

Therapy and Feeling Secure

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I spent many years in therapy, and when I felt a lot more secure, I labelled my therapy a huge success. It was some time after that, in seeing a work counsellor, that I was able to identify and name nine core securities.

Ellis began the process by asking me, “What constitutes security for you?”

1) Knowing How To Handle Difficult Situations Well:

This skill-building took place over a period of decades in my life. One day, I woke up pretty smart. Many situations are resolved through “doing or action,” and this involves respecting both the other person and yourself. It is normal for me to resolve issues at work involving colleagues without the help of management. In one instance, I resolved months of conflict with a fellow team member by finding the right time to have a frank and honest dialogue. That means no “attacking” and no “blaming” either.

Our discussion was private and largely positive. I let my colleague know that I believed our difficulties were caused by *our strengths* being very similar. After our talk, I followed up with the purchase of 10 packages of sugarless gum tied together with colourful ribbons. (Gum chewing was a liking we shared.) Soon after, this former adversary became one of my greatest supports at work.

2) Being Able to Laugh Later, Especially at Myself, When Events in Life Have Been Almost Too Challenging:

In the midst of a crisis, confusion reigns. Sometimes, I am not even certain *what* I think. When asked, I can be blank and silent. It is only with resolution of the crisis that perspective is gained. I have always felt that therapy is very much about perspective; achieving a healthy one. With perspective comes the ability to manage your emotions, your thoughts, and your situation. How does laughter fit into this equation? Whenever I can look back and laugh with heart at a situation, I know my healing about the matter is complete.

3) Knowing Myself, Especially My Vulnerabilities:

In order to get to know yourself, you’ll combine your own insights with the views of others around you. I was a romantic and always believed that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved. Sometimes, though, I suffered tremendously. This left me wondering if my energy in this area was a personality trait or something less complimentary, like madness. How big a risk should you take in love? I recognize that I have taken substantial risks in many areas of my life so my losses have been enormous and my gains have been huge too. Talking about one situation of the heart recently, a friend said, “Remember, I will be there for you whichever way it goes.” I found this remark touching and realized my exterior is very strong and resilient, however, as a client of mine observed, “Inside you, Cheryl, you are a marshmallow.”

4) Being Creative, Dreaming BIG:

In practical terms, I need to worry if factors impact negatively on my confidence. It is impossible to dream BIG and think negative. This does not mean I should determine every detail of every word or action I take, I also need to leave room for intuition and impulse. I keep a “Compliments Journal” to help me focus on the positives about myself but all parts have merit. Remember, the Japanese believe the “unpainted” part of the canvas is no less important than the painted parts. It also needs to be chosen.

“Emotion” is rarely celebrated, especially in mental health. However, emotion is very important to ME. My view is that great things are usually created by the celebration of emotion rather than the presentation of logic.

5) Accepting Others as I Find Them, While Pushing Myself to Reach Excellence:

My experience is that people feel most heard when they know they are not being judged. When it comes to friendship, it can be a tight-rope walk to balance friendship and judgement. I love my friends, which causes me to want to protect them. However, I also recognize that I grew most after falling down several times. Unless a friend’s personal safety is in danger, I don’t *usually* intervene.

In my life, I have chosen a few things I am very interested in and have pursued these interests until I am very versed in them, e.g., writing, mental health and fitness. Recently, I have expanded to include abstract art and mixed media as areas to focus on. I have used materials new for me such as molding clay, acrylic paint,

photography, collage, dried flowers, and broken mirror and glass. Time spent on my art is a genuine break from my career in mental health. I feel it is the kind of distraction and the kind of rest that my thoughts and feelings need.

6) Learning from The Past; Protection From Further Trauma:

Something I do not want to put any more therapy energy into is exploring details of my past. The fact that those in my immediate family do not see things as I do can be crazymaking for me. I now realize that it is very possible for one person to be viewed several ways and for that person to have a different relationship with a number of different people. My mother always told us that, "There is nothing so bad that significant good does not come of it." This summarizes my journey to this point. Often, the worst things I encountered turned out later to be some of the best things that happened to me. As they say, "What doesn't kill you, makes your stronger." Some of us, though, have dealt with the resulting trauma and the horrors of barely surviving. I now have a built-in radar for abusive relationships and situations. My psychiatrist agrees this comes in handy and she also knows the price exacted for these skills.

7) Looking At the Breadth of my Life and Feeling Something Greater Than Happiness... Feeling Contentment:

Despite the horrors and some resulting mistakes, I am proud of my journey and what I have done with my life. I have taken negatives and made positives. Because I learned to forgive myself for my mistakes, I am gracious about other people's errors. So much of my life was a struggle. I don't feel that way now. Now, there are only difficulties. Do I imagine I will completely fail or not have the resources to cope? No.

My day-to-day life contains many happy moments and I have learned that there is something even greater than happiness. There is contentment. Contentment for me means my responsibilities are demanding but they are also interesting, challenging, my boredom level is zero, and I have the supports to be able to meet those demands. To spend each day knowing you are making a difference in the lives of others and watching those individuals evolve and grow, is amazing; to have the caring and love returned, is phenomenal.

8) Knowing With a Little Help, I Can Work Out Anything Life Throws Me:

The day I discovered that counselling was available to me for almost any issue I might name, I was thrilled. When I was in my 20s and had serious problems. I was too embarrassed to seek help. I believed that you had to be weak or even worse, "strange" to turn to a counsellor. At fifty-one, I swear I would see two or three counsellors at once if I could. I am certain my love of counselling has a lot to do with the excellent counsellors I have had like my psychiatrist and my work counsellors. I think it is important to understand that aside from resolving issues, additional support can mean better habits (journaling rather than having a drink), and takes the stress off friends and family so those interactions are more relaxed and fun.

9) Being Grateful:

I mention this last intentionally. I hope it is something you take away. If you were asked what you are grateful for, would your list be long or short? Once I began my list, I realized I couldn't possibly finish it. There is very little I am NOT grateful for. I believe it is important to remember, as the Chinese do, that crisis equals opportunity.

Some of my worst moments and situations have been instrumental in formulating the reach and depth of my understanding and empathy for others. And that means everything to me.

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