

Why should you care about emotional hygiene? The Answer: Cavities

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Hygiene is the routines, skills, and habits that we engage in to be healthy. The Oxford Dictionary defines hygiene as "... practices conducive to maintaining health and preventing disease...". Essentially, anything you do to take care of yourself in a healthy way could fall under your definition of hygiene practices.



Day-to-day, we engage in multiple physical hygiene routines to maintain our body, including washing our hands, brushing our teeth, taking a shower, or eating regularly. Going to your annual physical or going to your dentist could also be considered hygiene. We don't think twice about this or judge doing this type of behavior to take care of our body. Physical hygiene tends to be socially acceptable, promoted, and in some areas, required!*

While attending to physical hygiene is second nature to many of us, what about taking care of our emotional health through emotional hygiene? When is the last time you brushed and flossed your "emotional teeth?"

Take a moment before reading anymore and check-in with yourself. *When is the last time you engaged in becoming aware of or tending to your emotions and emotional wounds? When's the last time you slowed down to ask yourself, "How do I feel?" and "What does this mean?"*

In today's fast-paced, technologically driven society, emotional hygiene tends to be a forgotten necessity, which can have devastating consequences.

The lack of focus on psychological health and emotional hygiene leads to "emotional cavities." These cavities can be seen in a variety of mild to extreme depressive, anxious, mood, and negative symptoms.



We are all at risk of "emotional cavities."

Are you feeling continuously stressed? That's a cavity forming. Do you feel you have too much to do and feel overwhelmed? That's a potential emotional cavity. Do you feel disconnected from others, your spouse, your work, or yourself? You guessed it, that's a cavity developing too.

The good news is that emotional cavities can be repaired and prevented! You just need to determine if you are willing to prioritize some of your focus on emotional hygiene.



The benefits of prioritizing emotional hygiene are vast, and it's one of the best ways to improve your life. Emotional hygiene promotes resilience, confidence, and a type of emotional health that can only be obtained by tending to yourself. It builds awareness of yourself, your feelings, and your needs. Furthermore, emotional hygiene routines can help you create healthier communication with yourself and others as well as provides data on areas you may need to address.

Emotional hygiene is a foundational building block to a healthy life. It is a skill though, and we have not been prepared to prioritize it. Many individuals need help to build and define what emotional hygiene is to them as it varies from person to person.

Emotional hygiene could be journaling, meditating, or a mindful moment to settle your thoughts. Cleaning out your email, intentional social connections, or seeking support could also be considered hygiene. The possibilities are limited only by your creativity and willingness to explore. There are countless ways to engage in or schedule emotional hygiene! Some activities, such as yoga or going to the gym can combine emotional and physical hygiene routines, as long as it's actually brushing your emotional teeth!

There is no "one size fits all," so you will need to think about what you want and need in your hygiene routines. If this is daunting or feels overwhelming, I am a huge advocate of utilizing a therapist for help.

For today, I encourage you to start your emotional hygiene seriously. The benefits are huge and the emotional cavities from neglecting it are painful!

Activity: Think of ONE thing you want to add to your daily routine that tends to your emotional needs and start that one thing today (or tomorrow if it's late). Don't wait too long though. Don't overthink it. Don't overcomplicate it. Pick something and do it! If you don't like it, try something different tomorrow. It's not about finding the perfect hygiene practice, but exploring what works for you and meets your needs. Your emotional teeth will thank you.

Extra Credit: There are varying levels of hygiene, and not all practices are created equal. Think about the last time you brushed your teeth. Would your dentist be happy with you? How long did you brush, did you floss, did you brush your gums and tongue? Depending on how much effort you put into this practice will directly correlate to how much benefit you get from it. It's the same with emotional hygiene.

Be mindful of your focus and intention. Good luck, you can do it!

** It's important to understand that any social construct, including what is considered proper hygiene, varies from place to place, family to family, or person to person, so the value of physical hygiene is not true for everyone.*