

Intentional Self-Discovery

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*“And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” —Antoine De Saint Exupéry, *The Little Prince* (1943)*

Ongoing and intentional self-discovery and reflection are at the core of every form of self-care (AHNA & ANA, 2013). It is through these actions that we learn new patterns of connection. We translate our care of others by paying attention to our own physical bodies, thoughts, beliefs and emotional responses as well as how we connect to others and the world.

Self-care is an adventure of the heart and a journey of courage to openly examine ourselves beyond what our senses experience. This process of self-care through self-discovery connects us to the deepest workings of the heart allowing us to see beyond what is visible to the physical eye. Courage allows us to become

aware of the essential acts of listening to ourselves with compassion, finding meaning in our actions, understanding our beliefs, intentionally being present, and embracing all aspects of ourselves. This intentional self-discovery allows us to engage in the act of growing into ourselves and our role as Holistic Nurses.

As we live our lives, we engage in a variety of activities. These include activities that

- nurture our physical bodies,
- provide propriety and balance in experiencing and expressing our emotions,
- connect us to others, and
- build our cognitive competencies by challenging our mental models.

Self-care begins when we commit to a “time-in” for self-discovery during our daily activities (Clarke, 1999, p. 218). In contrast to a time-out or something that is separate from our regular routines, a time-in for self-discovery occurs as part of our daily lives and does not require consistent practice or a scheduled occasion. It can be done anytime, anywhere.

Intentional self-discovery, as a self-care activity, is a cooperative journey that starts with connection to *self*. It is being present with self and also allowing opportunities for an “actual caring occasion” with self (Watson, 2007, p.58). Courage to allow my authentic self to be visible has created the potential of actual caring occasions. I have come to

Tips for Intentional Self-Discovery & “Time-In”

1. Be Present in the moment.
2. Be Human. Being perfect is stressful and being human allows you to learn through acknowledging when you could have acted better.
3. Be a Witness to your Actions. This information is a window to the different parts of who you have been and what patterns you use through habit. Habits can be changed. Allow yourself to become aware of what or who triggers you. Be the witness of your behavior and ask yourself, “Does this action honor who I am?” Act thoughtfully and consciously and take time to think before you act.
4. Be Humble. You are your best teacher. Be willing to also be the student, practicing compassion first with self. Self-compassion naturally translates into compassion for others. Be willing to make amends to yourself and then to others by not repeating the same action. Ask for support and be willing to accept it.

this understanding of self-care through my own adventure into living Holistic Nursing principles, values and standards. I did not arrive here on my own, nor was it a straight path. Many unknowing teachers and unplanned experiences supported me in this journey.

Over the last year, I have been honored to teach the first Holistic Nursing course in a program for RNs completing their BSN. While preparing for the class, I set my intention to provide opportunities for each student to find personal meaning in the standards of care and to begin translating Holistic Nursing competencies as part of their own self-care during eight weeks of self-discovery. I utilized the theories of Newman, Watson, Rogers and Erickson

in the creation of exercises that were intended to challenge their beliefs, deepen their connection to each other and their environment, and expand their consciousness of health, their role as nurses, their actions, and their emotions (Dossey & Keegan, 2013). I wanted the standards, core values and principles of Holistic Nursing to come alive for the students, while addressing all aspects of the course holistically.

At the end of the eight weeks, the students wrote a personal Nursing Oath that would guide their own nursing practice as they moved forward. All the students translated their experience of self-discovery into a personally meaningful, theoretically supported, and compassionate oath. One student

I PLEDGE...by Laura Lawson

I pledge to not just hear you but listen to you.

I pledge to not just physically be in the room with you but physically, mentally, emotionally and energetically be with you no matter our geographic location.

I pledge to emphasize—not sympathize on your path to healing.

I pledge not to accept you despite you. I pledge to accept you for you, because you are you.

Finally, I pledge not to be your healer but to promote your belief in yourself to heal.

indicated that this course was not what she had expected, but it was one she would always remember. She wrote an oath that touched the very essence of intentional self-discovery (see “I Pledge” below).

The journey of intentional self-discovery, which leads to caring for others, requires courage and a willingness to be challenged. Once aware, there is only moving forward...

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