

I'm Not Crazy! Mental Health Week and Protective Choices!

"Hold on! Feeling like I'm headed for a breakdown and I don't know why? But I'm not crazy, I'm just a little unwell, I know right now you can't tell..."

Well, so wrote the band, Matchbox 20, nearly a decade ago.

The song kind of rings true, in more ways than one, for a growing number of our community struggling with the complexities of 21st century living and some of the attending dysfunctions that our ever burgeoning 'technocracy' leads us into.

There are reasons why stress, anxiety and depression present, and some of those sources/origins can be amplified by our obsessive 'screen culture'; not just content, but mechanism too.

[The 20th Century Blues: The Evolution of Despair](#) was the title of Time Magazine expose on the emerging mental health crisis engulfing the first world west, as far back as 1995. They noted that one of the key drivers for this decline was 'social isolation'. What's concerning is that while our 'screen culture' gives us greater digital connection, it often diminishes our human one, and this disconnection of healthy and meaningful human interaction is one factor contributing to our mental health decline.

There is one thing that is often not clearly understood, and it is that good mental health has very little to do with the idea of 'feeling happy'. Whilst 'happiness' can be a wonderful by-product in life, it really should never be made a destination. Those who attempt to make it that, always fall short and then stress over not attaining the 'state' they hoped for. This of course, only adds to the elements that make us less 'happy' and further push us to the longing to find that seemingly elusive state that we have believed can only found in a 'feeling'!

What we need are states that go beyond mere mood, urge, taste or symptom, places that really enrich us. Such are found in satisfaction, fulfilment and joy, and these come with and from elements like meaning, purpose, significance, good caring relationships and sustainable values; these are vital elements which assist in experiencing the psycho-social wellness that eludes more and more Australians.

The renowned psychologist Rollo May stated; *"a person can meet anxiety to the extent that their values are stronger than the threat,"* and this is so important in today's eclectic culture. When we are confused about 'values', have multiple 'paths' on which to travel, but no compass or map to guide us, we can have trouble making

sense of the world, and consequently we can often simply try to 'self-medicate' these difficult spaces with substances, and all too often we are prompted by an ever vociferous 'stoner-sector' that the choice to use [Cannabis](#) to self-medicate will be a 'safe choice'!

This, among many dangerous 'downplaying' mantras could not be further from the truth.

Today's modified plant is incredibly [harmful for your mental and emotional well-being](#). However, that message is lost in our heavy 'online' propagandized arena, even though there are over 30,000 evidence-based articles on the inherent physical, psychological, familial, environmental and community harms of this not so '[harmless](#)' illicit drug.

However, it is this choice (and it is a choice) of drug use, that will not only **further undermine your mental health and well-being, but may prove your [undoing](#)!** Our short and more importantly, long-term mental health outcome, will continue to be influenced by your choices today. Choosing alcohol or other drugs to try and shortcut your way to 'happiness'; or simply short-cut your way out of sadness or meaninglessness or loneliness or emotional pain, are much worse than '*not helpful*' – and YOU are worth much more than what this self-sabotaging mechanism promises.

Of course, this choice ultimately fails not only us (the individual) but almost always causes grief to those around us too. To quote Australia's leading Cultural Anthropologists, Dr K.J. Smith, '*our culture of thrills and pills may make us feel better, but we are only getting worse.*'

This year, empower your mental and emotional well-being potential by 'unplugging' the screen, connecting with those around you in a meaningful way, and staying drug free.

Shane Varcoe, Dalgarno Institute www.nobrainier.org.au

