

Are You Able to Say, "No"?

People's illness, including cancer, can have secondary gains, which may directly contribute to the onset or duration of the medical condition. I remember working at the Simonton Cancer Center and being surprised at first when Dr. Simonton would ask patients, "What is a benefit of cancer? What important needs are being met through your having cancer?" And a common answer was that cancer allowed them to say, "No."

This reminded me of a study with AIDS patients. Often when we study illness, we try to figure out why people get sick instead of looking at people who have done well and why they're healthier. In this AIDS study, they took a group of patients who had fared much better than the norm, and wondered if there were any psychological factors that could explain why they were healthier. The only factor that stood out was that the group who was doing better had a greater ability to say, "No." "Can you refuse an unwanted favor?" was the only question that predicted a better outcome. This was related to a general belief: "I'm worth taking care of."

This helped to strengthen my rationale for not only doing more of what you really want to do (Go fishing!), but to do less of what you really don't want to do. What you think? Are you able to say, "No?" And meet your own needs in balance with caring for others?

Excerpted from *Why Love Heals* by Dean Shrock, Ph.D.