

ANOTHER VIEW: Thankful Even In Hard Times

By Patricia Costales, LCSW Nov 13, 2020 

Thanksgiving marks the start of the holiday season in the United States, and is a favorite for many. It is a time when loved ones gather together to reflect upon all things for which they are grateful. There is no pressure of holiday gifts; it is a day built on the simple breaking of bread and sharing of blessings and love.

Thanksgiving 2020 will be very different than it has in the past. We are living through an ongoing global pandemic, the highlighting of racial injustices and the most emotional presidential election in modern history. The pandemic alone changes things dramatically. Families are struggling, facing evictions and foreclosures and food insecurity, as parents have lost their jobs. Children are learning remotely, away from the social and academic development from being in school. There are so many loved ones lost to the pandemic, with little opportunity for proper grieving. We are isolated from our loved ones and unable to have the large celebrations that symbolize this holiday. At a time when even a hug can be dangerous, why should we even try to find our gratitude?

We should try to find gratitude because it is actually good for us. As written by Dr. Laurie Santos, cognitive scientist and Psychology Professor at Yale, our brains think they know what makes us happy, but they often lead us down the wrong path to finding peace. We should recognize and address our tribulations, but having gratitude despite those trials is a powerful tool to feeling better. According to Dr. Robert Emmons, professor at UC Davis and leading expert on the science of practicing gratitude, finding gratitude is life changing.

"Gratitude blocks toxic emotions, such as envy, resentment, regret and depression, which can destroy our happiness," Dr. Emmons said.

Highlighting thankfulness and gratitude is important to us because it directly connects to the work we do with our clients at The Guidance Center. Our clients are encouraged to practice gratitude to help them heal from past trauma and cope with ongoing hardships. Gratitude journals, where clients and families write down one thing for which they are thankful every day, are a vital clinical tool against trauma, anxiety and depression. As a daily exercise, it helps clients gain optimism and hope for their lives, even in the darkest of times. In fact, many of our clinicians themselves maintain daily gratitude journals against their own stressors and the emotional challenges of the work they do.

This has been a year that has weighed heavily on all of us. We will undoubtedly miss our loved ones and many of our usual traditions as we enter the holiday season. As we feel and acknowledge those real losses, there are things for which we can be grateful. Rain brought relief to our wildfires. A kitten's purr feels lovely under your hand. A yellow flower bloomed today in your yard and brought a smile to your face. Your children are safe. Gratitude.

In the name of healing, we at the Guidance Center are dedicating this month to giving thanks. Despite these challenging times, we appreciate so many people for all they do for our agency and the clients and families we serve. We are launching a series called, "Thankful for You" featuring blog posts that focus on thankfulness and gratitude. As we give thanks, we hope all our spirits are lifted.

Patricia Costales, LCSW, is the CEO at The Guidance Center.