

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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~ May is Mental Health Awareness Month ~

MENTAL HEALTH & EXERCISE

The benefits of exercise are many. Besides being physically fit, exercise benefits a person's mental health. Regular aerobic activity including jogging, biking, swimming, dancing and gardening have proven to increase blood circulation to the brain which helps to alleviate stress and helps with a positive outlook in mood. Our bodies, which include our mind, are gifts from God and exercise helps us take care of them.

Exercise and Depression

- Studies have shown that exercise can treat mild depression just as well as antidepressant medication.
- Exercise promotes many changes in the brain including neural growth and the release of endorphins known as the feel good hormone.
- Those who exercise regularly have a more positive outlook.
- Exercise serves as a distraction to negative thinking.

For many of my clients who struggle with mood, I encourage exercise because of the positive effect. Walking for fifteen to twenty minutes three times a week is beneficial. No time to exercise? Try a simple lifestyle change like parking the car a little further away or using the stairs.

Exercise and Anxiety | Stress

Exercise is a natural and effective anti-anxiety treatment. When stressed or anxious, we tense our muscles without even noticing. It is not uncommon for stress to affect the body physically.

- Exercise can help manage physical



tension and anxiety/stress symptoms better.

- Exercise helps one to stay in the moment and teaches us to be more mindful.
- Breathing is also a component of exercise and focusing our breath helps in being mindful as well. Let your breath set the rhythm for praising God while you exercise. (Psalm 150:6)
- For those who struggle with anxiety, breathing techniques are used often in therapy and have a natural calming effect.
- Anxiety causes the mind to go in many different directions - exercise helps it to stay focused.

Exercise and ADHD

- Regular exercise improves concentration, motivation, memory, and mood.
- Brain chemicals such as dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin all affect

by Kim Pronoitis, MA, LCPC

focus and attention. Exercise naturally boosts these brain chemicals just as medications can.

- Exercising forces a person to stay more focused and on task. When someone struggles with ADHD, thoughts tend to be scattered, and organizational skills and forgetfulness are not uncommon.

Exercise and PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder)

Exercise helps us to become more in tune with our body and how it feels and reacts. With PTSD, our nervous system becomes stuck on the stress like a skipping record.

- Evidence has shown that by paying

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The Life that Could Have Been

Walking Through Miscarriage

■ by Karen Krygsheld, MSW, LCSW

The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalm 34:18



The double pink lines! A positive pregnancy test! Perhaps you've been waiting for this moment or perhaps you're completely surprised. Maybe excitement grows, maybe apprehension. But then it happens...miscarriage.

The Life that Could have Been

What next? Tears. Anger. Disbelief. Each person reacts differently to a miscarriage and the individual situation impacts that. If the pregnancy had been announced, people may say hurtful things, although they intended to be helpful. If the pregnancy had not been announced, the pain may be very silent and lonely. Following a miscarriage it is typical to cycle through different grief processes: denial, sadness or depression, anger, bargaining, and acceptance. These grief processes are not a checklist to be completed. Each day may contain a bit of each, or some weeks may feel swallowed by one feeling more than another. Allow yourself to feel each stage. As days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months, moms should begin to feel more days of "acceptance"-- the days where you feel like yourself and are able to function as you used to be able.

Anticipate Shadow Grief

Even after feeling more yourself again, times of shadow grief will creep up. Shadow grief is the unexpected things that remind you what you have lost. For example: your due date, a family wedding where the baby would have met family, the first Christmas without the baby, the time a friend announces her pregnancy, or the anniversary of your loss. When you're able to anticipate these, ask for support from friends and family. Plan out how you would like to spend the day on your due date or the anniversary of the loss. Others are more than happy to help you in these times—you need not be alone!

Help from Friends and Family

As friends and family, we can take an active role, not just remain side line well-wishers. Grief is a time when mom may not feel like getting up and

doing what she used to do. Here are some ideas to help:

- Offer to bring a meal.
- Help with the older kids.
- Provide practical support at home (cleaning, adjusting things in nursery if requested, etc).
- Ask how she's doing and what she needs from you. Does she want to talk about the baby and her feelings, or a different topic, or remain silent altogether?
- Be bold in mentioning the baby. Talking about the baby will not bring more pain than ignoring what happened.
- Remember your job is not to cheer up mom, simply be present.
- Offer your silence. Grief may be silent, but it does not need to be lonely.
- Remember and mention the shadow grief days (due date, date of loss, holidays).



What About Dad?

Let's not leave dads behind! A dad's grief may be neglected, as family and friends know better how to support mom than dad. Although many dads experience pregnancy in a different manner than moms, who almost immediately feel the symptoms of the life growing inside her, dads still experience grief. Go ahead and give dad permission to express what he has lost. Let him know that you are thinking of him just as

much as mom. Perhaps simply acknowledging he may be feeling pain will be enough to allow him to acknowledge it himself.

No Need to Grieve Alone

Pregnancy and infant loss is a difficult road, but it does not need to be lonely. As parents we can reach out to others, and as friends and family we can use these practical strategies to support the family. Psalm 34:18 tells us that "The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." We—the friends and family—are the instruments he uses to do this as He is the "God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1: 3b-4). ■



Karen Krygsheld is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and sees clients in our Schererville, IN location.

New Staff

Linda Ostlund, MA, LCPC, NCC
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor
New Lenox & Tinley Park, IL locations.



We are pleased to announce that Linda has joined our professional staff. Linda works with individuals, couples, and families. She sees clients as young as age 6.

Unexpected Detours

(I Didn't Sign Up For This)

■ by Matthew Potter, MEd, LCPC



At different times in my life, I have related to characters in the Bible. It is encouraging that God includes stories of people he has used for his purposes, even when they tried to run from unwanted or unexpected 'turns' in their lives. Aaron Sharp has written a book, *I Didn't Sign Up For This: Navigating Life's Detours*, which addresses a subject so many of my clients struggle with. Circumstances in their life they "didn't sign up for". A 'detour' they didn't expect.

Elijah's Detour

The main subject of the book is the prophet Elijah in I Kings 18 and 19. Aaron writes about Elijah's return to the Jewish people under the rule of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. With the prophet Elijah as the 'poster child' for how God works in our lives, the author introduces a simple term, 'detour', to describe how Elijah's life went awry. In his words a detour is 'your life making an unexpected and almost always unwanted turn'. A classic definition of the word is 'taking a long or roundabout route to avoid something'.

Elijah fleeing the city upon learning Queen Jezebel plans to have him captured and murdered is the beginning of his 'detour'. Even though God is ever present with Elijah, Elijah navigates his detour by abandoning God's people, his role with God, and contemplated life itself. From Elijah's perspective God is *unseen and seemingly uninvolved* (I Kings 18:1-4), yet God interacts and directs Elijah through the angel of the Lord (verses 5-9a), dialogues directly with Elijah (verses 9b-14), and then personally commands Elijah (verses 15-18).

Examine Your Expectations During Life's Detours

The book is chock-full of very practical advice, but I want to share the 'guidepost' in chapter 1, "Detours and Unmet Expectations".

Three problems with the formation of our expectations during a 'detour':

1. Our expectations are uninformed because they involve the future.
2. Our expectations are inherently selfish or egocentric in nature and in hoped outcomes.
3. Our expectations become unmet because we have a false perception of who God truly is.

Aaron continues on this point with some popular views of God in relation to meeting our needs.

- God is a slot machine who gives me what I ask for, need.
- God is (only) love so only allows loving things to occur.
- God wants me to be happy.
- God will not give me more than I can bear (alone).
- God wants Christians to be happy and joyful (always).

Aaron reasserts that when we find our journey through life taking a detour we need to check our expectations. When we reframe what the detour truly is, we can begin to accept the new route with all its uncertainty – where it will lead and why God allowed it. With the grounding of faith in God, we will have reassurance that God remains by our side. Elijah's fall from glory to fear when viewed from a perspective of unmet expectations can help explain how fragile we all are in the face of unexpected 'detours'. Some practical advice while on a detour and you continue to have unmet expectations:

1. **Look for God's purpose.** Take time to look for God's purpose in the situation instead of your own best interests. The book cites the blind man in John 9 when Jesus explained the blindness was allowed '...so that the works of God might be displayed in him'. When we minimize the need for an answer to the 'Why' of the detour, we can shift our focus to wondering how God will use our "story" to impact others.
2. **Keep your expectations flexible.** The more firm or rigid your expectations, the harder it becomes to adapt to the actual reality of the situation, especially when we try to predict our own future.

Aaron ends each chapter with various questions for discussion and below is Chapter 1's.

1. Which of your expectations for your life have been unmet?
2. What is the most difficult part of dealing with your unmet expectations?
3. What has dealing with unmet expectations taught you about yourself?
4. What have your unmet expectations taught you about how you view God?

One of my clients has read the book, and commented, "The main thing I took from this book was God's plan vs my plan. Especially today where a lot of people live for themselves and put God on the back burner. The book showed me we are here to put God first and problems occur when we do the opposite. Am I scared, anxious, frustrated and even mad sometimes? Yes. But the book helped me see that through prayer, reading the Bible, attending church, and seeking counseling that I am becoming stronger, more patient, more forgiving and more loving than ever." ■

If you are getting frustrated and need a fresh perspective, Matthew suggests reading *I Didn't Sign Up For This: Navigating Life's Detours* by Aaron Sharp.

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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

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attention to our body and how it feels during exercise, we can help the nervous system become unstuck by learning to have new awareness.

- We cannot change what we are not aware of, therefore being aware of our body's reactions are key and can be empowering as we learn how to cope with PTSD symptoms.

Overall Sense of Well Being

For many years prior to working as a counselor, I was a personal trainer and fitness instructor with a fitness ministry focused on body, mind and spirit. God has created the three to work together as one. The mind is strong, and what we think and tell ourselves motivates us. When engaging in exercise from a healthy perspective, there are no negative effects and the benefits to mind, body and spirit are many:

- More energy and stamina
- More endurance
- Stress reducer
- Mood enhancer
- Calming effect
- Better sleep
- Higher self esteem
- Sharpens thoughts and memory
- Weight control
- Better heart rate

Feeling helpless and don't know where to start? Take baby steps – you don't have to have the all or nothing mindset. It is OK to start at ground zero. Making small goals to start with and accomplishing them will give you confidence. It may help having an exercise buddy or even choosing to exercise at a time of day when you have the most energy. Remember something is better than nothing. If you have physical limitations, check with your doctor before you begin.

Top Down Effect

No time? In our busy world some of us feel exhausted. When tired or stressed, exercise may be the last thing on your mind. However, exercise will actually give you more energy. In working with many busy moms over the years, the topic of selfishness and taking time away from the family would notoriously come up. My answer would always be to remember the top down effect. When you feel good about yourself, everything else falls into place, which allows you to be a better mom, wife, sister, and a more productive human being overall. God calls us to be the best person we can be and taking time to exercise helps us to gain not only physical, but mental strength. ■



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