On the Journey

Winter 2009

TOOLS FOR LIVING

from MICHELLE BARONE, MA, MFT
www.michellebarone.net
818-951-7744

Life Goes Better With Friends

Everyone knows that friends make life better, but there is a growing body of evidence that shows people who have good friendships and strong social circles live longer—as well as happier—lives.

In study after study, researchers have found that those who have friends are less likely to become disabled and, if they do suffer a period of disability, more likely to recover. Further, people with fewer friendships are more likely to have a heart attack and to die as a result, while people with more social contacts are less likely to suffer cognitive decline.

The message from all this research: If friends are gifts we give ourselves, it's good to be generous.

Health-wise, friends encourage us to do what's good for us: eat better, drink less, exercise and seek medical care when we need it; friends listen to us when we need to let off steam and cheer us up when we're down. We stress less when we have friends who support us and help us along the way.

Frequently, family and friends are lumped together when people talk about support. However, friends don't usually make the same demands that family members sometimes do. The old saying goes, "We choose our friends, but we're stuck with our family." Granted, we may have a supportive family that we're very happy to be "stuck" with, but friendships allow us to experience ourselves in a new way and grow beyond the patterns and expectations of our family.

While friendships can be passing, we generally hang on to the ones that are meaningful. As we grow older, we may have fewer friends, but our pleasure in them grows. The reason: "People become more selective and get better at knowing the kind of people they like and don't like," says Stanford psychology professor Laura Carstensen. "And they steer away from those they don't care for."

These days, in our mobile, fast-paced culture, it's more difficult to make and maintain social relationships than when folks stayed in one place and had more leisure time. People move across town or across country and jam-pack their lives with schedules that leave no time for finding and nurturing friendships. Consequently, at the end of a too-full day or when a free weekend finally arrives, we may discover ourselves longing for the kind of easy pleasure friendship offers. Without friends, life can get lonely.

If you've moved to a new location, or your friends have drifted away and you need to restock the reservoir, reach out through joining groups and pursuing hobbies and interests where you're likely to find kindred spirits. Extend a hand and an invitation.

Like any other living thing, friendship requires care and feeding:

- **Give your friendships priority,** not just when you're lonely.
- **Make a weekly date.** This can provide the scaffolding for an enduring emotional relationship.
- **Stay in touch** when you can't be together physically: call, write, and send pictures, too.
- **Celebrate occasions together.** Be there for the big events and the small. Create celebrations of your own.
- **Make time for old friends,** even if it might be an inconvenience.

There is wisdom in the simple lines from the childhood song, *Make new friends and keep the old. One is silver, the other gold.* ❊

10 Ways to Start (and Maintain) a Good New Year

The best way to have a good year is by living life fully on a daily basis, and by letting the good days accumulate, one by one. And it doesn't have to be New Year's Day to make the resolution to have a good year. Start anytime. Today, for instance.

1. Take time and slow down. Be mindful of the present moment.

2. Care for your body. Eat well, exercise, treat yourself to loving, nurturing self-care.

3. Spend quality time with family and friends. Communicate, keep in touch. Say "I love you." Tell people you appreciate them.

4. Take time to renew yourself. Take a walk, read a poem or a good book, listen to music. Bring beauty into your life. Retreat from your daily routine.

5. Clean up what needs to be cleaned up. Make amends, fix what's broken, clear away clutter, forgive what needs to be forgiven and let go.

6. Commit to a project you really want to do. Learn something new, or go for what you want. Set achievable goals and work towards them every day.

7. Give yourself to a cause. Volunteer at a nonprofit, a community group, a place of worship, or lend a hand to an individual or family who could use your help.

8. Practice your spirituality. In whatever form you express it, practice daily.

9. Laugh every day.

10. Take time to dream. What will make this a great year? ❊

A Letter From

Michelle Barone, MA, MFT

Enjoy this issue of my newsletter.

My new book, Finding Your Way: Exploring Your Family's Educational Journey, *is now available through lulu.com. You can go directly to lulu.com or access the ordering page on my website: www.michellebarone.net.*

The book is a journey for self and family discovery. Full of thought-provoking questions and exercises designed to increase self-awareness, define beliefs about education and design family goals. You can hear a discussion of the book on my website. Seminar and teleseminar dates for Finding Your Way, *are also available on my website.*

My office news and services: I would like to welcome Laura Rauh, MA, MFT, as my intern. Laura graduated from Pacific Oaks college and brings with her expertise in breastfeeding, attachment parenting, prenatal stress, blended families and parenting. She is mom to five children.

Currently, I work with individuals, couples, families, children and teens. I bring my knowledge of interpersonal neurobiology, mind/body therapy and alternative health/education to my work. I maintain a large referral base of supportive health care providers. I currently serve on the board of the Glendale Area Mental Health Professional Association as the e-list facilitator.

Services Offered

- *Individual, couple, family counseling*
- *Healing grief and loss*
- *Mind/body therapy*
- *Stress management*
- *Alternative education/homeschooling support*
- *Parenting classes and support groups*

Office and phone sessions by appointment.

Please visit my website www.michellebarone.net for listings of groups, classes and speaking engagements.

Treat yourself gently,

Michelle Barone, MA, MFT

How Healthy Is Your Relationship with Money?

Money—the lack of it, the fear of losing it, the dread of not having enough—tops the list of concerns of many people these days. We're more debt-ridden than any generation before. Some of us tie ourselves up with such notions as "Having money and leading a spiritual life are contradictions." We let our feelings of scarcity color our decisions, even if we have plenty of money!

The bottom line is that our unspoken attitudes and ideas about money may be getting in the way of a sense of well being and security in our lives. Take this Thriving *quiz to learn more about your relationship with money.*

True	False	
❍	❍	1. I have no idea where my money goes every month. I just don't think about money.
❍	❍	2. I act as if I have plenty of money, but inside, I'm always worried that I don't have enough, even to meet my monthly bills.
❍	❍	3. I have no idea where I got my attitudes about money.
❍	❍	4. I feel ashamed about having more money than my friends (or less than); if they found out, I'm afraid they wouldn't like me.
❍	❍	5. It seems like I'm always comparing my financial situation with others'; no matter how much I actually have, I always feel like I come up short.
❍	❍	6. I'm embarrassed about the amount of debt I owe; I would never talk about it with any of my friends or acquaintances.
❍	❍	7. No matter how much money I actually have, I'm secretly afraid I will lose everything and become a homeless person.
❍	❍	8. I'm too busy at work to deal with my money. I just don't have the time.
❍	❍	9. I'm clueless about money; I don't even know the right questions to ask. My financial advisor just tells me what to do with my money.
❍	❍	10. I keep having to use a credit card to cover my monthly bills.
❍	❍	11. I worry that I will never be able to make it financially if my spouse leaves me or dies.
❍	❍	12. I'll always have to do without, so I might as well get used to it. I can never really have what I want.
❍	❍	13. My body gets tense when monthly bill-paying time rolls around or when contemplating a large purchase.
❍	❍	14. It's hard to face, or even think about, people to whom I owe money.
❍	❍	15. I use money to punish or reward myself.
❍	❍	16. As a rule, I always buy the most inexpensive item. For example, though I think Ben & Jerry's ice cream tastes the best, I buy the cheapest brand at the drug store. It's frivolous to spend extra money for good taste.
❍	❍	17. Having money means having control.

If you answered true to even five of the above questions, you may want to explore your beliefs around money. By better understanding your attitudes and values toward money, you may be more able to gain control of money instead of it controlling you. Please don't hesitate to call if you would like to discuss your relationship with money.

Used with permission, © 2009 Claire Communications

Holiday Drinking –

When the Party's Over But the Drinking Isn't

The holidays are a time of *More*. More parties, more social gatherings, more celebrations. And more drinking. Many of the usual drinking rules are relaxed during the holiday season – drinking in the daytime for example, and drinking at the workplace where office parties often add alcohol to the mix. More drinking and driving occurs during the holidays than any other time of the year, too. And sometimes people who don't normally drink much may indulge in more than they intended and trouble follows.

> **The most common symptom of alcoholism is denial that there is a problem.**

It's not true that increased drinking causes alcoholism. Alcoholism is a disease with many "causes." Just because someone drinks more frequently, or consumes more alcohol than they usually do, doesn't mean he or she has become an alcoholic. But there are warning signs that drinking may be a problem, for example:

- Starting to drink earlier in the day
- Increased drinking (drinking every day or every few days, or drinking increased quantities)
- Continuing to drink when they've "had enough," denying they've had enough
- Urging others to "have one more" when they've said "no thanks"
- Including alcohol in every activity
- Always making sure there's "enough" alcohol (buying excess liquor for gatherings)
- Refusing to discuss their when anyone expresses concern about it

Alcoholism is a family disease. That means it affects not just the person who drinks, but everyone in the family. They're called co-alcoholics, and they may need help as much as the alcoholic.

The most common symptom of alcoholism is denial that there's a problem; the first step in recovery is to admit there might be a problem. If alcohol caused a problem during the holidays and you'd like to talk about it, don't hesitate to call. ❊

20 questions

to determine if you might have a problem with alcohol.

1. Do you lose time from work due to your drinking?
2. Is drinking making your home life unhappy?
3. Do you drink because you are shy with other people?
4. Is drinking affecting your reputation?
5. Have you ever felt remorse after drinking?
6. Have you gotten into financial difficulties as a result of your drinking?
7. Do you turn to lower companions and an inferior environment when drinking?
8. Does your drinking make you careless of your family's welfare?
9. Has your ambition decreased since drinking?
10. Do you crave a drink at a definite time daily?
11. Do you want a drink the next morning?
12. Does drinking cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
13. Has your efficiency decreased since drinking?
14. Is drinking jeopardizing your job or business?
15. Do you drink to escape from worries or troubles?
16. Do you drink alone?
17. Have you ever had a complete loss of memory as a result of your drinking?
18. Has your physician ever treated you for drinking?
19. Do you drink to build up your self-confidence?
20. Have you ever been in a hospital or institution on account of drinking?

If you answered yes to three or more of these questions, you might have a problem with alcohol.

20 questions

to determine if you're affected by the excessive drinking of someone close.

1. Do you worry about how much someone else drinks?
2. Do you have money problems because of someone else's drinking?
3. Do you tell lies to cover up for someone else's drinking?
4. Do you feel that if the drinker loved you, he or she would stop drinking to please you?
5. Do you blame the drinker's behavior on his or her companions?
6. Are plans frequently upset, or cancelled, or meals delayed because of the drinker?
7. Do you make threats, such as, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll leave you"?
8. Do you secretly try to smell the drinker's breath?
9. Are you afraid to upset someone for fear it will set off a drinking bout?
10. Have you been hurt or embarrassed by a drinker's behavior?
11. Are holidays and gatherings spoiled because of drinking?
12. Have you considered calling the police for help in fear of abuse?
13. Do you search for hidden alcohol?
14. Do you often ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking?
15. Have you refused social invitations out of fear or anxiety?
16. Do you sometimes feel like a failure when you think of the lengths you have gone to control the drinker?
17. Do you think that, if the drinker stopped drinking, your other problems would be solved?
18. Do you ever threaten to hurt yourself to scare the drinker?
19. Do you feel angry, confused or depressed most of the time?
20. Do you feel there is no one who understands your problems?

If you answered yes to three or more of these questions, you may be affected by someone else's use of alcohol.

How to Cope with the Post-Holiday Blues

A trail of brown needles leads out to the curb where the Christmas tree, once fragrant and green, lies wilted and dying. Unplugged are the brightly colored lights and, along with the treasured decorations, boxed up and stored away. Gone too, are family and friends. And where so recently nights were filled with gala social gatherings, the only thing left on many to-do lists is return gifts and mop up.

To top it off, in many parts of the country dreary, gray days lengthen into cold, dark nights.

No wonder so many people find themselves at a loss once the holiday season is over. The Post-Holiday Blues—feelings of sadness, of let-down, of depression—are not at all uncommon this time of year.

As the name implies, these blues are seasonal and are likely to disappear as the routine of daily life sets in again and things get back to normal. But the symptoms are real and can make a return to that ordinary rhythm hard to come by.

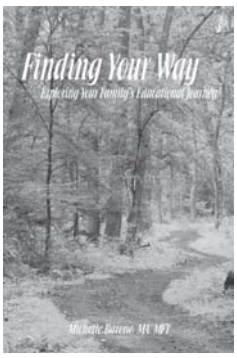
Symptoms of the Post-Holiday Blues can include feelings of fatigue or lethargy, an increased need for sleep, a lack of interest in activities and a sense of loss or sadness. To help get through this time, here are some things you can do:

- **Extend the time of giving** by continuing to be generous. With so many new toys, children can clean out their toy boxes and closets and give to a charity or church those which they no longer use or want. Adults can do the same with clothes, household items or their own "toys."

- **Recount the good times** by writing thank you notes. Handwritten notes acknowledging the gift of time shared can be meaningful too—for the writer as well as the recipient.
- **Be creative.** Instead of putting this year's holiday pictures away in a drawer along with all those other photos of years gone by, set aside the time to put them in a holiday scrapbook. Make it a family project.
- **When the weather permits, take walks outside.** When the weather doesn't cooperate, exercise inside. Put on some music and dance.
- **Every day schedule in a pleasant activity for yourself.** Even if it's only a hot bath or a half-hour with a favorite book.
- **Bring beauty into your home and your life.** Taking down the holiday decorations can make a place feel dull and empty. Fill it up again with art, candles, flowers, bowls of fruit.
- **Plan a trip or a project.** Working on something and making plans gives you something to look forward to.
- **Volunteer for activities** through one of your favorite organizations.
- **Recognize that this time and these feelings too shall pass,** as the night to day and winter to spring. However, feelings beyond "the blues" or feelings that are more debilitating, or that extend much beyond the post-holidays, may signal depression. Seek help when you need it. Remember, you don't have to do it alone. ✻

Michelle Barone, MA MFT
Sunland, CA

Phone: 818-951-7744
Website: www.michellebarone.net
E-mail: Michelle@michellebarone.net



Michelle's new book, *Finding Your Way: Exploring Your Family's Educational Journey*, is now available through lulu.com. You can go directly to lulu.com or access the ordering page on my website: www.michellebarone.net.