



ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

MELISSA YOUNG, EAP COUNSELOR



With the New Year here, many of us hold the tradition of making New Year's resolutions. This age-old practice is often meant as a way to honor and acknowledge new beginnings, second chances and hope for change. I believe these intentions encompass the New Year's resolutions tradition at its best. Unfortunately, though, for most of us change is a slow, frustrating and unglamorous process.

Additionally, when the resolutions don't "stick" people often feel as though they have failed, experience disappointment and self-doubt. In turn, many individuals feel less likely to attempt the desired change again. I imagine that when people, myself included, do fall short at their efforts at change could offer themselves compassion and forgiveness, we would be better positioned to understand what went right and what went wrong, seeing the attempts as a learning process versus an indictment of who we are or aren't.

As a matter of fact there are a number of models of change that exist in the world of Psychology. Most of which include stages and considerable time as well as trial and error before a desired change is sustainable. One model I find useful is called The Transtheoretical Model developed by Prochaska and Di Clemente. This model includes six stages, which are as follows:

• **PRECONTEMPLATION** - In this stage, people don't intend to take action toward the desired change in the near future. Individuals often do not see the advantages of changing the behavior or see it as problematic.

• **CONTEMPLATION** - Here people begin to recognize the behavior is problematic, weighing the pros and cons of changing it and think about taking concrete steps within the next six months to change the behavior.

• **PREPARATION** - During this stage individuals are ready to take some action to change the unwanted behavior within the next 30 days. People begin to believe that a change in the behavior will lead them to a healthier and happier lifestyle.

• **ACTION** - At this point in the process, people take the actual steps toward stopping the behavior

and adding more desired ones in its place for at least a six-month period.

• **MAINTENANCE** - People have maintained the desired change for more than six months and work toward actively preventing relapse.

• **TERMINATION** - At this stage in the model, people have no desire to return to the unwanted behavior and do not fear relapse. This stage often is not reached, and folks continue to work toward maintenance of preferred new behaviors and not lose sight of the real possibility for us all that relapse is frequently a part of the change process.

As the model indicates, change takes time, preparation and lots of practice. If I can add a seventh stage I'd say forgiveness is key to any real change. We are here for you at the EAP should you decide you need us to help support you and the changes you may wish to make in 2019. Happy New Years to you and yours!

EAP MISSION Saint Alphonus Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a voluntary, confidential counseling service that assists employees and their families with issues that affect their quality of life at home and work.



AVOIDING THE JANUARY SLUMP

Keeping Your Relationship Happy and Healthy after the Holidays

BY SUSAN MURPHY, EAP COUNSELOR

The holidays hold some of our best memories—it’s a time for sharing with others (and remembering that many have less than we do), the social scene is generally chocked full of activities that only happen this time of year (caroling/concerts, office parties, watching old holiday movies together), and enjoying special time with family and friends that we may not normally set aside time for during the year. It is the most wonderful time of the year, right?

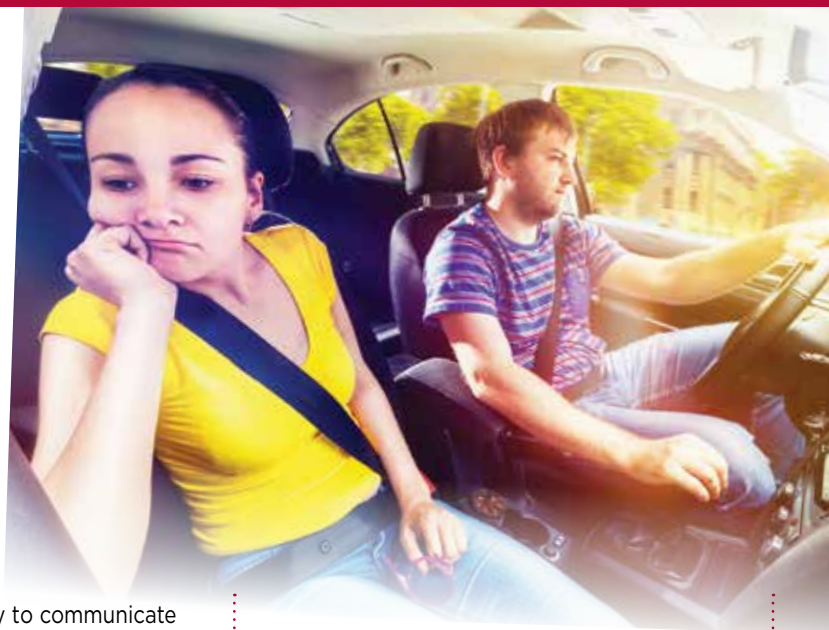
Yes, and no. It can be a difficult time for many couples who may painfully stick it out through the holidays partly in the belief that the positive experience of joy and good intention will take care of the unhappy state of their marriage. They may maintain a focus on the fun, and avoid their problems, as if the issues will just melt like the snow in the spring. Of course, this “head in the sand” approach is merely a temporary refuge from facing the reality that their marriage/relationship has been going south for some time.

It’s safe to stress that the holidays bring up a myriad of issues. All too often, by the time we’re able to really enjoy ourselves, we’re exhausted, resentful, and disappointed. Moreover, unrealistic expectations set the stage for couples to experience tension, tempers to spew, and for families to fight. Relationships take a battering—especially when exposed to various family dynamics, unfamiliar cultural traditions, financial concerns, and trying to “make everyone happy” by *going along for the sake of getting along*.

All couples have issues. The key to a healthy, happy relationship lies in the ability to communicate honestly and openly—to be authentic—to be an attentive listener—and being willing to be accountable toward compromise and personal change. But between balancing work and home schedules, raising a family, and carving out a necessary “time for me”, makes it difficult to stay connected as a couple. Truth be told, problems are rarely resolved without addressing them.

Here are a few suggestions to consider should you and your spouse find yourselves in the “January Slump”—whether on the rocky road contemplating divorce, feeling bored, blue and insignificant, or hoping to reconnect in your relationship in a new way:

- **Create goals that chart out new experiences that you want to learn or experience together:** Taking a cooking class or plan a DIY project at home. Research shows that sharing hobbies and activities makes for happier couples.
- **Nurture your friendship:** Intentionally make it a priority to connect daily in conversation, affection, or setting a specific time aside after



the kids are in bed to talk about “un-family” and “un-work” topics.

- **Be authentic:** Think about the things you used to enjoy doing. Couples often struggle to maintain their individual identities by getting lost in their marriage. So make a list of your needs and choose one to re-activate or start a new one.
- **Re-examine your needs and wants as a couple:** You probably don’t have the same goals today that you shared when you first got together. In fact, a healthier you says that things have changed—you may have a family, you may work in a completely different field, or your plans for the future may be poles apart from what you originally wanted. Discuss what is working, what is missing and what might be new and exciting in your relationship.
- **Consider marital/couple counseling:** Remember all couples have issues, and yours is no different. A little jump-start may be all you need to get out of the post-holiday slump and back on track in your relationship!

STUFFED MUSHROOMS

BY GINNY BAYUK, BILLING AND REPORTING SPECIALIST



INGREDIENTS

- 24 or so large mushroom caps
- 1/4 cup chopped green onions
- 1/4 cup finely chopped pecans
- 1/4 cup chopped crisp bacon
- 1/4 cup feta cheese
- 1 wedge parmesan cheese
- 1 8 oz. cream cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

Clean out mushrooms. Mix all ingredients together. Bake at 400°, 10-12 minutes, until cheese is melted. Serve warm.



SIGNS YOU MAY BE DEALING WITH A NARCISSIST

BY JARED BELSHER, EAP COUNSELOR

The term narcissist is often used when describing somebody who is selfish, conceited, or seems to only think of themselves.

People might even be tempted to describe someone who constantly takes selfies or who brags about their accomplishments as a narcissist. However, using the term narcissist to describe common and often harmless selfish traits and behaviors trivializes a serious clinical disorder. Someone with narcissistic personality disorder can cause substantial emotional damage to those they interact with. Because of how much damage they can cause others, it's important to be able to identify the signs of a narcissist.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* describes narcissistic personality disorder as a "pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy and behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy" that includes at least five of the following nine personality traits: Grandiose sense of self-importance, preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success or beauty, believes that he or she is "special" and can only be understood by other high-status people, requires excessive admiration, has a sense of entitlement, exploits others for personal gain, does not have empathy for others, is often envious of others or thinks others are envious of them, and shows arrogant behaviors or attitudes. Narcissists can be very charming and outgoing but their excessive self-focus eventually becomes too much for the people around them to handle.

It is important to keep in mind that narcissism lies on a spectrum from mild to severe and only those who lie on the severe side of the narcissistic spectrum will be diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder. Also, just because someone has a few narcissistic traits doesn't mean they are a narcissist. A little bit of narcissism can be good for us but if someone has many narcissistic traits it will usually have a negative impact on their life and those around them.

To figure out if someone you know might be a narcissist, it is helpful to know what types of traits



and behaviors to look for. Some common narcissistic traits and behaviors are listed below:

Never apologizes when they make a mistake or hurt someone's feelings. A narcissist might say "I'm sorry you feel that way" and "I'm sorry you're so angry" but these are not apologies for their behavior.

Does not take responsibility for their actions and blames others instead. A narcissist will blame others even when it's something they caused. A narcissist might say, "I wouldn't have punched the wall if you hadn't have made me so angry."

Unable to empathize with others. The narcissist is unable to see things from another person's perspective or know what the other person is feeling.

"Gaslights" others. Gaslighting is a form of manipulation where the narcissist makes a person doubt their sense of reality by telling them they are remembering things incorrectly, such as what they said to the narcissist in an argument. The

narcissist will change facts from the past and make a person question their memory. Anger and intimidation from the narcissist can occur if the person doesn't accept their false version of reality.

Sensitive to even the slightest criticism. Because they have a fragile self-esteem, narcissists can't handle any form of criticism and may lash out in anger or sulk into a depression if criticized.

Never feels remorseful or guilty.

Project what they do onto others. Projection is a defense mechanism whereby the narcissist denies something they do and attributes it to others. For example, a narcissist might tell his partner that she is being selfish when in fact he is being selfish.

Twists your words. For example, if you tell a narcissist that you need his help with the kids more often, he might tell you that he doesn't appreciate you calling him a terrible father.

Brag or boasts often. The narcissist will often mention the important people they know or the important things they have done in their life.

Refocusing the topic of conversation and going off on tangents. In order to avoid talking about a topic, a narcissist will not answer a question and instead go off on a tangent about a different topic.

"Burns bridges" with others. Because of their self-focus and selfish behaviors, a narcissist will have a hard time keeping friends and will often "burn bridges" with friends, family members, and coworkers.

These are just some traits and behaviors to look out for when you think you're dealing with a potential narcissist. Again, keep in mind that just because someone has some of these traits doesn't mean he or she is a narcissist. If you think you may be dealing with a narcissist in your life, it's best to seek counseling to find out how to best deal with him or her.

Interacting with someone who has narcissistic personality traits requires setting firm boundaries to reduce the manipulation that can occur. If you are having difficulty with someone close to you and notice that they have some of the narcissistic traits above, the Saint Alphonsus EAP department has counselors available to help you.



IS IT FEAR OR INTUITION?

*Adapted from article by Homaira Kabir
By Carol Pangburn, EAP Counselor*

We are fascinated by the concept of intuition. It bears a certain mystique to it, a connection to our subconscious stories and our inner knowing. Fear, on the other hand, we know all too well. It is the voice of the inner critic that screams loudly in our ears every time we try and step out of our comfort zone.

As we move into the new year of 2019 and begin to reflect on our life and goals, we may confuse fear and intuition if we're headed for some most important decisions for our lives. We often mistake the voice of fear for the wisdom of intuition and stop ourselves from the very actions that would allow us to rise to our full potential.

Here's guidance on how to tell the difference between fear and intuition:

Build Body Awareness

Intuition is a gentle inkling, a fleeting answer that happens in an instant, according to Malcolm Gladwell in his groundbreaking book, *Blink*. It's easy to ignore, which is why people often fail to recognize it. Fear, on the other hand, is a relentless and loud unease, evolution's way of making sure we stay safe from what may harm us. Except

that in today's world, most of our fears are not real, but psychological.

Integration vs. Catastrophization

Intuition integrates the neural networks from different parts of the brain. In his book, *Brainstorm*, Dr. Dan Siegel talks about these linkages and how they lead to the emergence of an inner wisdom and informed decision-making. Fear does none of that. It activates the amygdala as a neural shortcut that also leads to a racing heart and a catastrophizing mind.

They Emerge in Different Situations

Intuition rarely speaks up for the minor decisions of life, whereas fear can throw a fit whenever we are required to try something new and different. Intuition emerges for the larger decisions of life, when reason does not seem to provide conclusive answers. Nevertheless, fear simply says "no" to all that may potentially harm us, however remote and far-fetched the possibility.

Feel Comfortable, Not Relieved

Intuition points us in a direction that makes us feel comfortable, even if not certain. Fear, on the contrary, dictates a decision that makes us feel relieved, as though we just survived a threat to our very existence. Except that it becomes louder every time and curtails our way of showing up in the world like a shrink-wrap around us.

Befriend Them Both

Intuition is the growth that comes from taking on risks and opportunities and learning from successes and failures. In the coming year see if you can learn to recognize the voice of fear, befriend it and then trust the knowledge of experience, the voice of intuition. Over time, both can learn to cohabitate in peaceful existence.

Saint Alphonsus Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

REGULAR APPOINTMENT HOURS

8:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m., Monday-Friday
(special appointment hours by request)

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