



Belief System (Compassion & Hope)

Belief System: By belief system we mean all aspects of your beliefs that keep you buoyant and hope-filled. **This includes whatever in your life that brings forth more compassion or increases your awareness of the abundance around you.** Is it a specific religion or spiritual tradition? Is it reading certain poets or wisdoms? Is it walking in nature, being around pets, listening to certain music? Is it keeping a "Gratitude Journal"? ***This part of your personal safety net includes all classical spiritual activity and/or that which feeds your soul!***

Pay attention, since **spending time in this fashion on a regular basis will truly enhance all other other parts of your life. What we "feed" our minds, our mouths, our ears, our eyes, and our bodies has an effect.**

Think about what it is that keeps your spirits up - can you get more? What causes you to feel down? Can you diminish this? Help keep the nurturing parts of your Personal Safety Net moving forward. Place information about these beliefs and wishes in a place where you, and those you want to have the information, will be able to access it.

- What practices do you employ or use to keep you grounded and bouyant?
- How do I take care of my mind, mouth, ears, eyes, and body?
- What, if any, is your religious background or affiliation?
- Who are the people who support you?
- What charitable organizations do I love?
- Do I have a preference when it comes to end of life decisions?
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Resources:

10 Things We Can Do to Encourage Nonviolent Communications

1. Spend some time each day quietly reflecting on how we would like to relate to ourselves and others.
2. Remember that all human beings have the same needs.
3. Check our intention to see if we are as interested in others getting their needs met as our own.
4. When asking someone to do something, check first to see if we are making a request of a demand.
5. Instead of saying what we DON'T want someone to do, say what we DO want the person to do.
6. Instead of saying what we want someone to BE, say what action we'd like the person to take that we hope will help the person be that way.
7. Before agreeing or disagreeing with anyone's opinions, try to tune in to what the person is feeling and needing.
8. Instead of saying "No," say what need of ours prevents us from saying "Yes."
9. If we are feeling upset, think about what need of ours is not being met, and what we could do to meet it, instead of thinking about what's wrong with others or ourselves.
10. Instead of praising someone who did something we like, express our gratitude by telling the person what need of ours that action met.

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Forgiveness

Maybe it's time to give yourself one of the most important gifts - the gift of forgiveness!

Here's some useful information from a variety of sources, as well as a plan of action -courtesy of PSN and one of the leaders in the field, Robert Caldwell, M. Div., CPC, LPC, who for more than twenty-five years has practiced individual, group, and couple psychotherapy in Bethesda, MD and Washington, DC. He has also been president of the Maryland Mental Health Counselors Association.



[1]As we live, we accumulate experiences - some leave permanent wounds and handicaps. We store many of these as resentments and develop a repertory of coping programs: going numb, denying, forgetting, dissociating, or getting even: overtly by direct action, or covertly by fantasy reprisals called resentments.

All of these defenses enable us to avoid forgiveness. According to Dr. Caldwell, "forgiveness is hard to do and hard to sustain. To a considerable degree **we take an easier path: we live by the energy of our resentments and the power we gain by refusing to forgive.**"

Sometimes, after an injury to our psyche there is a period--from a few days to beyond this lifetime--in which we don't forgive, because we are neither able nor ready. We feel hurt, confused and smarting from being hurt. **We don't know what will happen next or exactly what we should do.**

Instead of stepping up to a course of action, we give puffed-up pleasure to our egos, making ourselves the "good guy" even at the cost (alienation) of assigning the 'bad guy' role to the other person." **There is a bonus for self-righteousness -- we ignore flaws in ourselves,**" according to Caldwell.

"We save ourselves from facing our vulnerabilities . . . maintaining a kind of tense, mechanical balance--formalistic and non-empathic. For many, this is as close as we come to keeping an inner and outer peace."



Our refusal to forgive becomes a part of our self-definition. While we become accustomed to a style of not forgiving, thinking it has given us power, we have, in fact, lost a functional awareness that life has any options other than holding on to grievances. When possessed by an incapacity to forgive, we are more alone and alienated from others. **We often continue to work and play with the unforgivable, "but everything in our own lives is diminished in zest and focus and effectiveness."**

Caldwell says, "in refusing to forgive others . . . we "let ourselves off-the-hook by keeping them on it, but we are really failing to forgive ourselves." **What we're really doing is shunning any awareness of our own deficiencies and antisocial behaviors, because we lack the skills and compassion to build self-forgiveness.** "We have trapped ourselves into believing that our unhappiness originates outside ourselves--in what another did to us, rather than within, in our reactions to what was done to us, in our own pain, and rage, and hopelessness."

The beginning of learning to forgive means taking seriously our own experiences of our hurts and our complicity in how we have shaped and experienced life's happenings. **We need to retrain our focus away from what had been done to us by others. What has happened to us, has indeed happened--and the way we see these things, and feel about them, and seek to act about them, the way we mold and hold them is who we are.** "To allow ourselves to experience and acknowledge our pain, as indeed belonging to us, is the beginning of a path of self-awareness that can lead to healthy forgiveness."

Instead of seeing yourself as a victim, try to re-picture yourself as the strong and unthreatened one. It's time to understand that you can protect yourself from hurt, and you have within yourself, the powers of self-healing, and the capacity for honest forgiveness.

Dr. Caldwell says, "when we begin to claim our powers, to shift from a victim stance to being in charge of our own experience, a fundamental movement into strength occurs. . . . **We become aware of how the development of our personal power is what changes our world, and not vice-versa.**"

Take a look at your strength. **Try to combat an attempt to see the world as filled with dualities: either weak and strong, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, lovable and unlovable, winner or loser.** "This leads us to see ourselves as strong as we see others as weak, we are good as we see others as bad. This is the path which sustains not-forgiving, for to forgive would be to weaken ourselves and become vulnerable to others."



[2]Give yourself a "gift" - look at your strength another way!

While it may sound esoteric - try to see all of life's events as fluid possibilities for creativity. Move away from seeing the interactions of your life - not in an "I win" means "you lose" context.

This will help you draw closer to the idea that forgiveness is learning to identify, to empathize with others. "An "us" and "them" approach to relationships simply will never allow us to experience ourselves as forgiving people, says Caldwell."

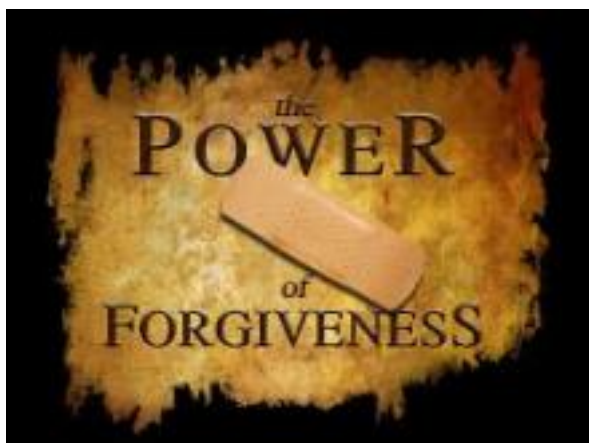
Remember: Acceptance does not imply that we approve of all behaviors either in ourselves or others!

Forgiveness is a life journey. Forgiveness cannot be forced. Forgiveness is part of a life development process that values your courage to be happy and belong creatively to others. It is a move away from valuing being "right" or "getting even."

Forgiveness is a pro-active enterprise. Forgiveness takes great courage and assertiveness, for in forgiving we do not react to what others think or do, but act out of our own desires to make our own world more stable.

Confront selected offenders. If the person is available, and within your orbit of interaction, you may move a great psychic distance toward forgiving them, if you let yourself make known your feelings toward them. Since forgiveness is fundamentally about personal power.

It's tough. But **nothing is more empowering that engaging the one who has hurt you in some sort of acknowledgment of your feeling.** The point is to come out of hiding, flex your body/mind, risk taking your space, claim your right to respect and consideration, and offer to the other an opportunity to exchange feelings and to apologize. This action establishes you in the world; the response you receive is secondary.



[3]Forgiveness is not forgetting. What has happened, happened. It was painful. **Forgiveness has to do with learning not to be controlled by feelings of resentment and revenge.** Our memories contribute to helping us guard against damaging experiences being repeated.

Don't expect perfection. We are ever vulnerable to have old hurts recalled as well as being injured anew. We will sometimes be able to forgive, but you may maintain grudges.

The new possibility is to know you may have the wherewithal to give yourself the option to accept the

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other and interact with the other--to the degree you are able--in spite of being wronged, for the "wrong" does not have a great an emotional hold or power it once had.

Remember, only the strong can forgive, and though none of us reach an ideal strength, all of us can become stronger. Forgiveness and strength always travel together!

Getting Your Survival Kit Ready

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from "12 Essential for a Survival Kit" by Kari Forsee, published in O Magazine

Who knows what winter will bring. In the Northwest, loads of rain, flooding, and possible power outages – we may even have snow, and all the trouble that brings. Around the country citizens will see a variety of weather-related troubles. For instance, the National Weather Service tells us about 800 tornadoes touch down in the United States every year. So if you live in a coastal community, hurricanes, wildfires and floods can be common occurrences.

Every family can prepare for the worst before the electricity goes out, the dog starts barking and the children start crying. The first step? Assemble an emergency supply kit. Ready.gov, a national campaign to help people prepare for emergency situations, and the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) [4] outline 12 essentials you should have on hand:

1. **Water:** The most basic necessity. Store enough water to last for at least **three days**, which equals 1 gallon per person, per day. FEMA suggests stocking up on extra water if you live in a warm climate or have children.
2. **Food:** Keep a three-day supply of nonperishable food on hand. FEMA suggests stocking up on staples and canned goods that don't require refrigeration, cooking or water. A manual can opener is also a must.
3. **Whistle:** A great way to signal for help.
4. **Battery-powered or hand-cranked radio:** The best way to stay informed and track inclement weather. Be sure to buy extra batteries.
5. **Flashlight and extra batteries.**
6. **First aid kit:** Should include sterile gloves, sterile dressings, soap, antibiotic ointment, bandages, eye wash, a thermometer and prescription medications. Ready.gov also recommends over-the-counter pain relievers, anti-diarrheal medication, antacids and laxatives.
7. **Dust mask.**
8. **Hygiene and sanitation supplies:** Moist towelettes, garbage bags, toilet paper and plastic ties can help keep you and your shelter clean.
9. **Wrench or pliers:** You never know when these multipurpose tools will come in handy.
10. **Local maps:** Learn different routes out of town in case some roads are closed because of traffic or others hazards.
11. **Cell phone with chargers:** Keep in contact with loved ones, emergency personnel or rescuers.
12. **Extra clothing:** If you live in a cold climate, FEMA suggests packing jackets, hats, mittens, scarves and one warm blanket or sleeping bag per person.

You never know what Mother Nature has in store for us this time of year so be prepared!



Giving Hope



[5]Hope is the belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life. It is a feeling of what is wanted can be had or that things will turn out for the best. Hope lifts a person up; it makes that person feel that he or she can do what needs to be done in the face of what may be near-insurmountable obstacles.

People endure immense suffering and hardship; unfortunately a person may give up when a word of encouragement is missing – when a word or something to give hope might embolden him or her to not give up. In the extreme case, it could be the difference between giving up and pushing through, surviving or thriving, succumbing or succeeding.

The world is full of examples of those who had hope or were given hope, and from great depths of despair or difficulties emerged and succeeded. A down-on-his-luck actor living at the YMCA in New York in 1912 could have given up hope and the world would never have known Dale Carnegie, author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. When Saul Bellow's life was turned upside down by his wife divorcing him (which he wrote about in his famous *Herzog*), he could have resigned from his life of writing, never fought back and never have claimed his Nobel Prize in literature. And what of the Holocaust survivors who marched out of Europe not knowing a word of English or Hebrew and yet made a successful life in America or Israel – all because they had hope.

So, in this era of a deep economic recession when colleagues, relatives, and friends are being laid off, do not avoid them.

- Reach out to them with words of encouragement and offers to tell others about their great skills.
- Let them know you are part of a team that can provide job leads as well as a variety of assistance while they are looking (research, looking over resumes, help with writing, etc.)
- Encourage them to tell EVERYONE of their need for new employment. Who knows, it just might be the grocer who provides the needed link!
- Often a word of encouragement or some one-on-one time with helps to bring another out of a spell of depression about his job loss.

Being part of a personal safety net team often costs nothing and it can change the life for the better.



What about someone who is going through difficult times: a separation or divorce, a parent with Alzheimer's? If you know about their problems, but they haven't asked for your help, maybe it's time for you to suggest some ways you can be helpful. This is the essence of being part of a Personal Safety Net. Reaching out and offering a word of encouragement and helping with specific tasks not only reminds them of their strengths but also that they are not facing difficulties alone. There is hope and there is a community.

Gestures of hope and support are warmly welcomed and richly rewarded – making their life and yours better. You may later see them happy and successful because you turned their life around through a feeling of hope. Give hope, and the more of it you will have.

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from The Importance and Magic of Hope in Socyberity

Hope - The Inner Fire

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from "Inner Fire, Your Will to Live" by Ernest and Isadora Rosenbaum, Plexus, Austin, Texas 1998

*Look to this day for it is life,
For yesterday is already a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision.
But today, well lived, makes every yesterday
A dream of happiness and every tomorrow, a vision of hope.
- Sanskrit Proverb*

When we look at patients living with an illness or through a serious life change their anxiety about the future is familiar to all of us, but so are their efforts to seek knowledge and to gain control over their lives.

In taking control individuals accept responsibility for their physical and emotional well-being. They come to see that the way in which they portray their actions to others determines how friends, family, and colleagues react to them. This awareness of their own attitude and its importance is often a *wake-up call* leading them to assess their values and to either confirm or change their way of life. For those who nurtured old relationships and developed new ones, each lived life more fully while learning to live with illness. Each of them found hope.

The same opportunity to acknowledge mortality and examine priorities is available to all: both the currently healthy and those with illness. Start by asking, how do I want to live the rest of my life? If you discover behaviors or habits you wish to change, you are free to begin experimenting in that direction. You may start to take risks, open your mind to other modes of thought, take a trip or a class, and make new friends. Anyone who goes through this process will undergo permanent, positive change and will have begun to nurture the will to live.

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Although there's no precise definition of the will to live, the following attitudes and behaviors common to patients observed over many years of practice have been identified:

- They live in the present. They know the past cannot be changed, but they also know they have the capacity to influence the quality of today and tomorrow.
- They accept their new problems and attempt to solve them through introspection, understanding, and sharing.
- They set reasonable, achievable goals.
- They consciously try to downplay negative emotions and to focus on feelings of love and hope.
- They surround themselves with supportive friends and family members.
- They actively search for ways to help others.

As care givers, consider the first five attitudes and behaviors to be essential. Those who practice them are taking responsibility for their illness and ensuring that their needs are met. The sixth represents a principle long recognized as vital to a fulfilling life: Try every day to help someone else! When your own needs are met, you are emotionally free to give to others. You too can reach out, relieve loneliness and give hope.

Of all the ingredients of the will to live, none is more essential than hope. But hope is relative: One person may hope for the fullest possible remaining life; another may hope to live until a special holiday or a family reunion; still another may simply hope to avoid suffering (and believe this is possible.)

Hope may indeed be one of the elements that enables a person to live longer than medically anticipated. However, the opposite is also true. An extreme lack of hope can have the same effect as the phenomenon called *self-willed* death or bone pointing, observed among Australian Aborigines and in other South Pacific cultures. In such cases, a tribal witch doctor casts a spell similar to that observed in Voodoo (in certain African or South American tribes), causing the victim to suffer paralyzing fear, withdraw from society, and die within a short time. Of course, the witch doctor can only be effective if the potential victim believes in the power of the curse. In the same way, a person with an illness can be adversely affected when doctors and nurses project a sense of hopelessness, or when family and friends are unable to hide their fears; just as they can be hope-filled when the medical team's focus is positive and supportive.

Clearly, realistic hope is a life force in and of itself. If you are dealing with a serious illness, you may often feel exhausted, overwhelmed by never-ending problems, ready to give up. Yet, a little hope for a remote chance for survival or a small improvement in your condition can give you the strength to carry on.

*There is no medicine like hope
No incentive so great
And no tonic so powerful as the expectation of something better tomorrow.*

- Orison Swett Marden

In conclusion, the will to live both defies definition and has many definitions. We can only describe common behaviors and attitudes among those who have it, and acknowledge its wondrous power. People who exhibit a strong will to live appear to have strong bonds of friendship and love. They also show a determination to meet misfortune head on to accept what has happened and find a way to cope. Most important, perhaps as a result of the foregoing, people with the will to live are determined to live life to the fullest, be this for one week or a natural life span.

How Old You Feel Depends on Your Age

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from "How Old Do You Feel? It Depends on Your Age" by Sarah Arnquist in the New York Times (June, 2009).

The older people become, the younger they feel and the more likely they are to see "old age" as a time occurring later in life, according to a national survey on aging released on Monday.



“There’s a saying that you’re never too old to feel young, and boy, have older Americans today taken that one to heart,” said Paul Taylor, executive vice president with the Pew Research Center and the survey’s principal author. He said this is the broadest survey the nonpartisan research center has ever done to gauge Americans’ views on aging.

Currently, about 40 million Americans, or one in eight, are 65 and older. By 2050, one in five American will be in that age group. The center surveyed about 3,000 adults 18 and older via land and cellular telephone lines in February and March of this year.

The survey found not just a gap between actual age and the age people say they feel, but also that the gap between reality and perception increases with age.

Most adults over age 50 feel at least 10 years younger than their actual age, the survey found. One-third of those between 65 and 74 said they felt 10 to 19 years younger, and one-sixth of people 75 and older said they felt 20 years younger.

On average, survey respondents said old age begins at 68. But few people over 65 agreed; they said old age begins at 75. Respondents under 30 said 60 marked the beginning of old age.

“Old age is always a bit older than you are,” said Jeffrey Love, research director at AARP.

The researchers also asked young adults what they expect aging to be like and older Americans how it actually is. Younger people tend to think growing old will be worse than the elderly report, the survey team found.

Older adults said they had experienced the negative aspects of aging — including illness, loneliness and financial difficulty — far less often than younger people anticipated. But older participants also said they found less time for family and leisure activities than younger adults expected they would when they reach old age. “Human beings have trouble coming to terms with the unknown,” Mr. Taylor said. “Growing old is a great unknown in the lives of everyone who is not yet old.”

Is It Depression or Just the Blues?

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from “Is It Depression or Just the Blues? A WebMD Medical Reference” by Mary Anne Dunkin (September 2009). Reviewed by [Brunilda Nazario, MD \[6\]](#).

Sooner or later, everyone gets the blues. Feeling sadness, loneliness, or grief when you go through a difficult life experience is part of being human. And most of the time, you can continue to function. You know that in time you will bounce back, and you do.

But what if you don’t bounce back? What if your feelings of sadness linger, are excessive, or interfere with your work, sleep, or recreation? What if you’re feeling fatigue or worthlessness, or experiencing weight changes along with your sadness? You may be experiencing major depression.

Also known as clinical depression, major depressive disorder, or unipolar depression, major depression is a medical condition that exists beyond life’s ordinary ups and downs. Almost 18.8 million American adults experience depression each year, and women are nearly twice as likely as men to develop major depression. People with depression cannot simply “pull themselves together” and get better. Treatment -- consisting of counseling or medications, or both -- can be key to recovery.

Major Depression: What Are the Symptoms?

Depression shows itself differently in different people. *Common depression symptoms are:*



- Depressed mood, sadness, or an “empty” feeling, or appearing sad or tearful to others
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed
- Significant weight loss when not dieting, or significant weight gain (for example, more than 5% of body weight in a month)
- Inability to sleep or excessive sleeping
- Restlessness or irritation (irritable mood may be a symptom in children or adolescents too), or feelings of “dragging”
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating, or indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or specific plan for committing suicide

Depression Treatment: When Should You Get Help?

If you have five or more of these symptoms for most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks, and the symptoms are severe enough to interfere with your daily activities, you may have major depression. It’s important to speak to your doctor about treatments to start helping you feel better.

Kindness Trumps Outrage

A few years ago, reaction to the outrage emanating from the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, became the impetus for the creation of the Patriot Guard Riders. Topeka, Kansas is home to homophobic propagandist [Fred Phelps](#) [7], who gathers church members together at military funerals to harass families for "allowing" their sons and daughters to serve in the United States military.



[8]The [Patriot Guard Riders](#) [9], sympathetic to the families whose loved ones have died in military service, work to help these same families realize that they are not alone. **What makes this group unique and powerful is that they are everyday motorcyclists who have taken as their mission to escort fallen soldiers from the airfields to the burial grounds, where they form a protective shield around the bereaved families.** Amazingly, this volunteer group of compassionate motorcyclists has grown to 193,000 in just five years.

The poignant and heart-felt stories written by various Riders - part of a new Ellen Frick documentary, [Patriot Riders](#) [9] - chronicle the emergence of a new kind of kindness and patriotism in America. **As one Patriot Guard Rider says: "you don't have to be religious or be an atheist to be in the PGR. You can be a hawk or a dove. You don't have to be a vet. Heck, you don't even have to ride a motorcycle."**

The Patriot Guard Riders tell us of a solemn journey astride thundering motorcycles to the sometimes silent, sometimes turbulent funerals of young soldiers killed in action. Their journey tell the story of a tragic truth: **Soldiers are dying and families are suffering, and an unlikely but powerful bond is growing between the riders and the grieving families.**

Patriot Riders is a story about fellowship, about community, about kindness, about veterans, about the

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effects of war on the home front, about riding, about what it means to be an American. And every once in a while, there comes a bitter-sweet story like the one that follows that puts a smile on your face! Their story also prompted the 2006 passage of the [Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act](#) [10], signed by President George W. Bush. The act bans protests within 300 feet of national cemeteries - which numbered 122 when the bill was signed - from an hour before a funeral to an hour after it. Violators face up to a \$100,000 fine and up to a year in prison. This must have annoyed Mr. Phelps!

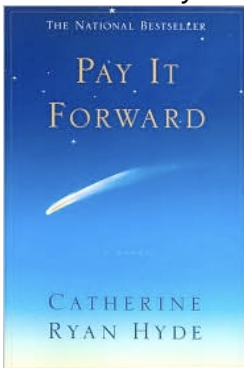


~~Now, if that's not a safety net stretching from here to eternity, we don't know what is! Our PSN hats are off to the bikers of the Patriot Guard Riders!~~ Tom Bellomy, a PGR member, tells us: "My first ride was in Concord, N.C. in 2006. The hearse passed our Guard flag line on the way into the cemetery, but no family cars or Patriot Riders followed. After a delay, the bikes rolled by with very nicely dressed passengers on the back of their bikes. **We later found out that the limo had broken down and the family members exited and asked to be taken the rest of the way on the bikes. After the grave-side service, they asked to be ridden back to the church by those same bikers.** ~~The family said their son must have arranged the break down so they'd have something to laugh and smile about that day."~~

Thanks and Giving - Paying It Forward

Twelve-year-old Trevor McKinney is the son of Arlene, a single mom working two jobs, and Ricky, a deadbeat absentee dad. He does not seem well positioned to revolutionize the world. But when Trevor's social studies teacher, Reuben St. Clair, gives the class an extra-credit assignment, challenging his students to design a plan to change society, Trevor decides to start a goodwill chain.

In the novel *Pay It Forward* by [Catherine Ryan Hyde](#) [11], (and a [movie](#) [12] by the same title),



Trevor does 3 good deeds for others in need. In return, all that Trevor wants is that they pass on the good deed to three other people and keep the cycle going.



Even at an early age, Trevor realizes that one good deed might not seem like much, but if everyone does three good things for someone else, expecting only that they do the same for others, then **the ripples of generosity and kindness could spark us to become better people.**

It's a shame that not everyone has experienced this to the fullest. The idea of an International "[Pay It Forward Day](#) [13]" is about all people, from all walks of life, giving to someone else and making a positive difference. At last count there were more than 28 countries around the world participating in the day.



"Some people were originally quite skeptical of the whole idea: they said that it was good in theory, but not in practice," says Catherine Ryan Hyde, author of the book and generator of the original idea. **"I challenged this point of view, believing that people are genuinely giving by nature, but many get caught up in the hustle and bustle of everyday life."**

Research from all over the world (articulated in [Psychology Today](#) [14] and the book by [Susan Skog](#) [15], "*The Give-Back Solution: Create a Better World with Your Time, Talents and Travel (Whether You Have \$10 or \$10,000)*") speaks to the benefits of doing volunteer work and good deeds - the basic ideas behind "Paying it Forward."

We have proof:

- **Doing good for others can have a powerful, positive effect on the immune system and general health.** Boston College researchers found that pain, depression, and disability in chronic pain patients decreased after volunteering.
- **Contributing towards the greater good improves self-worth and self-esteem.**
- Being generous to others prevents people from becoming isolated, encourages them to meet new people and to step outside of their comfort zones.
- Chronic negativity can be dismantled in the mind as positive energy flows from giving to others - **the neural "glow" from helping others even shows up on MRI scans.**
- **Kindness helps relieve stress**, which is a huge problem in many workplaces.
- "Helping contributes to the maintenance of good health, and it can diminish the effect of diseases and disorders, both serious and minor, psychological and physical." Allan Luks, after surveying 3,296 volunteers.
- **Volunteering eases depression** while helping us reach greater states of happiness and hope, as found by University of Texas and other researchers.
- **Volunteering even helps you live longer**, according to University of California-Los Angeles researchers.
- **Teenagers who get turned on by service learning and volunteer work are much happier and more optimistic. They also get better grades and use drugs less.**





So why do we want to do good for others - 1) besides repaying the many times people have done good and wonderful things for us; and 2) besides the research that shows life will be better and longer?

How about because we want to do good for others as a way to build and appreciate our Personal Safety Nets! Why?

- * To show each other that we care and that there is love, hope and magic all around us.
- * To know that we may be only one person in this world, but to one person, at one time, we are the world.
- * To improve our own health and well-being.
- * To encourage all of us to embrace the incredible power of giving.
- * To make a difference and find our own power through giving.

The Power of Choice, Part 1

The power of choice



[16]Knowing that you have a choice is a powerful feeling. You may not like one of the alternatives, or in some situations, any of the alternatives, but remembering that you can choose is very liberating.

When you forget that there are choices, it's all too easy to feel like a victim of your circumstances. When you're forced into something, you may feel that something is being done to you. Being part of a personal safety net, especially when the team is called into action, will pose many choices. A critical aspect of being able to choose is becoming adept at and saying "no" in various ways and thereby shaping how your "no" may be received. Equally important is being comfortable saying "yes" and able to tailor what your "yes" means to fit your intention.

Many people like to be involved with and helpful to others but find navigating the complexities of interpersonal communication overwhelming—so they remain uninvolved. If this applies to you, we hope you'll take on the challenge of learning how to be comfortable with being connected and involved in expressing choice through your "yes" and "no." We hope you'll be willing to try something new.

The Power of Choice, Part 2



It's remarkable how powerful it is to be aware of the choices you make.

Whether it's looking at the stress levels of bosses, or examining the results of giving women with cancer more choices in their types of treatment, or seeing direct health benefits from providing senior citizens with choices, there's a new commonality - **having choices, and intentionally exercising these choices, decreases stress and leads toward healthier lives.**



[17] In field research with older adults in a nursing home setting, [Langer and Rodin](#) [18], gave **one group the freedom to make choices and the responsibility of caring for a plant** rather than having decisions made and the plant taken care of for them by the staff, as was the case for a second group. **Questionnaire ratings and behavioral measures showed a significant improvement for the choice group over the non-choice group on alertness, active participation, and a general sense of well-being. They participated in more activities, got fewer colds, and lived longer!**

It seems almost silly that a group, given the choice of whether they wanted to water their own plants, would have wellness benefits, as opposed to a group that had their plants watered for them - but it's true. As we've learned lately, **the power of choice seems to have a great effect on our lives.**

Researchers at the University at Buffalo conducted a study of women between the time of breast cancer diagnosis and surgery, offering an in-the-moment snapshot of how women arrived at their decisions. A diagnosis of breast cancer will affect one in every eight women in the United States, according to the [American Cancer Society](#) [19], causing them to have to decide quickly about treatment. A friend of ours reminds us frequently, "Let's not worship at the altar of false urgency." Especially with cancers, though, we can panic and lose track of the fact that we do have a choice of deciding quickly ... or of choosing not to ... even if our choice is, perhaps, against medical advice. **Still, this is a choice, and in choice there is power!**

In the study published in the September issue of *Oncology Nursing Forum*, women who were diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer were interviewed during the period just after surgical consultation and before surgery. According to Robin Lally, assistant professor of nursing at the University at Buffalo School of Nursing, **women were presented with options as to treatment, they saw it as a positive prognostic indicator.**



[20] **The women in the study valued receiving options, even if they had one already in mind, and though they may not have seen themselves as a person who is typically good**



at making decisions, they drew confidence from the support provided to them by their health care team while making the decision." Research is continuing to see whether their optimism is positively linked to improved outcomes.

At Harvard University, new research - the largest of its kind - **supports the idea that options greatly affects business.** The study showed that business leaders suffer from less stress than people in less powerful positions. Bosses are less stressed than their workers.

While the leaders were more likely to be male and wealthier, who exercised more, consumed more caffeine, smoked less and woke up earlier (6 a.m. on average versus 7:30 a.m. for non-leaders), **the research showed that having a sense of control, options in decision-making and a say in what's going on "would buffer against stress,"** said Gary Sherman, a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University and the study's lead author.

Richard Elliot Wener, professor of environmental psychology at Polytechnic Institute of New York University, [agreed](#) [21]. **He has studied stress in commuters and found that they become more anxious as they lose control and the ability to predict what's going to happen.**

In a domestic abuse program, children of warring partners are helped to make plans for what they'll do if their homes become unsafe: call police? run to a neighbor? hide in a closet? **The children with a plan show less stress. They have come up with a plan - and that equates with power. Because they have CHOSEN! they have less stress ... how about YOU?**

The Reality of Kindness



[22]"What do you think of when you hear the word "kindness? For some it's kind of a reminder of sitting around a camp fire and singing Kumbaya - which represents a cynical and satirical view of human nature as naively optimistic. If you wake up happy, and love extending kindness to others and having others extend their kindness to you, are really naively clinging to a concept that has no value and no reality?

What does a Google search provide in terms of research and documentation related to kindness? A first search for negative effects of kindness - came up with no research that found kindness had a negative effect on one's life or health.

Searching for positive effects of kindness brought a motherlode. The organization, the [Random Acts of Kindness Foundation](#) [23], among it's other goals, seeks to quantify and support kindness - including Allan Luks' investigated research, *The Healing Power of Doing Good: The Health and Spiritual Benefits of Helping Others*, which illustrates numerous scientific studies showing acts of kindness result in significant health benefits, both physical and mental.

Here are some key findings of contemporary research:

- Helping contributes to the maintenance of good health, and it can diminish the effect of diseases and

- [Get Started](#)
- [Who We Are](#)



disorders - serious and minor, psychological and physical.

- A rush of euphoria, followed by a longer period of calm, after performing a kind act is often referred to as a "helper's high," involving physical sensations and the release of the body's natural painkillers, the endorphins. This initial rush is then followed by a longer-lasting period of improved emotional well-being.
- Stress-related health problems improve after performing kind acts. Helping reverses feelings of depression, supplies social contact, and decreases feelings of hostility and isolation that can cause stress, overeating, ulcers, etc. A drop in stress may, for some people, decrease the constriction within the lungs that leads to asthma attacks.
- Helping can enhance our feelings of joyfulness, emotional resilience, and vigor, and can reduce the unhealthy sense of isolation.
- The incidence of attitudes, such as chronic hostility, that negatively arouse and damage the body is reduced.
- The health benefits and sense of well-being return for hours or even days whenever the helping act is remembered.
- An increased sense of self-worth, greater happiness, and optimism, as well as a decrease in feelings of helplessness and depression, is achieved.
- Regular club attendance, volunteering, entertaining, or faith group attendance is the happiness equivalent of getting a college degree or more than doubling your income.



[24]In fact, **the research is overwhelming. It's naive *not* to see the value and reality that kindness brings to your own health and that of others. If you're still not sure, do your own search.** And one last thought, remember not everyone will ask for help, so try to walk in their shoes and think of their needs. That kindness will go a long, long way - for both of you.

Watching for Stumbling Blocks: Demonstrating Attitudes & Behaviors

From Personal Safety Nets® Getting Ready for Life's Inevitable Challenges and Changes" by Dr. John W. Gibson and Judy Pigott.

We have observed that when care-team members demonstrate the following attitudes and behaviors, they allow care receivers to develop and use their strength, flexibility, and resourcefulness.

- Openly and honestly communicating with the care partner.
- Clarifying roles, expectations, and limits.
- Communicating, negotiating, and partnering with him about what each will attempt to do.
- Being consistent and dependable, feeling responsible to but not *for* him.
- Doing your best to clarify assumptions and ask for feedback.
- Remembering to reach for humor and humility when other tools elude you.

GET READY

-
- [Get Started](#)
 - [Who We Are](#)



Think: Can you separate being needy from asking for help?

List: What scares you? List even the fears that sound silly.

Get help: If you've seriously or specifically considered suicide, call 911 or your crisis center.

Watching for Stumbling Blocks: Too Much Help

From Personal Safety Nets® Getting Ready for Life's Inevitable Challenges and Changes.™ by Dr. John W. Gibson and Judy Pigott.

Through our hands-on experience giving and sharing care, we have learned to identify many common "helping strategies" that actually complicate the situation or cause problems. Many of these attitudes and behaviors, while well-meaning, may cause a care partner to become weaker or more dependent upon you:

- Solving a problem for her because it's faster or easier for you to do it.
- Giving help before it is requested or without asking if it is wanted.
- Providing more care than is good for you, and thereby risking feeling overwhelmed or stressed.
- Not allowing her, if she wishes, the opportunity to try something where she may fail.
- Speaking for her.
- Needing her to need you.
- Not being honest about what you need or want.
- Overly protecting her from honest feedback about her words and actions.
- Trying to cover up or hide the reality of her situation.

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