

Hobbies, Creative Expression Bring about a Healthy Balance in Life

By Alyce Duckworth, LCSW

Maintaining a balance among all aspects of one's life can be the key to living a long, healthy life. Most people have heard the expression, "*All work and no play makes a person dull*"... In fact, it seems that too much or all of anything in life can have drastic impacts. Think about spending all day lounging with no exercise (every day) or all playing and no working. On the opposite extreme, what about spending all day exercising with no relaxing time or all day thinking seriously with no laughter and kicking back? In recent years, our western medical model has been borrowing concepts from other, more holistic models. More Americans are working with homeopaths, naturopaths, and acupuncture providers; techniques that are based on the concept of balance; than ever before.

In my own life, and the lives of the young people and families I am privileged to work with, I consistently attempt to utilize this concept as well. I try to eat fairly healthy most of the time, I try to exercise regularly and focus on my mental, spiritual, and physical health whenever I can. I try to laugh a lot (at least as much as I cry or am faced with "heavy" issues) and I cry when I need to. I try to be there for my friends and family and I try to focus on my own needs too, so that I can be more "there" for the people I care about. I work a lot and I try to play as much as possible. I also have a few hobbies, outlets for creative expression that seem to help keep me balanced and motivated. The benefits of creative hobbies are far reaching and can positively impact mental health and overall balance in life. Creative outlets can:

- Provide excellent outlets for self-expression, "venting" of emotions, and "finding oneself."
- Help a person process and work through difficult times and emotions. Writing and drawing, for example, have both been shown to be highly useful tools for dealing with difficulties.
- Enable a person to grow, and learn more about themselves, their families, and others. Hobbies such as scrap booking provide an opportunity for learning about one's own family and culture while providing a lasting archive of the family's heritage that will live on.
- Enhance relationships and provide opportunities for bonding and socializing with friends, family members, and the surrounding community.
- Broaden our horizons and global awareness. For instance, coin and stamp collecting can help us learn about politics, different cultures, and famous figures. "Antiquing" (collecting antiques) can give us the opportunity to travel to new places, meet new people, and learn new things.

- Assist us in processing grief and loss issues. One of my favorite hobbies is creating what I call memory jewelry. Memory jewelry is made from beads that represent different aspects of a place or a person whom I have lost in my life.
- Bring about balance in multiple dimensions. If your hobby happens to be bird watching and keeping a “life list” of the birds you are able to spot, you will most likely also get exercise and get out into the great outdoors on a regular basis.
- Remind us of our personal strengths and competencies. Hobbies such as beading, scrapbooking, and shadow box art can incorporate symbols of our personal strengths, goals we have reached, or obstacles we have overcome that have made us stronger, better people.

Tips on finding an appropriate hobby or creative outlet follow:

- If you’re having trouble finding something that works for you, don’t give up! Talk to friends or other like-minded individuals and get ideas from them. Walk around a hobby or craft store and see what ideas you come up with...
- Remember that an appropriate hobby or creative outlet should not cause further stress. For instance, if you have perfectionist tendencies and your creation has to be perfect, it may be causing you more harm than good.
- The perfect hobby will fit with your particular lifestyle and will be possible throughout the changing seasons. If you are a parent, you may want to find a like interest with your kids and pursue the same hobbies. Common hobbies bring about bonding time and model relaxation/balance for your kids.
- Think about the kind of person you are...solitary, social, introverted, extroverted? Then think about whether you want to pursue a hobby that fits with your personality or brings you out of your comfort zone. For instance, if you are introverted but would like to become more social, you may want to challenge yourself by looking for a hobby that includes or could include others. For instance, most scrapbook stores offer classes, groups, and socializing/scraping times.
- Similarly, the type of hobby you choose could allow you to spend more quality time with your significant other, or could help you develop separate interests if you already spend a lot of time together.

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