

C.A.L.M. Treatment

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Ken Caselden, LPCC/LCADC

Freedom Wellness Center, PLLC.

Chances are you've been affected in your lifetime by poor mental health or addiction in one way or another. Whether it has been something you've faced internally or by dealing with someone else's mental health state, it's something none of us can really avoid. Which means in some way you've been influenced or introduced to the idea of "treatment."

We refer to treatment as a form of medical care received. "I'm receiving treatment for (insert condition)." On the other hand, treatment can also refer to how one behaves or deals with people and situations. "Treat others as you wish to be treated."

For the purpose of this article, I'm going to refer to treatment as the care one receives while working with a qualified mental health professional (i.e. psychiatrist, psychologist, counselor/therapist, social worker, etc). First, though, allow me to explain why I think we have it backwards in society in the way we look at treatment. Treatment too often focuses on how to handle a person or situation you're perceiving as being stressful or problematic. Treatment fails considerably when the treatment does not account for how you treat your Self within the given circumstance.

Google any condition and you'll find a variety of answers on how to handle a problem. The internet is filled with how to's and lists to follow in order to achieve a desired result. And your best friend, close relative, or trusted confidant are no different. There are always plenty of opinions on how you should handle an issue and anyone can argue whether they think something is good, bad, right, or wrong.

In no way am I undermining this available information or your loved one's opinion. There is an abundance of studies providing supporting evidence of how specific "treatments" and caregiving supports have produced positive results such as improved mood, reduced anxiety, abstinence or recovery from addiction, or increased security and confidence. The buzz word today is "mindfulness." That buzz 15 years ago was "emotional needs." The buzz 30 years ago was "self-talk." The list goes on and on.

One of the most unique qualities we have as humans is our ability to self-reflect on our feelings and our position in the world. Underneath all of the "treatment" is what we experience as a result of dealing with our primary consciousness (seeing things as they really are) and our secondary consciousness (seeing things as we want, as we think things should be, and creating meaning). The trick to experiencing successful treatment is in learning how to observe how these primary and secondary "parts" interact.

Just pay attention the next time you say, "part of me says this" and "part of me says that."

We all have this sort of tension from what is and what we want. I believe the primary reason treatment fails is because too often people are looking for answers from someone else when they already have within themselves the ability to create a new experience. I have taught for years that the journey toward change is not in changing anything around you but by learning to relate differently to the very thing you wish would change.

I teach a method to my clients using another one of today's buzz words: CALM.

C stands for Curious. Curious is the desire to learn something. We are taught in our literature classes the skill of asking questions using a “who, what, where, why, when” format. Curiosity sets the stage to understand what is happening in and around you from a more mind, body, and spirit level. It’s learning about how you’re thinking, feeling, and behaving and “tuning in” to the experience of what is happening versus what you think ought to be happening in a curious, observant state of mind.

A stands for Acknowledge. Acceptance is another buzz word. Trouble is, you cannot accept what you are not willing or able to acknowledge. We have to learn how to be willing to “sit with the dragon” *per se*. That is, we have to be willing to acknowledge the pain, discomfort, even suffering without jumping to conclusions or impulsively reacting to manipulate outcomes.

L stands for Love/compassion. This one is easy to understand but harder to implement. It refers to showing your Self and your primary and secondary “parts” the same love and compassion you’d share with a close friend or relative in need. It is a moment we take to recognize that everyone, including you, want and deserves respect, that all of us are simply wanting to be better understood, and that all of us have a purpose.

M stands for Meta. This refers to seeing things from a larger context or higher perspective instead of from within the confines of the moment or situation. This part brings the C-A-L together in a deliberate, participant-observer stance that reaches the depth of our consciousness and sees what’s happening from a distance rather than allowing all of the thoughts and emotions to take over. It gives permission to let people be people and things be things. It allows you to be aware of feelings without becoming (i.e. behaving) the feelings. It also emphasizes one’s own understanding of a higher power and how such can facilitate restoration and healing.

Many cases of poor mental health are a result of reacting negatively to negative feelings. It is time we stop teaching quick fixes, how to’s, and lists that do nothing more than teach people to run away from their feelings. All emotions are simply a condition of being human. Its time to treat by turning *toward* our Self and our adversities – not away.

Ken Caselden is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor in private practice at Freedom Wellness Center, PLLC. He may be reached by visiting www.freedomwellness.org.