

Wake up and smell the roses: Conquer Emotional Numbness

Although I am a gardener and my psychology treatment office is Forest Garden, this article is not about flowers. It's about living life to the fullest and avoiding being stuck in the emotional desert of numbness. I will continue the rose analogy, however, as I discuss this most important topic. Too many people feel like emotional robots these days and are not willing or able to engage in the ups and downs of life. From my school years I remember memorizing a phrase from Shakespeare about how life "creeps in this petty pace from day to day until the last syllable of recorded time." That's what emotional numbness feels like, and my message to you is to avoid this pitfall.

What are the "roses" of emotional expression? Our capacity to feel the total range of emotions is part of our birthright as humans. Experiencing joy in beauty and love, feeling the freedom of the wind as we walk in nature, feeling our bodies move freely in exercise, experiencing spiritual highs, discovering the deeper parts of yourself. I could go on but you understand about the positive parts of this message. Many roses come in intense colors as red for hot anger, but other difficult feelings can be sadness or fear. You'll find that intensively and humanly expressed feelings come and go as the wind blows the clouds through the sky. You can be stuck

Advice Line

by Dr. Betty Phillips



in emotional numbness, but real feelings will dissipate as they are acknowledged and expressed.

What about the "thorns" of emotional numbness? Yes, there is a propensity for us to become fearful of expressing our feelings and become stuck in emotional numbness. Many of us are fearful of confronting our most powerful emotions and retreat into suppression. In times of difficulty or conflict, it's often attractive to deaden our pain by suppressing our feelings. We may feel it's too difficult to deal with volatile emotions, so we try to withdraw, ignore, suppress or stuff our feelings. But the less you feel, the less alive you are. Your feelings connect you to the world around you.

What are common ways of trying to control or avoid uncomfortable emotions through emotional numbing? The obvious symptom of emotional numbing is just trying to shut down and shut out uncomfortable emotions, disconnecting yourself

from whatever you could be feeling in a situation. A related response is to over think situations instead of feeling your emotional reactions, as if you had to choose between thinking and feeling. Another common response is resorting to one overused emotional response in order to avoid discomfort and avoid expressing a wider range of feelings. Some people, for example, use anger to ward off all feelings while other people joke around to cover up insecurities. Perhaps a less obvious response is to avoid feelings by resorting to distractions and momentary pleasures such as overeating, shopping, or Internet surfing. Many people retreat to psychiatric drugs to help them deaden anxiety and depression but also restrict access to pleasure.

If you have been retreating into emotional numbness you will soon find yourself experiencing a myriad of negative stress symptoms such as lack of interest in pleasurable activities, feeling indifferent and disconnected from the world, experiencing withdrawal and avoidance, becoming irritable, anxious and depressed, experiencing fatigue and low energy, insomnia, colds and sickness. Guess what? Emotional numbing doesn't work as a coping device except when you utilize brief periods of withdrawal to gather yourselves together and plan a coping strategy to

deal with a life stress. So emotional numbing will bring you only continued periods of distress instead of any real or lasting relief from your problems. You end up not really knowing yourself. Relationships with others will suffer as you become more emotionally distant.

If you are a person who sometimes suppresses emotions, read this carefully and resolve to change your ways. When you allow yourself to experience your emotions, they will come and go more freely. Even the most difficult or painful feelings can be resolved. If you suppress your emotions frequently to the extent that you have become emotionally numb, there are many self-help books or activities that you can pursue. Any increase in emotional expression will provide immense benefits. If your emotional problems appear too difficult or you find yourself stuck in dysfunctional numbing, an obvious solution is to contact a therapist to will help you work through your feelings and problems gradually and successfully. The moral of the story is, wake up and smell the roses!

Need Advice? Send questions BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. Betty looks forward to hearing from you!

Farms, Food and Fun on Piedmont Farm Tour

Visit local, sustainable farms, meet your local farmer and see where Farm-to-Fork begins. The nationally-recognized Piedmont Farm Tour was called, "something to squawk about" by this month's National Geographic Traveler for good reason. Happening **Saturday and Sunday, April 27-28**, from 1-5 p.m. each day, the tour taps into the region's vibrant local food scene. Over 3,000 people attended last year. This self-guided tour, sponsored by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association and Weaver Street Market, features 39 scenic and sustainable working farms in Orange, Chatham, Alamance, Durham and Person counties.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO:

- See the cute baby farm animals, take a hayride, ride a pony, pick your own strawberries, and learn how they grow the produce you buy at farmers' markets.
- For a truly farm-to-fork experience: Enjoy a lunch of lamb burgers and brats at Captain J.S. Pope Farm or see what they've got cooking at the food-truck farm, Boxcarr Farms. They'll have sausage subs, cheese picnic boxes and lemonade at Chapel Hill Creamery and you can watch the Buffalo roam from the lakeside gazebo while enjoying a delicious bison lunch at Sunset Ridge Buffalo Farm.
- Pet the soft sheep, goats and rabbits and see how their hair is turned into a sweater at Avillion Farms.
- Wander by the flower fields at Wild Hare Farm, Harland's Creek Farm and Perry-winkle Farms.
- Be amazed by the incredible mobile chicken coops at Ever Laughter Farm and

Harland's Creek Farm and gather your own eggs at Fickle Creek Farm.

- Learn how they are growing a new crop of farmers at the PLANT @ Breeze Farm, Transplanting Traditions Community Farm, Celebrity Goat Dairy and the Student Farm at CCCC.
- See for yourself what pastured, grass-fed beef really means at Cane Creek Farm, Braeburn Farm, Walters Unlimited, Captain J.S. Pope Farm and Sunset Farm
- Bring a cooler so you can buy farm-fresh produce, fruits and meats from the farms on the tour and then create your own farm-to-fork feast!

Tour tickets, good for both days, are \$25 per vehicle in advance and \$30 on the tour weekend or you can choose to pay \$10 per farm (available for purchase at all of the farms during the tour). Cycle groups count as one vehicle. Tickets can be purchased online now at www.carolinafarmstewards.org/pft/ or at Weaver Street Market stores closer to the event date.

No pets allowed. The tour is rain or shine. Proceeds from the tour support the work of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association.

This year, the tour once again features special programming for beginning farmers. Local experts will lead two half-day Beginning Farmer VIP tours to select farms. These tours are designed to introduce new and aspiring farmers to sustainable farming. Tickets for this special program, limited to 20 beginning farmers per tour, are \$3. Tickets and more information will be available at www.carolinafarmstewards.org/pft/.

Complete information with interactive maps and driving directions, plus tour tickets: www.carolinafarmstewards.org/pft/.

Shakori Hills alive with grassroots music

The Shakori Hills GrassRoots Festival of Music & Dance will hold its annual spring festival from **Thursday, April 18 to Sunday, April 21**. The festival will feature more than 50 bands and performers on two big outdoor stages, a large Dance Tent, and an intimate Cabaret Tent. The festival is located on 72 beautiful farmland acres at 1439 Henderson Tanyard Road in Silk Hope.

The festival also features local crafts, delicious food, various children's activities, environmental sustainability workshops, and much more in a family-friendly environment.

More info at <http://www.shakorihillsgrassroots.org>, where you can see all the participating performers.

Festival tickets are on sale now, available at www.shakorihillsgrassroots.org/tickets-info. Four-day passes are \$100 in



Ironing Board Sam is one of the many blues performers appearing at Shakori Hills.

advance and \$110 at the gate. Youth 4-day passes are \$55. Kids 12 and under are free. Day passes are \$28 (Thurs), \$38 (Fri), \$48 (Sat), and \$28 (Sun). Youth prices (13-15) are \$14, \$19, \$24, and \$14. Tent camping is \$15 per tent and vehicle camping is \$60 in advance and \$75 at the gate.

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