

## SEPTEMBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

### THEME: Toxic Friends

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& Workshop Presenter



SELF TRANSFORMATION  
THERAPY

#### IN THIS ISSUE

- Announcing a **New Meditation Group** on a fortnightly basis for relaxation, stress relief and to learn how to meditate.
- The '**Ask Andrew**' question for this month is on: '**Toxic Friends**'. How to recognise them and how to survive them.



Please feel free to forward this email to any who may be interested in the meditation group or the 'Ask Andrew' topic.



#### Announcing: New Meditation Group

I will be commencing a meditation group in Term 4. This will be on a fortnightly basis on a Monday night at 7:30 PM. This alternates on Mondays with the Personal and Spiritual Development group which is now into its 3rd term.

This group will serve two purposes. Firstly, it will serve as a time-out in your busy life to look after yourself and experience a period of peace and relief from stress - to quieten the mind, calm the emotions and relax the body. Secondly, it is a way to learn to meditate, which is a very important skill for both maintaining your energy and dealing with stress.

No assumed knowledge is required, but there is an expectation of practice in the intervening fortnight to continue to obtain the benefits from meditation. It is usually easier to learn to meditate in a group, or people experience a deeper meditation, due to the combined energy and the intention to meditate.

**When:** Fortnightly from Monday Oct 7<sup>th</sup>, 7:30pm to 8:30pm

#### WEBSITE LINKS

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[Previous:  
'Thoughts of the Month'](#)

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therapy?](#)

**Where:** Top-to-Toe Health – Level 3, 200 High St, Lwr Templestowe (5 mins from the Eastern Freeway near Doncaster Shopping Centre).

**Cost:** \$10 per session with a commitment for the term paid up front - totalling \$50.

I will run this group with a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 12.

Please **reply to this e-mail to register your interest** and reserve your place.

### Ask Andrew Column: 'Toxic Friends'

#### **Query:**

JN enquired how to end a friendship with a friend she described as toxic. JN had recently made significant personal changes and no longer found this friendship tolerable, but was unsure how to go about ceasing ties. This friend was described as dominant, concerned about herself and left JN feeling very drained.



#### **Response:**

High maintenance friends are different from toxic friends. High maintenance friends are often characterised as those friends where there is a little bit of drama, messiness in organising things, confusion or frustration at certain times. However, they are still able to be there for you and have some give-and-take in the relationship. Toxic friends are those where the giving and taking is a one-way street. Toxic friends often leave you very drained, tired or angry. Toxic relationships are not just with dominant, critical or bullying people. Manipulative behaviour can come in a variety of ways, but the end result is the same – a lack of give-and-take leaving you drained and/or frustrated. Even people who play a victimised role who appear fragile or overwhelmed often can be experienced as toxic.

#### Anatomy of a 'toxic' friendship:

People who are described as toxic are people who have very high needs and have these needs met by others. This is not just limited to friends, but may include work colleagues and parents. The degree of need can be so strong that it is always one-way and often present in every single interaction you have with them. But before we go any further, I feel it necessary to say that people who are described as toxic also deserve our pity. Someone does not become toxic out of choice, but because in their past they have received very little themselves or have experienced emotionally traumatising or toxic parents. Having said that, that does not mean we need to expose ourselves to behaviours which do not respect boundaries or who we are.

The thing that is important to understand about toxic friends is that you are likely to be someone who often looks after or worries about others, and do not find the situation too unfamiliar by having a friend who makes it about themselves. What I mean is, if this friendship has been very one-way, it is not likely to be the first time that you have experienced this type of relationship. It suggests that in your past, most commonly your childhood, you are used to suppressing or neglecting your needs and being there for other people in any number of ways. Therefore, if you describe a friend as toxic, you may be used to neglecting your needs and therefore are prone to feeling guilty in asserting yourself. Consequently, if you try and make changes in this relationship, you will be confronted by guilt and anxieties of upsetting the other person and fear how they will respond.

There are 2 important things to understand when you are trying to alter a friendship with a person who you feel is toxic:

- They do not display these toxic behaviours because they prefer them. They have a very fragile and tenuous self-esteem which causes a very unstable in a world. What I mean by this is that in order to keep unpleasant feelings of emptiness, anxiety and inadequacy away, they need to stick to some very rigid ways of thinking and behaving.
- These rigid ways of thinking and behaving mean that you only see a limited amount of ways that this person relates. They struggle to show a gamut of emotions or a variety of facets to their personality. They need to limit themselves to a certain ways of relating to keep control over their functioning, and therefore control over feelings that they cannot handle and need to keep at bay.

Therefore, you could appreciate the when you attempt to create a change or end the relationship, it is extremely confronting or difficult for them to cope with, as you are disturbing this very rigid construction in how they see themselves and the world. What they will need to do is maintain the status quo and therefore will struggle to change as they lack the resilience and insight to achieve this. However, be wary of classifying your friends as toxic as you may underestimate the capacity to change their friendship with you.

#### Handling conversations or change with a 'toxic' friendship:

There are 3 important points in dealing with these type of situations:

- When you talk to people who do not listen or lack insight of their own behaviour, you approach them by having decided what you want to tell them, without requiring their agreement or acknowledgement. This is opposed to more optimal communication style, where both parties have some insight into their behaviour, are willing to listen to the other and find a compromise or negotiated solution.
- Knowing what you wish to say to someone in this situation is often not too difficult to decide. Where all the difficulty lies is in managing your emotional reactions. If you have sat on your reactions for far too long, you will feel the urge for them to come out far too strong. You are then left in a dilemma of being stuck between not saying anything at all or saying something with too much anger or frustration. This is where learning to deal with these type of relationships hold great potential for your personal growth. In many cases, you have tolerated these friendships because you have experienced similar treatment in your childhood. Therefore, in resolving them you can heal that aspect of your childhood.

- People who are described as toxic have very strong needs. Therefore, when you try to alter or end the relationship, they will find this extremely difficult. Consequently, you will trigger potentially strong emotional reactions. These may initially be an escalation of the usual behaviours that you have seen. What can also follow is that they will try and erode your newfound position of strength and assertion. There may be a variety of other approaches to create guilt in you, to doubt your position or even bully you to gain control over the situation.

You can use this following 3 step process to approach a conversation with a toxic friend:

1. Decide very clearly what you wish to say in terms of why this friendship is not working for you and why you wish to alter it. The very important key is not to criticise their behaviour, but to identify how your needs are not being met. If there is a shred of any personal criticism in your expression, then that will result in an immediate strong reaction and deteriorate the situation. It can be useful to state this in terms of expecting give and take in a relationship, a sense of equality and support.
2. It can be very difficult to do this in person. Identify what emotional reactions you are experiencing before approaching them and how you may feel when you actually do. You may wish to gain clarity of your emotional reactions by talking to a friend or counsellor. Either way, it is likely to be a difficult thing to do, so you need be fully committed to your actions. If you find your emotional reactions too strong this may be too difficult to do. Therefore, I recommend seeing a counsellor for assistance. Otherwise, you will handle the situation better if you connect to your sense of strength and commitment to have relationships of mutual respect, while remaining empathic to the other party so as not to be critical and hurtful.
3. When you actually approach your friend, maintain the mindset that you simply have certain things you wish to communicate without their agreement or acknowledgement. You will encounter a variety of responses as this will be very threatening or hurtful to the individual. Therefore, continue to do this with empathy and respect for them. However, you have the right to look after yourself and do not need to respond to criticism, manipulations or guilt trips. As you encounter a variety of responses, simply repeat your central elements of what you wish to say by paraphrasing them in a slightly different way. You may end up sounding like a broken record but the important point to emphasise is not to be baited into the more manipulative and conflicted behaviour that you are likely to see. These behaviours are power plays to maintain control.

In summary, when you approach a person for a major discussion of this type, followed the following 3 steps:

- 1) introduce the discussion
- 2) state what you need to say
- 3) do not enter into manipulative or conflicted responses and repeat your statements in another way

I caution you not to attempt conversation of this type unless you are clear on what you wish to say, and has some mastery over your emotional responses. What I mean by the latter is that you may find you state your intentions too strongly with anger and criticism, or you may not feel strong enough to stand up against the expected criticisms or manipulations. In these cases, if you wish to take an action of this nature, I recommend that you see a counsellor to sort through your emotional responses, what you wish to say and how to handle it.

Of course, none of the above may be required, as the alternative is to reduce frequency and amount of contact. For instance, talk to them less on the phone and see them less often. And when you are on the phone or in-person, have some pre-prepared reasons to wrap up the conversation, especially when you feel yourself becoming drained. Identify early on when the draining starts and begin to wrap the conversation up.

Finally, I wish to say that I'm writing this column, not to treat toxic friends as enemies or in a disrespectful way. I say once again, they are to be pitied at some level as they have not had their needs met throughout their lifetime. What this column is about, is that there are times when we have an increasing sense of deserving more equality, respect and a return of what we give to others. If you find someone no longer resonates with you, then hopefully the advice here may be of benefit.

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