The Aging Process: Adaptation and Growth
KEOM & ElderHope
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Dr. Griffin: So, Barb, what are we talking about today?

Barb: Today, I thought we'd talk a little about the aging process. Someone said that aging isn't for sissies. The famous curmudgeon H.L. Mencken once said: "The older I grow the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom." We all frequently hear jokes about growing waistlines, receding hairlines, and lapsing memory. And, certainly, these are often hard things to adapt to as we age. Still, adaptation really is a necessity. Like so many things in life, much of the aging process is a mind game.

Dr. Griffin: What do you mean?

Barb: Well, that there is a certain sense in which we have to tell ourselves what to think and how to think about certain things. There really is a choice involved in where we choose to dwell in our thoughts. It has been said that, "It's easier to act your way into a feeling, than to feel your way into an action." Sometimes, we just need to act AS IF things were the way we would wish them to be, rather than to dwell on them as they aren't. Instead of asking ourselves, WHAT IF, we tell ourselves to act AS IF. Many elderly people become focused on the faculties they have lost in the aging process—they and those may be many. But, this is also a time of growth, reflection, and challenge. Much of what we can do to help ourselves is a process of AS IF talk as it has been called.

Dr. Griffin: What are some of the areas that we might feel are most difficult in the aging process?

Barb: I think there are a number of areas where the aging process specifically calls our self into question: The value of our life until now, the sources of meaning in our life, the change in our physical selves, changes in mental processing and memory, guilt over past real or perceived mistakes, the joy we find in relationships, and the continuance of hope. Many people use these changes as springboards to make the latter chapters of life more meaningful than the first.

Dr. Griffin: Do you have an example?

Barb: Yes, as a matter of fact, I do (smile). George Burns, living to be 100 years old said, "I don't..."
worry about getting old. I'm old already. Only young people worry about getting old. I don't believe in
dying. It's been done. I'm working on a new exit. Besides, I can't die now - I'm booked. And, while
he is by no means old, many of us have witnessed with wonder the courage and strength that Lance
Armstrong has found in spite of adversity. At times, it really is in the mind of the beholder how we
look at aging.

Dr. Griffin: Sometimes, though, doesn't it just weigh people down, the process of aging?

Barb: Absolutely. And, though we can help ourselves by good self talk, not everyone will find that to
be all that they need. Indeed, as we age, our brain chemistry changes somewhat, and our bodies
may produce less of the chemicals that we need to be able to keep our outlook on life where we want
it to be. So, our bodies may need some help in balancing out those chemicals. Appropriate
medications may be what's needed to improve the quality of life for the elderly. Counseling may
sometimes help as well as spiritual direction. The point is, if we find ourselves unable to work through
some particularly difficult place in the aging process, there is help, and it should be sought out. To
close, I leave us with the words of Karl von Bonstetten: To resist the frigidity of old age one must
combine the body, the mind and the heart - and to keep them in parallel vigor one must exercise,
study and love.