



Your Mental Health



by Nathaniel Branden

Psychological disorders are a major health problem. These disorders far surpass any group of physical diseases (such as heart or cancer) with regard to number of victims, economic costs, and general devastation of lives. More than half of the hospital beds in this country are occupied by the mentally ill. More than half of the physical complaints for which patients consult physicians are judged to be of psychological origin.

The arbitrariness of equating mental health with social adaptability leads to absurdities. Seeking more tenable definitions, different psychologists and psychiatrists have proposed various criteria for judging mental health. The mentally healthy person is said, for example, to have an obstructed capacity for “growth, development, and self-actualization;” to “know who he is,” i.e., to have a firm sense of identity; to have insight into his own motivation; to have a high tolerance for stress; to be “self-accepting;” to be unencumbered by paralyzing conflicts; to have an integrated personality.

Such descriptions may be valid, but they are not definitions of mental health. What must be provided is a fundamental principle of mental health. Such characteristics as the above are effects or consequences. But what is their cause?

In the sphere of physical health and disease, a healthy body is one in which organs function efficiently in maintaining the life of the organism; a diseased body is one in which organs do not. The health or disease of any part of a human body is judged by the standard of how well or poorly it performs in its survival-function. Life is the standard of judgment. No other rational standard is possible. Only the alternative of life or death makes the concept of health or disease meaningful.

Just as medical science evaluates a person's body by the standard of whether or not it is functioning as a man's/woman's life requires, so the science of psychology must employ the same standard in appraising the health

or disease of the mind. The health of mind must be judged by how well that mind performs its biological function.

What is the biological function of mind?—cognition, evaluation, and the regulation of action. The basic function of our consciousness is cognition, i.e. awareness and knowledge of the facts of reality. Since we must act, our survival requires that we apprehend reality, so that we may regulate our behavior accordingly.

The crucial connecting link between cognition and the regulation of action is evaluation. Evaluation is the process of identifying the beneficial or harmful relationship of some aspect of reality to one self. Evaluations underlie and generate desires, emotions, and goals. Our judgments of what is for us or against us determine the ends we set for ourselves as well as the means by which we seek to achieve them.

If our values and goals are in conflict with the facts of reality and with our own needs, then we unwittingly endan-

ger ourselves. Thus, our survival and well-being requires the evaluative function of consciousness be ruled by the cognitive function, so that our values and goals are chosen in the full context of our knowledge and understanding.

Our mental processes may be directed by the goal of awareness. Or they may be ruled by goals that entail reality-avoidance operations. This is the alternative at the root of the issue of mental health. If no such alternative in the operation of mind were possible, no such question as a mind's health or disease could arise. Mental health is the unobstructed capacity for reality-bound cognitive functioning—and the exercise of this capacity. Mental illness is the sustained impairment of this capacity. PE

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ACTION: Set realistic goals that do not conflict with reality.



Finding Balance



by Patti Hathaway

IN 1973, PEOPLE had 26 hours of leisure time each week. Today, we average only 16 hours of leisure time. Half of the families with small children have both parents working, and there is a growing number of single parent families. Stress in the home and workplace is becoming a growing concern. How can we maintain balance when there is less time to do all the things that are demanded of us? Here are four ideas:

1. **Set goals with significant others.** Creating a “Mission Statement” as a couple or family can create more commitment to our families and become the basis for making decisions and setting priorities. Develop a “Goal Book” to help you visualize your goals and dreams.

2. **Treat others the way they want to be treated.** Since some significant others have a desire to know the details of our whereabouts, a monthly calendar on our refrigerator can be helpful in coordinating work and after-work commitments and babysitting sched-

ules. I advocate scheduling leisure time and “date nights” to make our time as a dual-career couple a priority.

3. **Only one of you.** Recognize that you cannot do it all by yourself. There is only one of you. Just because you can do something, doesn't necessarily mean you must do it. When there is only one of you, I advocate hiring a house cleaning service. If you manage the household, that does not mean that you do all the work.

4. **Personal power.** To avoid burn out, we must have a place where we can “fill up.” I start out each day with meditation and prayer so that my focus is where it should be.

To become balanced, develop ways to rejuvenate yourself and develop your spiritual foundations. You will live a more satisfying and fulfilling life if you know you are here for a higher purpose—not just to satisfy your material urges and compete with others.

Donald and Nancy Tubesing in *Seeking Your Healthy Balance* state “The challenge is, in light of your values and beliefs, to invest yourself in a balance between self-care, other-care, and meaningful work that you believe in and can live with.” PE

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ACTION: Use these four ideas to balance your life.

