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The Seven Keys to Wellness

1. **Empathy -** for self and others. With others, being able to truly listen and display the ability to imagine oneself in their situation; and in return; choose to be vulnerable and open with those who similarly empathize with you. Self-empathy includes loving oneself whether one is succeeding or failing at any moment in time. Empathy for self also critically includes never empathizing with another at the expense of your own self-empathy. For example, if engaging in empathic communication and behavior toward others causes negative effects on one's mental or physical health, and one loses healthy boundaries with others, then one needs to heed to the needs of the self and not engage in that communication or behavior. In other words, if one engages in empathic communication or behaviors with others at the expense of one's self-empathy and overall wellness, then one's empathy for others at one's expense cancels out the empathic efforts all together. Thinking of it as a simple math problem (Empathy for another minus Self Empathy equals "0" empathy) is a helpful way to be mindful of the need to be equally empathetic toward self and others.

2. **Acceptance -** for self and others. Acceptance of both one's and others' limitations and strengths, such that, when weaknesses are illuminated, that one's appreciation for self or others does not wane. Acceptance about the difficulties inevitable in life, and acceptance of the transitory nature of all things, especially regarding the stages of life; from infancy to old age, and the inevitable decline in one's physical capabilities as we go through the aging process. Acceptance also includes letting go of objects, activities, persons, and situations that are toxic to one's physical and mental health.

3. **Boundaries -** for self and others. Being aware of self needs, wants and expectations, and effectively communicating and acting in a way that honors one's boundaries that contribute to healthy speech, behaviors, and activities. Setting clear boundaries with individuals that disrespect one's efforts for healthy living. Being able to honestly appraise effective boundaries regarding use of substances, and other forms of consumption, particularly as individuals are inundated with temptations in our electronically obsessed and materialistic society, in which individuals have instantaneous access to materials. Creating healthy boundaries which protect oneself from indulging in unhealthy habits or addictions regarding seeking pleasure at the expense of a healthy lifestyle such as

compulsive spending, sexual stimulation, as well as compulsive use of electronic devices including social media, and video gaming. Effective boundary setting includes setting kind and firm social boundaries such that one maintains their lifestyle choices in spite of others' opinions. For example, when grandparents visit your home, effective boundary setting includes being able to express your expectations as a parent regarding limit setting for your children such that grandparents do not undermine your parenting authority.

4. **Balance -** between optimism and appreciation for self and other, and pessimism and criticism, of self and other; between pleasure for just pleasure's sake and productivity to achieve specific life goals. Balance between love for self and love for others, in which a heathy give and take and compromise is achieved. Balance between work and play, between seriousness and playfulness, and between spontaneity and planning ahead. Balance with regard to restorative sleep patterns, whole food-based nutrition, and consistent aerobic/cardiovascular exercise to maximize physical and mental health. Balance between engaging in outdoor and indoor activities, and sedentary and physical activities. Balance between alone time and social time, such that one is able to be awake to one's hopes, and aspirations, both separate from others, and in collaboration with others. Balance is also crucial when offered opportunities for flexibility versus rigidity, where flexibility is needed when facing change, and flexibility is needed to succeed with new ways of coping, and accepting letting go of old patterns, opening oneself up for more healthy ways of living under ever changing circumstances.

5. **Passion -** Finding relationships, activities, career, hobbies, or courses of study that bring joy to self, others, and betters society, whether the passion is demonstrated through a loving hug, engaging in an activity that creates a beautiful garden, volunteering to pick up liter at the beach, or performing the simple task of pleasing another, whether through words or deeds.

6. **Mindfulness -** Living in the present moment; appreciating the preciousness of being alive, and of each breath we take, moment by moment. Being mindful of one's thoughts, feelings, and physical needs and experiences, and seeking understanding and appreciation of others' thoughts, feelings, and physical needs. Mindfulness includes awareness of the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of self and others**.**

7. **True Self -** Communicating in a non-violent, emotionally intelligent way, one's true thoughts and feelings, irrespective of other's beliefs, desires, or agendas, and then acting in a way that is congruent with those thoughts and feelings. Being brave expressing one's true self, and not letting fear of rejection get in the way of one's expression and actions that are consistent with their true self.