

## The Four Legged Stool

*Once I had a four legged stool. It was handy for all kinds of things. It lived in a corner in my closet and whenever I needed to put up a picture, install drapes, pull out weeds in the garden, paint a wall, or get cobwebs off the ceiling, this little stool helped me get things done. It was a great little thing.*

*One day I noticed that one of the legs was getting a little loose. It wasn't too wobbly so I just left it, thinking, "I'll fix it up some other time". The next time I used it the leg got looser and this seemed to cause pressure somewhere else. A screw nail popped out giving me pause as to the reliability of my little stool. I planned on fixing it right away but I was in a hurry that day.*

*The next time I needed it I decided that I wouldn't put too much pressure on it - just a brief little job with no real weight. Sure, it was a bit unsteady but it didn't have to do much. Soon I noticed that my stool had a definite slope to it. I carefully balanced my items and compensated for my stool's 'problems'. It worked that way for awhile. Perhaps the stool didn't need fixing after all.*

*But, the last time I used it that little stool had a major breakdown. Crash, Bang, Smash! It/I was a mess! It took a long time to clean up and heal up.*

*The moral of the story: Do some preventive maintenance & respect your stool!*



### **#1 SELF CARE**

This leg relates to things we do for enjoyment, re-creation, pleasure. (e.g. reading, painting/drawing, walks in the woods, pets, gardening, cooking, sports ....)

Things that disrupt self care: Lack of time, lack of resources, feeling as if we don't count or others' care counts more than our own.

### **#2 SELF TALK**

This is the way we talk to ourselves. It's our internal dialogue. It can function as a critic, an encourager, a pessimist, an optimist, a cynic, a humorist, and many many other things. While we may not hear it aloud (at least I hope not!) we certainly have a relationship with this internal character. If this voice is like a good friend – graciously taking the grain and blowing away the chaff – then we have a fairly healthy self talk. If it's like a pernicious foe then we have some pretty unhealthy self talk going on.

Things that disrupt healthy self talk: Anxiety, depression, family histories, traumas, stressful events.

### **#3 SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Think of our supports like 3 concentric circles. The outside rim consists

of wider community activities like sports leagues, church involvements clubs, work place associates, etc. Our middle circle typically engages people who know things about us that are more personal. These may be extended family members, friends, or long time acquaintances. Our inner circle represents those who are our 'intimates'. This probably represents a small handful of people like our partner, long time friend(s), parents, siblings, maybe even a pet.

Things that disrupt our social support system include: marital strife/divorce, moving communities, changing jobs, death, family quarrels, losses, or transitions of various types.

#### **#4 PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE**

Our physical health is made up of several variables – diet, exercise, sleep, treating illnesses, and substance use. When our body and in particular our brain is not functioning effectively our mood and capacity to cope will be hampered.

Things that disrupt our brain health include: poor sleep (too much or too little), shift work, not eating well, too much caffeine, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, etc. If we have little to no exercise we miss out on the 'feel good' chemicals that our brain produces. Likewise, if we have chronic pain our brain becomes depleted of endorphins and deteriorates other mental health processes.

#### **TRY THIS EXERCISE:**

**Rank each of the four areas of mental health on a 1-10 basis with "1" being poor and "10" being great. See what your overall score is and whether your 'stool' needs a little preventative maintenance or not.**

**If your total is below 12-17/40 you're probably noticing significant anxiety or depressive symptoms. It's time to get some professional care.**

**If your total is 18-24/40 you're likely having episodes of feeling stressed and it will often feel like your mood is unstable.**

**If your total is 25-32/40 you're probably managing fine.**

**If your mood is 32+ .... Way to go! You've got great mental health.**