

A Message from BHAC Board President

Hope, Dreams & Connection: Key Strategies for Optimal Mental Health & Well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic has been long and character building. Our everyday routines changed, and some of us are living in a state of hypervigilance while others are languishing. The rush to vaccinate has brought a semblance of normalcy back to our lives, but many have lost hope and now struggle to dream big. It is so important to get back to our passions again and maintain a sense of hope as it gives us the determination and motivation to make our dreams come to fruition. Hope guides us through character building experiences and reassures us that negative circumstances are never permanent. Optimism tells us that a positive outcome is certain, while hope motivates us to continue working towards our dreams even if we are a bit unsure of the outcome.

The power of hope is backed by scientific evidence. A landmark publication by Snyder and colleagues (1991) defined hope as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p. 285-305). Recently, a prospective study with 12,998 older adults in the United States found that a greater sense of hope was associated with better physical health and health behaviors, higher psychological well-being, lower psychological distress, and better social well-being (Long et al., 2020). Hope is tied to how we think, and how we think is everything as our thoughts influence our feelings and behaviors. When you notice your mood is going in a negative direction or you notice a bodily sensation associated with a negative emotion, ask yourself: What was just going through my mind? Is this thought really true? Is this thinking helpful? And do I have the evidence to back this up? The answers are probably no, so the key is catching, checking, and changing these automatic negative thoughts to more positive ones to feel emotionally better. This technique comes from cognitive behavioral therapy and has been demonstrated to increase feelings of hope (Gallagher et al., 2020).

We must keep our dreams bigger than our fears and use hope to persist in pursuing our goals. People who write down their goals and place them where they can be seen every day are much more successful in attaining them than people who do not (Gardner & Albee, 2015). Remember to keep your goals SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Plant your seeds, nurture them, and never give up on your dreams before they grow! When things are not going your way, when you feel defeated or are fatigued, start dreaming again and feel your energy rise. Regard any set back as a lesson and consider what you can learn from it. Success is going from one failure to the next with enthusiasm, knowing that with one more failure or closed door, you are one step closer to your accomplishing your dream. Let us keep dreaming, discovering, and delivering a brighter future for our academic communities.

Best wishes and stay well!

Fond regards,
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