**CHOOSE TO HAVE PURPOSE**

Looking after ourselves is only the beginning, and provides a stepping stone towards choosing a life with meaning.

Choose to have purpose

In the same way that we need to give to ourselves in order to give to others, a meaningful life doesn’t stop with just looking after ourselves – this is only the beginning, and provides a stepping stone towards choosing a life with meaning.

Below is an Action Plan for Giving3, starting with the stepping stone of “self” and extending from there to the widening pool of others, communities, the natural environment, and ultimately, to something “bigger” than ourselves.

**Action Plan for Giving**

**Self**

We must first learn to give to ourselves to create a surplus from which to give to others. Refer to the SELF CARE AIMS: Action Plan for Self Care on page 3 for some evidence-based areas in which to give to self. This forms a core for giving to others.

**Others**

Giving to others can involve supporting those who are closest to us, such as family, friends and co-workers, but it can also include random acts of kindness to strangers and people who come into contact with us.

**Communities**

Giving to communities can mean giving to our workplace or the local sport club, volunteering, or supporting aid organisations. Doing this expands our field of generosity and our awareness of people outside our immediate circle.

**Natural environment**

The natural environment is a great healer of our physical and mental health. Think of tangible ways to return the favour, such as recycling or buying locally. For more information, visit http://www.livinggreener.gov.au/home.

**Whole**

The ‘whole’ means different things to different people. Whether we are spiritual or ‘world conscious’, feeling that we are part of, and giving to, the ‘whole’ is a way we can give to something “bigger” than ourselves.

**Call to action**

Would you like to have a life with meaning and find out what it’s like to live for others as well as yourself? If so, perhaps you would like to start now by following the Action Plan for Self Care on page 3, and the Action Plan for Giving outlined above—and look forward to an increase in your physical and mental health and happiness!

Why not consider volunteering for an organisation in your local area! Alternatively, you can contact Volunteering Australia on (02) 6251 4060 or visit www.volunteeringaustralia.org for more ideas.

**Endnotes**


Our modern world is a diverse and fascinating place. But it is also a complex and challenging one, full of consumerism, materialism, and virtual ‘realities’.

Some say we, as a human family, are in a spiritual crisis. Many are pointing to the curious finding that depression and suicide rates have increased worldwide since the end of World War II, despite the fact that most Western countries have at least doubled their spending power\(^1\).

Why is that? We don’t know for sure. But the research is clear on one thing: as long as our basic needs are met, more money does not make us substantially happier. To feel truly happy and healthy on all levels—physically, emotionally and psychologically—we need a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives.

Choose to contribute

While what is meaningful to one person can be something very different to another, there is one common denominator for what people report as giving them meaningful happiness: it is that of being something for others. Each letter of the acronym SELF CARE AIMS\(^2\) is a helpful reminder of how to give to ourselves.

Choose to feel better and live longer

Research shows that giving to others increases our happiness and health significantly. Personal pleasure is not to be dismissed, but it is having meaning in our lives that accounts for our deepest levels of happiness. When we give to others, we not only have higher and more meaningful levels of happiness, we are also more resilient in the face of adversity and recuperate more quickly from traumatic events.

Regular giving has also been found\(^2\):
- enhances happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of control over life
- lower depression and reduce mood disorders
- have a positive impact on mental health, hopefulness and social effectiveness
- be linked with reduced mortality.

Choose to give to yourself

Choosing to give doesn’t mean that we should aim never to be sad or have conflicted feelings. Beyond happy and sad is the idea of treating all feelings, difficult or pleasant, with compassion and understanding, because it is through a generous and loving attitude toward ourselves that we manage to learn from negative emotions and actions, and ultimately, rise above such events.

In fact, research shows that in order to be able to give to others effectively—to live the meaningful life—we need to also learn how to give to ourselves. If we don’t give to ourselves sufficiently, we not only find it harder to give to others, but we also don’t receive the same health benefits from our giving\(^2\).

The acronym SELF CARE AIMS\(^3\) is a helpful reminder of how to give to ourselves. Each letter stands for a step in the Action Plan for Self Care (refer page 3). All of these strategies have a strong evidence base—in other words, they work!

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