

But Don't I Have a Right to be Happy?

How many times have you or I heard this question? Yes, this seems far afield from my previous contributions, e.g. inverse agonists, autoreceptors, etc. And it is! But since we are in the business of mental health and since this seems to be a growth industry in spite of the billions of dollars spent in efforts to eradicate poor mental health, I think it to be a fair topic.

The short answer is no! You nor I have a right to happiness. In fact, as I look around, happiness is hard to come by. About 3500 years ago the patriarch Job said, “Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble.” I think he got it about right. Mark Anthony, about 1500 years later (according to Shakespeare anyway) said, “The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But in ourselves...” The stars cannot explain all the selfish things people have done and all the bystanders (e.g. kids) that have been hurt in deference to the right to happiness.

Of course, perhaps the bigger question is whether one needs to be happy to have mental health. Or conversely, is unhappiness something that needs to be “treated”? The answers are “no” and “no”.

In our world of endless distractions... (excuse me, my cell phone beeped)- where was I? In our world of endless distractions, sometimes it is hard to recognize what we are feeling at all. Since, I have thrown out a few quotes, perhaps one more can be excused. In the mid 1600's the great mathematician, Blaise Pascal said, “All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” Wow! I am sure that Pascal could not imagine our distractions today but, truthfully, I cannot imagine what kind of distractions existed in the 1660's to provoke such a quote. But think about his insight anyway. Are you (or am I) able to sit in a room alone-quietly? Recently someone told me about a book entitled Entertained to Death, but I cannot find it so perhaps they were wrong or I misheard. Either way, I mention it because I think the idea is right on target. We are losing something of mental health value in our culture by the ‘inability to sit quietly in a room alone.’

I could go on and on but this is meant to be a brief essay. So I will stop. No, people don't have the right to be happy. Furthermore, you also are not always entitled to your opinion. If you don't believe me, read Leah Curtin's article in May's American Nurse Today entitled, “You're Not Necessarily Entitled to Your Opinion”. It is another cliche that needed unraveling a bit.

In summary, you don't have a right to happiness and you are not necessarily entitled to your opinion either. I hope you feel better now.