

Women, where are you on your own to-do list?

BY RHONDA RABOW, FREELANCE AUGUST 16, 2010

We, as women, are brought up to be nurturers, to take care of everyone else.

We are so good at reminding our spouse or boyfriend to call his mother on her birthday, get the perfect gift for his boss, and don't forget to remind him about doctor appointments. We tell our children to believe in themselves, speak up for themselves and hold their heads up high. My question is, who does that for us?

In my private practice, I see some wonderful, caring women who are so stressed, overwhelmed and burned out. Why is that? Maybe part of the answer is the expectation society puts on women, and we, as women, accept it.

We are taught to give and give, to nurture, love and protect. The other message we receive is that by neglecting ourselves we are being unselfish. This is seen as positive.

On the other hand, if we ask, "What about me?" we are called selfish and ungrateful. Well, I have news for you, ladies: they are wrong. It is not selfish to take care of yourself, it is actually healthy. It's also a myth that you can empower your children and have them feel self-confident, when you deny yourselves the things that nurture you. Children follow the example of what you do, how you act, and how you treat yourself, not what you say.

High self-esteem and self-confidence, unfortunately, does not come automatically with birth; it has to be taught. Unless you were one of the few fortunate ones who had parents who knew and practised unconditional love and support, you were probably raised by parents who did the best they could, coming from their own childhood of criticism and negativity.

That is where empowerment comes in. The time is now to work on feeling empowered. Many ask me what I mean by being empowered? I am talking about self-confidence, of course, but more than that, it is knowing that we can handle it. We know, in our hearts, not just our heads, that we can handle whatever life throws at us. This feeling of empowerment is the opposite feeling of powerlessness and contrary to feeling like a victim or a martyr. It comes from having been through very tough times, and coming out, not only a survivor but victorious and now resilient. Empowerment is something we all deserve to feel. It makes us redefine life. We start seeing obstacles as challenges. We see failures as learning experiences, and fear of the unknown, which used to paralyze us, is now approached with determination and the knowledge that we can survive and succeed. We know we have the skills, the capabilities and the belief that nothing can stop us now.

There are skills we can use to get our needs met and take back power, including:

- Learning how to assert themselves.
- Setting limits.
- Learning how to say "no" without feeling guilty.

- Prioritizing time for themselves.
- Having the courage to take calculated risks.

These accomplishments will raise self-esteem and alleviate feelings such as depression, anxiety, feeling powerless or feeling stuck. It is more than just being positive, it is a conscious decision to take back control over your life and refusing to give anyone or anything the power to make you doubt your self-worth or capabilities.

There are many ways to become empowered. Counselling is just one avenue, but women can also help themselves by joining assertiveness support groups, reading self-help books and having friendships with positive-minded people. Just think how coming to this knowing and belief can inspire your children, partner and friends. Just imagine the ramifications you will have in your life, when you are feeling empowered and have learned to dance with life rather than feel victimized by it.

This is a choice you make with every thought and every action. This is your life -own it and be proud!

Rhonda Rabow is a psychotherapist in Montreal. Her website is www.helpmerhonda.ca. To receive her free monthly newsletter, go to www.rhondarabow.com or email her at RERabow@aol.com or call 514-626-4609.