

ABSTRACT

Ability to Experience Enjoyment

The “Kleine Schule des Genießens” (Little School of Pleasure) – a euthymic intervention – teaches us self-care

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Moments of pleasure and enjoyment help protect us against day-to-day stress and counteract negative feelings with positive ones. This article advocates a conscious learning of pleasure and training one’s own ability to experience enjoyment as an integral part of caring for oneself and ensuring one’s well-being. It describes the functionality and general psychological prerequisites for experiencing enjoyment and puts forward the concept of the “Kleine Schule des Genießens” (KSdG) with its seven rules of pleasure through which enjoyment can be relearned.

THE EUTHYMIC ORIENTING RESPONSE

In the field of psychology, pleasure and enjoyment are attributed to euthymic experience and behaviour. Euthymic means “what is good for the soul”. When we experience enjoyment, our attention is focused on the sensual perception of a beautiful object or pleasant process. If our attention turns to an object or process, this triggers a euthymic orienting response (EOR) which initiates a feeling of pleasure in us. We can steer this ourselves, by checking which euthymic possibilities suiting our own current needs are created by a particular current situation and by correspondingly selecting an object or a process. The process of enjoyment gets under way: our concentration and sensual perception is focused on the object of pleasure, triggering a “euthymic contemplative state”. In this moment, time seems to stand still and positive images or memories spring up; relaxation sets in.

“KLEINE SCHULE DES GENIESSENS”

Those who have forgotten how to experience enjoyment may take “revisionary tuition” in the “Kleine Schule des Genießens” (KSdG). A therapist/trainer coaches participants on the intervention levels of cognition, senses, and emotions, and on the action

level of experiencing the sensation of enjoyment. The KSdG follows the seven rules of pleasure which state that enjoyment takes time, must be permitted, cannot occur as a sideshow, that less is more, that one should choose what benefits one’s well-being, that there is no enjoyment without experience, and that enjoyment should be an everyday experience. Participants are given various exercises in which they are trained to only focus on one of their senses and specifically explore and consciously experience this sense, e. g. via materials for testing their perception of smell or touch. A coaching course at the KSdG is recommended to patients with various diagnoses (e.g. depression, pain) but also makes very good sense for non-patients. A group consisting of patients and non-patients offers a helpful framework for relearning how to experience enjoyment and for creating opportunities in which an EOR is possible. A guide on pleasure and enjoyment is offered by the free information portal www.genuss-tut-gut.de, set up by the Association of the German Confectionery Industry (BDSI). This website was developed with the cooperation of the author and for the first time links guided training in experiencing enjoyment with an offering of information and learning for everyone.

PLEASURE AND ENJOYMENT AS SELF-CARE

Those who want to experience enjoyment must take the time to do so, for this is needed for each EOR, simultaneously creating a pause and the feeling of being able to freely control one’s own time. The EOR hence creates its own time space, which is why it can be understood as a clever mechanism for self-control in optimising one’s pleasure and enjoyment and an ideal way of developing a higher level of self-care. Those who have learnt euthymic behaviour possess the ability to create positive emotions and experience pleasure and enjoyment.

CONCLUSIONS

To lead a life of well-being, pleasure and enjoyment must be desired and acceptable, for pleasure creates positive feelings which are self-induced and hence can also be self-controlled. The goal of the KSdG is ultimately self-care: a person should regard himself or herself as responsible for themselves and their well-being. The KSdG hence not only makes good sense for patients but also for non-patients, helping them relearn how to experience pleasure and enjoyment.