



THE WILDCAT WAY TO WELLNESS

Nourishing Our Bodies and Souls: Circles of Wisdom and Love

We are meant to enjoy vibrant lives—lives rich with adventure, creativity, companionship, and learning. To do this, we must nourish ourselves. When we nourish our bodies and souls, we are happier and more successful. We become better parents, friends, co-workers, and community members. We also have a greater sense of peace and increased vitality for loving, serving, and blessing others.

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Nourishing yourself means giving yourself what is necessary for optimal health, growth, and well-being. It means truly accepting and cherishing yourself for the capable and precious person you are. It means listening to your heart and taking good care of yourself so that you can not only enjoy life to the fullest but also help others to do the same. Nourishing yourself means giving yourself the kind of care and kindness you would want for your dearest friend or loved one.

When we neglect to nourish ourselves, we are less capable of performing well and giving to others. Unfortunately, we often fail to nourish ourselves in even the most basic ways. For example, about half of us don't get enough sleep, and millions of Americans are seriously sleep-deprived.

Sleepiness and the related lack of alertness are principal or contributing factors in accidents of all

kinds. For instance, drivers who fall asleep behind the wheel account for nearly 50,000 collisions and 1,500 deaths annually.

Aside from accidental injuries, we miss a lot in life because of low levels of freshness and energy. And how do you think lack of rest affects judgment, relationships, school performance, our immune systems, and our creativity?

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that simply getting enough rest could drastically improve our individual and collective well-being. Yet sleep is only one of many essentials that we need to properly nourish ourselves. Far from being a selfish preoccupation, intelligently nurturing ourselves is fundamental to our well-being.

Nourishing oneself is a very personal matter. Everybody has different needs and wants. For example, some people find a great deal of contact with people

to be energizing. Others are just the opposite. They need and crave a good amount of solitude. If they don't have at least a little time to themselves, they begin to feel overloaded.

Try to decide what is good for you. As much as possible, avoid people and activities that drain your vitality. Sidestepping this kind of negativity is an essential aspect of nurturing yourself.

Our bodies and souls require nourishment. When we don't receive it in healthy ways, we often turn to destructive substitutes such as too much junk food and alcohol, drugs, constant hurrying, an overemphasis on material things, even gang participation. To reach our potential as individuals and thrive as a society, we must place a priority on nurturing ourselves and one another.

Just as different kinds of plants require special nutrients and conditions to thrive, we as human beings also have individual needs. The star in the circle to the right offers 25 ways to nourish our bodies and souls. Spirit, love, peace, faith, and joy are core principles for nurturing oneself. Along the points of the star are other essential means of nurturance.

Star Exercise

Study the star diagram, looking at all the ways of nourishing yourself. Take out a piece of paper and write down the ones that most appeal to you at first glance. Pick four or five of them, and jot down quickly what they mean to you. Don't think too hard about it. Just let what comes quickly to mind come out on the paper. Think to yourself, do I do the things that might make me a happier, more well-nourished person? If not, why not?

Are there other ways of nourishing yourself that are important to you but not listed? Jot them down and ask the same questions. Do something like this:

Travel: Travel rejuvenates me. If I stay in one place too long, I begin to get into a rut and lose perspective. I know an overseas trip would help, but the money, the planning, taking time off from work—it all becomes overwhelming.

Once you have the problem identified, start to think of solutions:

I could take shorter, inexpensive trips. I could go somewhere for a half day rather than a week. I could take a weekend trip or go camping. Maybe I could just take a drive in the country. That's it! I'll start taking small trips right away and save up to go to Ireland next year.

When it comes to nurturing ourselves, most of us have a lot more insight than we give ourselves credit for. A "Circle of Wisdom and Love" is an excellent way to tap into our inner wisdom.



Circles of Wisdom and Love

The circle is one of the most basic, ancient, and universal symbols in existence. It has been used over and over again to express unity and wholeness. Our ancestors gathered in circles around the fire to tell stories, solve problems, seek the common good, and celebrate the joys of life. Today, small groups that meet in circle-like formation are gaining in popularity—special interest groups, project development groups, 12-step meetings, scripture study and prayer circles, and support groups of all kinds.

Basically, a Circle of Wisdom and Love is a group of people who have decided to gather together to speak on a particular topic or topics. It is not, however, an everyday discussion.

Heart-to-Heart Communication

A Circle of Wisdom and Love is a place where it's safe to say what's really on your mind and know that you will be respected. It is a place where you can be confident that you won't be interrupted, ridiculed, or bullied. You do not give advice, nor do you engage in dialogs. In a Circle of Wisdom and Love, you face each other in trust and appreciation, creating a safe, sacred space where you encourage each other to listen to the "still, small voice within." You feel free to express your struggles, your hopes, your visions.

You are encouraged to practice the art of deep truth telling—something that many of us may

find difficult to do on a regular basis. But, if we can develop the confidence to speak our hearts in a small group like the one described here, speaking from the deepest part of ourselves will be easier in other areas of our lives.

The "Talking Object"

One of the things that makes a wisdom circle different from an everyday roundtable discussion is the Native American custom of the "talking stick." Here's how it works:

First, everyone gathers in a circle. The talking stick is placed in the center of the circle, perhaps on a small table. When a person wants to speak, he or she goes to the center and picks up the stick. Only the person holding the talking stick speaks. Everyone else remains silently attentive, listening wholeheartedly to what the person is saying. When the speaker finishes talking, he or she places the talking stick back in the center for the next person to pick it up. As a frequently used alternative, the talking stick is simply passed around the circle from one person to the next.

The talking stick can be any "talking object"; it doesn't have to be an actual stick. If you pick a substitute, try to find something that has meaning for the group. For example, you might choose to use a flower as the "talking object." The flower could represent the inner beauty of the person speaking, the blooming of wisdom, or the fragrance of kindness. You could just as easily use a teddy bear or a sacred text. Any symbolic item that is easy to hold works well as a "talking object."

We really seldom do anybody much good excepting as we share the deepest experiences of our souls. . . . It is not the fashion to tell your inmost thoughts, but there are many wrong fashions, and concealment of the best in us is wrong.
— Frank Laubach

The purpose of the “talking object” is to focus the whole group’s attention on listening to the individual who is speaking. If you think about it, this is something we rarely do for each other. Our minds are often distracted when someone is talking to us, or we’re half-busy doing something else or thinking of a response so that we hold up our end of the conversation.

The Role of Silence

In today’s world, silence is a rare and valuable commodity. Silence is refreshing and healing; it helps us tune into our inner guidance, and it allows our speech to be more powerful and filled with wisdom. Silence is a vital part of good problem solving and effective communication. That’s why we recommend starting a Circle of Wisdom and Love with a moment of silence. That is also why the “talking object,” which provides for non-interruption and moments of silence, is so important.

The person who has the “talking object” may hold it for a moment of silence or may choose to pass it on without speaking. In a Circle of Wisdom and Love, silence is as important as talking.

Properly understood, silence allows us to say a lot. We offer support and love with our eyes, through facial expressions, and with our thoughts and feelings. We communicate directly, heart to heart.

Confidentiality

If members are to be comfortable expressing themselves freely, it’s important that all circle members agree to a code of confidentiality. Personal information shared during the circle should not be discussed inappropriately elsewhere.

Circle Guidelines

The following guidelines were adapted from *Wisdom Circles: A Guide to Self-Discovery and Community Building in Small Groups*:

- Remember, only the person holding the “talking object” speaks.
- Listen with all your heart.
- Speak from your heart.
- Allow and respect silence.
- Be appreciative of life’s blessings and opportunities.
- Keep personal information confidential.

A Question for the Circle

Beginning with the person who is holding the “talking object,” allow each member of the Circle of Wisdom and Love to thoughtfully answer the question of the day. While any question or issue of importance can be addressed in a circle, one focusing on nourishing our bodies and souls could be: *How do I want to nurture myself, and what might the benefits be?*

Action Plans

After group members share their answers, each person can take a few minutes to jot down a personal action plan—one small way they want to nurture themselves in the next few days. As time allows, members of the circle can share their action plans with one another.

Reference

Garfield, C., Spring, C. & Cahill, S. (1998). *Wisdom Circles: A Guide to Self-Discovery and Community Building*. New York: Hyperion.

A Teaching Outline and an Addendum for Professional Educators accompany this publication



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