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Guest Columnist

Photo Therapy: It Can Change Your Life

By

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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - Is technology helping people have better relationships? The answer might be surprising: In a recent survey, most Americans reported that while they increasingly use technology to connect with others, they feel they have fewer meaningful relationships than they did five years ago -- and that, in fact, they are feeling increasingly isolated and lonely. While most agreed that their network of friends has grown "wider" through technology, they also feel this has not resulted in making the quality of those connections any deeper. Yet the solution may be just a snapshot away!

That study, "Relationship State of the Nation: Interpersonal relationships in the United States and the effects of technology, photography and economic climate," shows the impact photographs can have in helping people feel less lonely and more connected to those who matter most. In times where busy lives and concerns about money can create barriers that prevent people from connecting, the survey results demonstrate how small things can have an even greater impact.

The survey, commissioned by Kodak, sought to explore the nature of Americans' relationships compared to five years ago, including the impact of newer forms of communication, the barriers to maintaining relationships, and the role, if any, that photographs can play in strengthening them. And it turned out that there are many practical ways that photos can help people feel better and strengthen their relationships.

Even though technology has made it easier to connect, most of those surveyed reported that relationships sustained via technology are not felt to be more meaningful, and nearly 70 percent believe that there is more loneliness in today's society than there used to be. Many of them admitted to feeling lonely themselves and wishing to have closer relationships.

Almost all surveyed knew that photographs have the power to change our moods and motivate us, and most (93%) said sharing photos has brought them closer to friends and family members. They realized that, because photos can remind people of past moments full of good times shared with others, they have the power to improve and sustain relationships through difficult times.

The importance of a photo actually lies less in what it shows visually, than in what is about emotionally. The story underneath its surface details evokes feelings and memories inside the mind (and heart) of each person who sees it, and thus ordinary snapshots speak "heart to heart" when words alone are not enough. While looking at a snapshot, people put themselves back into that picture and feel that moment all over again as if they were there, and thus people's reactions to photographs can actually reveal a lot about themselves if the right kinds of questions are asked.

In my several decades of psychotherapy practice at the PhotoTherapy Centre, I have used photographs as extremely effective tools in helping my clients battle their feelings of isolation and disconnection in the midst of a very connected world. And for the general public, photos can work the same kind of magic: when people use photos to reach out to others, they usually feel better as a result.

PhotoTherapy is a collection of techniques that therapists use to help people explore what their own personal snapshots and family albums are about emotionally, in addition to what they are of visually -- discussing the stories their photos tell and the reasons behind those stories. During PhotoTherapy sessions photos are not just passively reflected upon in silent contemplation, but also actively created, posed for, talked with, listened to, reconstructed, collected on assignment, or even simply remembered or imagined.

The general public can use an adaptation of these same techniques (called "Therapeutic Photography") to explore their own lives or improve their relationships and communications with others. Highly recommended for helping people learn more about themselves and their feelings, Therapeutic Photography can be used to actively strengthen and rekindle relationships by using photographs in the absence of physical connections.

As a result of keeping photos of good times and loved ones nearby, and by sharing photos with others to show how much they matter, people can easily take action to make themselves feel less lonely and connect better with others; for example:

1. **Creating a Picture-Perfect Environment:** Decorate your space with photos of friends, family, loved ones and places you enjoy. Be sure to select photos that contain strong positive memories. Every photo has feelings and memories just underneath its surface; choosing the right one lets you to revisit those moments again and therefore feel those same good feelings all over again.
2. **Sharing Your World:** The people you miss, miss you too. Let the important people in your life know how you're doing by sharing not just the special moments but the ordinary moments too. Sharing the "small stuff" can have a big impact on your relationships.
3. **Interviewing Your Photo:** Unlock the magic of your photo. Find the happiest picture in your collection and imagine a conversation with it. What positive message would it want you to know? How would it like you to feel? What would it want you to remember?
4. **Breaking the Ice:** Turn your photos into conversation starters. Behind every picture is a great story that wants to be told; it's just waiting for you to ask! Sharing your photos is like sharing your life; when others hear your anecdotes, connections are made that can last a lifetime.

For more tips as well as the comprehensive "Relationship State of the Nation" research findings, please visit www.kodak.com/go/smile. For more about PhotoTherapy techniques, see: <http://www.phototherapy-centre.com>

Judy Weiser is a psychologist and art therapist who has been pioneering "PhotoTherapy techniques" for the past thirty years -- exploring the "why" of taking, posing for, keeping, and looking at, ordinary personal and family snapshots. Founder and Director of The PhotoTherapy Center, she is the author of the classic text "PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums" and the website "PhotoTherapy Techniques in Counseling and Therapy".

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