

Celebrating Autumn

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It's been a stressful few weeks around here. Based on what I am hearing lately from friends, colleagues, parents, and kids, many of you would agree with me. From the nationwide focus on elections and correcting the financial crisis we seem to be facing, to the more local shift back into the school and work routine, it's no wonder that there is an increase in stress levels. In fact, increased stress at this time of year may even be hardwired into our psyches, an instinct passed down to us from our ancestors. After all, autumn is the traditional time of the harvest, when entire communities across history have become mobilized in the reaping process while preparing for the upcoming winter.

Recently, amidst my stress, I was thankfully reminded of the spirit of abundance and celebration that also characterizes this season. It was a perfect day. I went out for a run before dusk and everything was clear and calm. The sunflowers were in full bloom, and the harvest moon was rising. It seemed so much easier to forget about the stresses of the week, falling away from me like leaves from a tree. Autumn is also a time of shoring up our energy; soaking up the stress-relieving sun, fresh air, and the overall benefits of the outdoors before the first snow flies. It's a time for respecting the natural cycle of things, remembering in the process that warm weather will return. Much as our ancestors set aside a day every week for rest and reflection, I think it is so important for our own mental health to set aside that time as well. In the spirit of the harvest season, I have included the following tips for appreciating the season, and reducing our stress in the process:

- Take advantage of the local festivals, celebrations and seasonal activities. These settings provide the perfect opportunity for connecting with fellow community members, enjoying the outdoors, and creating family memories. All of these things are known to be naturally stress relieving.
- Focus on nature-related crafts. Remember preserving leaves or flowers by ironing them between two sheets of wax paper? Crafts such as this one can provide a fun family activity while also preserving pieces of the outdoors inside, reminding us of natural benefits throughout the year.

- Shop at your local farmer’s market. This option also provides the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors while connecting with community members. An additional bonus involves the health benefits of fresh produce, as well as the positive contribution to local farmers and the money saved by reducing fuel costs for transportation of that produce.
- Take a family road trip into the mountains to appreciate the natural beauty of the season. These day trips provide an excellent opportunity for quality family time, among many other benefits.
- Find out about past and current autumn practices and celebrations. Often, your local library can help in this pursuit. Focus on reconnecting with practices designed to maximize our enjoyment and respect of the season.

Alyce Duckworth is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) for Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network. If you would like more information regarding the subject matter of this article or on mental health issues in general, please call Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network at 303 730 8858 or visit admhn.org

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