

Busy Is The New Addiction — Hurry Up and Relax!

By Sherri Snyder- Roche, MA, LMHC

“Karissa! Hurry up! Get your shoes for soccer!” “AJ! Stop fooling around! Hurry up! You’re late for basketball practice!” “Hurry up. Get in the car. I’m going to stop for fast food on the way to drop you off!” “Oh no! I just got a text from the coach. We have to be there in five minutes! Oh @%&*! I forgot the _____!”

Does this sound familiar in your home? We are a culture that is constantly in a hurry, rushing everywhere and filling every single second of the waking day. Rushing and hurrying in all aspects of our lives and in our children’s lives has created an impact that is more far-reaching and destructive than we would like to imagine. Let’s take a peek.

When we rush and hurry, it affects us emotionally, physically and spiritually. Our mind and body go into hyper-alert, a mechanism of the fight-flight system in our brain. Our brain thinks we are in danger or in trouble, so it sends out a burst of adrenaline to protect us. Adrenaline increases our heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension and numerous other physiological symptoms to give us the resources to react quickly. These symptoms fade as the danger signal clears, but when we are constantly rushing, our brain believes that we are in constant danger.

Another fascinating chemical in the brain is the neurotransmitter dopamine, which is released when we experience pleasure. Dopamine is like a reward; once we get rewarded, we want to do that same thing again and again. Even just thinking about doing something exciting releases dopamine, which can create pleasure-seeking behavior.

In “Exploiting the Neuroscience of Internet Addiction,” (*The Atlantic*, July, 2012) Bill Davidow writes: Much of what we do online releases dopamine into the brain's pleasure centers, resulting in obsessive pleasure-seeking behavior...Thanks to neuroscience, we're beginning to understand that achieving a goal or anticipating the reward of new content for completing a task can excite the neurons in the ventral tegmental area of the midbrain, which releases the neurotransmitter dopamine into the brain's pleasure centers. This in turn causes the experience to be perceived as pleasurable. As a result, some people can become obsessed with these pleasure-seeking experiences and engage in compulsive behavior such as a need to keep playing a game, constantly check email, or compulsively gamble online.”

The Internet, texting, social media, videogames, rushing from one event to the next, hurrying — they have all become one big addiction.

There is a natural inclination to avoid discomfort, to avoid stress, to avoid danger. As we are rushing (running from danger), our brain is seeking relief from that sensation. So, of course, we turn to pleasure. Once we engage this teeter-totter pattern of discomfort/pleasure, we often become stuck. Unless we are actively taught how to cope with discomfort, we may constantly avoid it and seek pleasure. In *Smile at Fear: Awakening the Heart of Bravery*, Chogyun Trungpa describes our culture as “a world of neurotic comfort where we use everything to fill up our space.”

Not so long ago, during a slower time, families sat together for dinner. We did one thing at a time. Not every waking moment of our lives was filled with busy-ness. Technology did not consume our lives. Teenagers did not have four hours of homework a night. This was a time before fast food and sports took over our children’s lives and smart phones notified us every few minutes.

I have been incredibly fortunate to know a Menonite family (the modern Amish), to befriend them, to learn from them, to watch the children grow up in this busy culture. I have observed how they honor Earth, honor each other, honor family, honor meal times together and honor nature’s pace. Yes, they do use technology, but only when necessary. It is not used as a distraction or as entertainment. They share meals together. They grow their food, all contribute to the garden, and each family member takes responsibility for a piece of their homelife. They invest in their family and their home and their community.

What would happen if we re-assessed how we live our day and how we invest in our own life? How we prioritize activities? What would happen if in between each activity, we “took three long, deep breaths,” as American Tibetan Buddhist Pema Chodron suggests? This pause allows one to be present and in the moment, rather than running away from the moment or running away from discomfort.

What if we paused when we felt frustrated or hurried? Our frazzled self says, “But I don’t have time to pause!” The reality is that when we pause we relax, and we give space to feel and think. When we honor the moment and become aware of our emotions, we find that we no longer have the need to run away from the situation. We can sit with the discomfort or the unknown and be okay with what is. We are not avoiding the situation nor are we running toward an immediate pleasure. As we give space for that breath between our words, allowing ourselves to really listen to each other, we may find that we have more patience. We may

develop a deeper understanding of our self, fostering more self-compassion.

So now imagine that you are stuck in traffic or waiting in a long line at the store. Rather than getting frustrated and irritated and distracting yourself from that frustration by turning to your cell phone and checking social media or emails, what if you simply breathed? Slowly counting your breaths, feeling gratitude for your breath, appreciating the time you have in this moment, taking three long breaths. Now notice how you feel. Your life has change immensely in just three breaths.

Rather than rushing around and hurrying, what would happen if we slowed down the pace? Had dinner together? Put away our technology? We might find that we actually have the time and space to connect with each other in person, be less frenetic and more organized and patient. Slowing down gives us more time to breathe as we're learning how to cope with discomfort and release our addiction to being busy. It gives time to just be, to connect, in the stillness and peace of silence.

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