



## Stuffed Emotions Don't Die – They Multiply!

By Trudy M. Johnson, M.A., LMFT

Americans love stuff. They rent storage units so they can stuff their stuff. Storage sheds full of stuff is a good visual of the internal. We are stuffers and that stuffing often includes emotional stuffing.

As I work with clients on a daily basis, I am often amazed at how much fear is involved in showing emotion. Granted some people go the other way and completely out of control with their emotions. However, numerous others are entirely out of touch with how they feel. You can tell a person is in this situation because when you ask them the typical therapist question, "And how did *that* make you feel?" there will be a long pause. Uhhh....ummmm...truly the thought of putting emotion to an event is almost impossible for them.

This process can be very frustrating when a person's spouse tends to be very in-tune with their emotions. They know exactly how they feel at all times. When an inquiry into what their partner is feeling brings a blank stare, there can be a complete break-down of communication. My common answer to help the aggravated partner understand what's happening inside their loved one's heart is, "when he/she tells you they don't know how they feel they are telling the truth. They truly *don't know* how they feel."

Typically, a person who stuffs will respond to any situation requiring emotions in one or two ways. They will give you the one emotion that our culture allows us to show: anger. However, anger is not the real emotion they are feeling. It is just the emotion that we are allowed to express openly. Anger is really about hurt, unmet expectations or other pain. If a stuffer doesn't show you openly expressed anger, they will just push the anger down inside and do what they do so well...stuff it!

The problem is that stuffing doesn't stop the emotion. Stuffed emotions don't get buried. Truly, stuffed emotions multiply. They become stronger and more powerful. Stuffing emotions over the long haul will eventually cause your body to break down. You can only carry so much emotion on the inside. Pretty soon your internal systems will start responding to the heavy load you are forcing them to carry.

If you are a stuffer, please know that this information is coming your way via divine providence. It is time to step back and start finding new ways to identify and process your emotions. Emotions don't

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have to be scary when you learn better ways to get in touch with them. Emotions are just like the light on the dashboard of the car. They serve the purpose of letting you know that “something under the hood” needs looked at. You can take out the fuse so the light doesn’t go on, but that doesn’t stop the damage to the inside that could possibly happen if you drive on down the road ignoring the warning signal.

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