



# Relationships *The Adlerian Team*

## Improving our emotional environment

By Susan Prosser

Last month I wrote a letter to the Editor at The Ottawa Citizen about my experience in St. John's Newfoundland and how the difference in the emotional environment there made a marked difference in how I felt emotionally. People there were consistently kind, friendly and respectful. It occurred to me that we could all use a little help in changing the emotional environment within our homes, places of work and in our community.

### Toxic Environments

Recently I read an article about the interaction between couples and the irritations that develop as a result of annoying habits that persist. The researcher likened the process to the allergic process. When a toxin is introduced into the body there may be a mild allergic reaction but if the exposure is repeated we develop a full-blown allergy. When we are irritated we can often soothe ourselves and get past it, but if the source of the irritation persists, we can grow increasingly impatient and upset. This creates a toxic environment for ourselves and everyone around us.

Many of us are moving about our lives in this toxic way and consequently we are tired, stressed and anxious. We know the pace is getting faster and faster and yet we are more and more driven to complete all the tasks on our lists before we can truly relax. We also know that the list never ends. We can find ourselves preoccupied and less aware of how our mood affects our well-being and the well-being of those around us.

In St. John's I was immediately struck by the slower pace. Cars would stop to let me walk across the street when there was no traffic. People took the time to help me. Everyone we met was kind and patient. I found myself relaxing, even though I was in a strange city with a deadline to meet, simply because of the way I was being treated.

There is so much we can do to change the emotional environment in Ottawa. Yes, we are busy and we have many important responsibilities which prevail upon us but, it doesn't take much time or energy to change the toxicity of our interactions with others. In fact, we create energy when we improve our inner world and when we make contributions to those around us.

### Creating Healthy Emotional Environments

Energy is contagious. By changing our internal environment we have the power to make a difference in other's lives. When we can choose to emit positive energy we can actually change the emotional climate in a room, in a meeting, and in our relationships. It comes down to making some decisions about how we want to live our lives. We need to have a conscious intention to improve the way we feel. Being stressed and impatient has long-lasting effects on your body, including your brain. Depending on the level of stress we sustain, our bodies can over-secrete stress hormones that actually do damage to our system. Is it worth it?

Of course, slowing down the pace is one answer. Since that doesn't seem to work for very long for many of us, we need to find a way of slowing down our internal responses to the demands. This involves acceptance, gratitude, compassion, patience and laughter. When we relate to others from these perspectives our world begins to change.

Acceptance: Think of getting on a bus after a long day. All you want to do is get home and relax. There are four little kids running around and shouting and driving you crazy. When you can't stand it anymore you approach the father who is sitting there and doing nothing about his children. You are irritated and it shows when you ask him to get control over his children. Then he looks at you with tired eyes and apologizes to you, explaining that his wife is seriously ill and they are returning home from the hospital. Your attitude quickly changes from one of irritation and impatience to acceptance.

Gratitude: You may even find that once you have arrived at acceptance that your thoughts turn to your own family and you feel a sense of gratitude that they are alive and well. Gratitude is a powerful emotion. It moves us deeply and in fact generates an ability to express love and to receive love.

Compassion: Once we are in the frame of mind where we are aware of the father's reality and accept the behaviors that were so irritating, and we mix that with our own gratitude for our own lives, we can actually start to feel something deeper for the father and his children – and that is compassion. We can let ourselves care for these strangers and perhaps even want to help them in some small way.

Laughter: When all of this happens, not only will we be more open and loving, but we will find our hearts feeling lighter and our minds being clearer – guaranteed! This frees us up to use our humour and creativity and the result is more fun in life.

I hope you will be inspired to focus on your own heart and mind in a way that will bring more joy into your life so that you can generate more joy for those who cross your path. Instead of creating 'allergic' reactions with those in our lives, let's inoculate each other against the stressors!

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