**Stop and Smell the Roses**

The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) acknowledges the risks we face as trauma workers.  They emphasize the need for, "basic self-care: balancing work, play, and rest. Adequate diet and exercise are essential."  Making a plan for specific self-care routines and rituals is essential, they say, in maintaining meaning and hope in our work and in our life.

I recently asked an acquaintance if he had made a New Years' resolution and he said "I want to tie up some lose ends and generally be more grounded."  That sentiment resonated with me and I told him I would try the same.  The more I considered this I had trouble pinpointing exactly how this might be accomplished until I came across an article by Kristen Race, PhD, who expands on the old adage, "Stop and smell the roses."  It turns out this is more than just good advice but grounded (there's that word again) in neuro-scientific research.

Dr. Race is founder of *Mindful Life*, an initiative whose mission is, "to provide schools, businesses, children and families with brain-based mindfulness tools and strategies to help them become more resilient to the stress in their lives."  She recognizes the need for us as caregivers and providers to adopt practices that help us remain grounded and available to our clients despite the demands on our time and the residual effects that trauma, theirs and our own, may have.  On her blog for *Psychology Today* Dr. Race offers targeted mindfulness exercises to help support this.  She recommends daily use of such practices as a vital life ingredient, "to be the person you want your kids to become...peaceful, kind and happy."  Whether you have kids or just work with them, I challenge each of us to take that advice and begin our own mindfulness practice.

The R.O.S.E. practice emphasizes connection with positive experiences in our daily lives to help keep us from becoming mired in the anxiety and stress that trauma can bring about.

* R - *Recognize* at least four positive daily experiences, EVERY DAY!  Take note of the warm feeling of snuggling your pet. Really see the sun stream through the oaks.  Hear your favorite music all the way to your core.  Taste the chocolate!
* O - *Observe* the feeling you have in your body as you recognize these good times during your day.  Does your heart flutter, your skin tingle, your muscles relax?
* S - *Soak* it in and savor the experience.  Hold your attention to these enjoyable moments a few minutes longer than you normally might in your busy day.
* E - *Engrave* the moment on your whole being by sharing the experience with someone close to you or by writing it down.

Dr. Race says this works because it is a practice in exercising the neural pathways in the brain that process pleasure and optimism.  You may have heard the saying, "neurons that fire together wire together."  The more we practice and use these pathways the stronger they are.  In this way we can more readily benefit from positive experiences and bring this outlook onto the rest of our lives and to our work with clients and their trauma.

Take time to stop and smell the roses. Make time for self-care!

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