life

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which provide me focus to take steps to increase my energy.

In this context, I envision the various parts of my life as "energy spheres." Like circles of influence, each part of life offers some potential to provide energy and improve my overall sense of well-being. In other words, each "energy sphere" or circle offers sources of energy.

In the columns below, "Energy Spheres" represents a crucial component of life that contributes to my overall health — where I can find energy. The center column identifies "Desired Outcomes" — what can increase my energy in each area of life. The column of "Energy Sources" cites examples of specific ways I have increased my energy in that part of life.

Each time I choose resources that satisfy my individual needs, I contribute to my overall wellness. For example, I have experienced the benefits of energizing relationships, spiritual connections, and creative expressions. While these experiences may not enable me to fulfill some of my physical desires, like walking a mile — they can give me the mental and emotional energy to express my talents and strengths in non-physical ways.

HOW CAN WE EXPAND OUR ENERGY?

We need to assess the various parts of our lives and identify what we want and need within each area.

A Harvard study that traced graduates for 25 years found that those who wrote down their goals actually achieved and experienced much more than their counterparts who did not use this technique.

I believe we can increase our energy by identifying what we want in each part of our lives, and then by exploring resources that match our needs and approach to wellness. The "Well-Formed Outcome" model outlined below offers a decision-making process that can help us clarify what we want and find realistic ways of getting that.

Decide What You Want: Develop a Well-Formed Outcome

- ◆ *Desired Outcome:* What do you want? Make sure it is within your control and something you can initiate.
- ◆ *Specifics:* Where, when and with whom do you want this outcome?

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Energy Spheres	Desired Outcomes	Energy Sources
Physical Body	energy, vitality, comfort, pleasure	ventilators, bodywork, acupuncture, aquatic exercising
Emotions	awareness, acceptance, compassion healthy forms of expression	psychotherapy, journalling, dreamwork, bodywork
Intellect/Cognitive Mind	clear, rational and congruent thinking; ability to analyze and problem solve	ventilators, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, cognitive therapy, Self-Acceptance Training
Relationships	genuine, nurturing, respectful, loving interactions with others	psychodrama, assertiveness training, psychotherapy, Neuro-Linguistic Programming
Creativity: Self Expression	consistency between our values and the way we express ourselves: our behaviors, communications, choices, decisions, interests, and occupations	movement therapy, guided imagery, music therapy, art therapy
Personal Experiences	finding meaning in our life experiences; intimate connections with others; harmony between our rational and intuitive minds	Self-Acceptance Training, Life Planning Workshop, journalling, psychotherapy
Spirituality/Intuition	serenity; feeling connected with the universe, a spiritual force/being, a higher power, and purpose	meditation, prayer, yoga, aquatic exercising, music therapy

◆ *Evidence:* How will you know when you have your outcome? How will things look, sound, feel to you?

◆ *Benefits:* How will getting what you want benefit you? What will it do for you?

◆ *Ecology:* How will experiencing what you want affect other parts of your life? Are there any parts of your life or people that may be adversely affected? Will there be any losses, negative consequences? Is what you want consistent with what you value in life? Is there any part of you that does not favor what you want? What is the positive intent of this resistance? How can you fulfill this need (i.e., the positive intent of your resistance) in a healthier way that is aligned with your desired outcome? Or, is your resistance a message from your intuition that for some reason your desired outcome is not good for you at this time?

◆ *Obstacles:* What stops you from experiencing what you want already?

◆ *What resources do you already have* to get what you want? What additional resources do you need?

◆ *Action Steps:* What is the first concrete step you will take? When? Where? Is this achievable? What are other options?

(Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a series of models, skills, and techniques that uses the senses and language to enhance a person's abilities to think, communicate, and achieve results. NLP Comprehensive, 1990. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission. For more information on this material, please contact 800/233-1657.)

The chart on the previous page suggests Energy Sources. In looking at your life, from which spheres do you derive the most energy? Which parts are most stressful, draining, or disappointing? These areas may need your attention and benefit from your investing in "energy sources." Which are you interested in exploring?

We need to face *ourselves with awareness, acceptance, and compassion for our strengths and limitations rather than with judgment, self-criticism, and resentment.*

I continue to learn how my emotions and state of mind affect my physical health and energy. Previously, I resented my body and acted as though it was "not good enough." I pushed it to perform beyond its capacity until I could no longer force my body to do what I wanted. Instead, it compelled and humbled me to look at how I was hurting myself when I did not respect its needs for rest, assistance, and nurturance.

I learned I needed to express the feelings — the sadness, anger, and fear that accompanies loss — in constructive ways. This grieving process freed mental and emotional energy, which in turn, has had a ripple effect on my physical energy and relationships. In addition,

when I respect my body's needs, I make healthy choices and conserve my valuable energy.

We need to explore our options with open minds. When we increase our awareness of the obstacles, we can discover possible resources and strategies that work.

When I am lacking energy, I find the Well-Formed Outcome Model useful in helping me discover obstacles. Sometimes, I get stuck because of unresolved feelings; other times, because of some ambivalence about the changes I need to make. Often, when I am not respecting my limits, some part of myself expresses that need by interfering with my experiencing what I want.

Using my resourcefulness to work through such obstacles has enabled me to discover strategies and resources that affect other parts of my life.

We need to commit to our well-being and make conscious choices that match our values and abilities.

I recognize that I choose how I expend my valuable energy. The reality is that life involves limits and I cannot change aspects of my body. I want to respond to this reality in a resourceful, realistic way rather than allowing feelings of helplessness and hopelessness to deplete my energy level. Life Planning Workshops and other resources have enhanced my ability to make daily choices that preserve the energy I value.

We need to support ourselves internally and get appropriate support from others whom we trust, to make this process work.

Learning to accept myself and the effects of having post-polio syndrome has freed me to focus on my strengths, respect my limits, and recapture my resourcefulness and commitment to live life fully.

Seeking support from others confronts my ability to practice the self-acceptance I promote. I value working with competent and ethical professionals who respect my involvement in my healthcare decisions and recognize the connections among my mind, body, and emotions.

Professionals in this panel have offered "What Works" for them. By listening and learning from others, we broaden our perspectives and options. Since 1981, others who attend these international post-polio conferences have continued to display resourcefulness in adding value to the quality of their lives and contributing to our community — living as well as they are able. Their energy strengthens my own efforts to live life fully. I am challenged by the saying, "Living well is the best revenge." □