

Counseling Corner

Do You Feel That You Matter?

from the American Counseling Association

Most of us have never heard the term "mattering" as used by professional counselors, but it's a concept that's important to all of us. It simply means feeling needed by others.

As individuals, we all want to feel that we matter to others. We need others to pay attention to us, take interest in us, consider us important and care about what we think and do. When we perceive that we don't matter, it can have a profoundly negative effect on our self-esteem and how we interact with others.

Mental health professionals usually break "mattering" up into four levels. The first is "Attention," the most basic level of mattering which occurs when we feel we have the interest or notice of another person. The "Importance" level is stronger since it is when we believe we are not just noticed, but actually important to the other person.

When the term "Dependence" is used, it describes the notion that we are part of society not only because of our dependence on others, but also by their dependence on us. And at the "Ego Extension" level we believe others are actively interested in our successes and disappointments.

It's easy to see how these levels of mattering can make us feel good about ourselves, but it's important to note that mattering is a perception. It's what we believe about how much we matter to others. And as a perception, it may not always be in line with how others actually think about us.

A friend forgets your birthday; a dinner date is canceled at the last minute; you don't receive an expected party invitation. It can be shocking and depressing to learn that you really didn't matter as much as you thought you had. However, in most cases, the negative feelings that such awareness brings are quick to pass.

But there may be more serious events... the loss of a job... the end of a romantic relationship... when that sense of not mattering is strong and has a lasting, depressing effect on a person's life. That's the time to contact a professional counselor. Counseling can help correct and strengthen perceptions about mattering, giving someone a better perspective on his or her relationships.

Mattering is a critical human need. Feeling that you fit meaningfully into a bigger picture helps lend meaning to your life. We all need to know that we matter to others.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association.
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