- Social networking

PROCESSING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA BASHING

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Social media can be a source of diversion that provides us a healthy distraction from the stresses of daily life. It can be a tool for positive social interaction that strengthens relationships among family and friends.



On the other hand, social media can achieve the opposite and cause conflicts even among friends and family members.

A middle-age housewife asked her husband to bring her to the emergency room a few weeks ago because of the severe stress-induced hypertension and palpitations she was experiencing.

Her blood pressure was uncontrolled, and she was complaining of more frequent chest pains and skipped beats, which she usually felt when she had an irregular heartbeat or arrhythmia.

The source of the stress were the unkind and hurtful remarks she was getting on her Facebook page because of her posts staunchly supporting the contrary position in a raging online debate.

At the emergency room, they gave her potent antihypertensive medicines which temporarily brought the blood pressure (BP) down, but her BP pattern has assumed a roller-coaster pattern with peaks risky enough to cause her brain artery to rupture and make her brain tissues swell.

Greatest downside

When she followed up at the clinic, we adjusted her medicines for her heart and blood pressure, but we explained to her that unless she's able to "process" her negative emotions caused by the nasty remarks of her anonymous bashers, then her BP will remain erratic and her chest pains will keep on recurring. Sleeping soundly at night would also remain a challenge.

Social bashing is really the greatest downside of social media interaction. Although people are really expected to take sides, many have resorted to spiteful and malicious attacks on social media, and once provoked, one tends to be much more confrontational and daring than one normally is.

A peculiar type of mob mentality rears its ugly head in the form of social bashing by some individuals who feel they belong to a bigger group, and verbally pounce on people perceived to be on the minority side. The feeling of anonymity also adds to one's loss of restraint, knowing that they could not be identified by the target of their unacceptable language or behavior.

Because they know that their behavior cannot be traced back to them, especially if they use fictitious names, they have no qualms about breaking social norms and releasing their "darkest side" to vent on people who may have different beliefs and convictions than theirs.

These people who lose their normal restraints and inhibitions and say things they could never imagine themselves saying when they're alone, are said to have experienced "deindividuation" or a loss of self-awareness. They "deindividuate" when their sense of individual identity is lost and they identify with whatever group or faction they are passionately supporting.

The heightened passions stir up a lot of emotional excitement, and can cause provocative behaviors that one would not typically engage in if one were alone. One's personality can be completely changed. This happens in athletic events when fans can be so emotionally stirred to engage in violence, leading to riots and chaos. This also happens during the campaign period when one is rooting for a candidate or political party.

Simple steps

This form of mob mentality, which social media bashers unwittingly allow themselves to engage in, gives the erroneous and selfish belief that one cannot be held responsible for any unacceptable behavior or language one may have when part of a "mob" because they attribute the behavior to the group and not to one's individual self.

There is no feeling of personal accountability for the unacceptable act, language or behavior.

"Processing" of negative emotions requires several simple steps, according to Dr. Bess de Guia, a psychiatrist friend practicing at The Medical City:

1) Acknowledge these negative emotions and accept that one's feelings had been hurt deeply, causing physical distress and/or disease. One should detail the symptoms and bodily problems the negative emotions have caused.

2) "Release" all feelings of negativity, together with the individual symptoms or bodily problems. One may imagPenntoft ine blowing all of them into a balloon and letting go of the balloon or being in a boat and throwing all psychological and physical consequences of the negative emotions into the water as the boat speeds away.

3) Decide not to take revenge on the person who has inflicted the negative emotion or injury.

4) Make the difficult resolve to forgive the person.

Forgiveness, says Dr. De Guia, does not mean tolerating the unacceptable act or behavior. It has to be emphasized that the person should be held accountable and should be made to answer for whatever he/she has done, as provided by law. Forgiveness is actually more an internal process for the victim of the hurtful act or language. It releases the victim from being a prisoner of the bitterness and rage one's negative emotions are likely to cause. This ultimately leads to psychosomatic problems— bodily problems resulting from mental or emotional causes— like what happened to our patient.

In the case of our patient— since she has no way of identifying who her social bashers are —we just advised her to grant them her "generic" forgiveness and let go of her negative feelings. It's easier said than done, but with God's grace we can have the peace of mind no amount of social bashing can take away from us.

Indeed, there's so much truth to what Alexander Pope once wrote: "To err is human; to forgive, divine." And every time we forgive, we allow the Divine to work in us.

The patient's stress was caused by hurtful remarks she was getting on Facebook, leading to uncontrolled blood pressure and chest pains