

Learn joy from puddle jumping and shrieking

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This past week I watched a toddler, complete with pink crocs, shrieking with joy as she stomped and splashed in a puddle at the end of my driveway. It was that automatic, natural behavior that characterizes children world-wide. It defines us as a species. Her parents and I just observed and smiled.

When was the last time you jumped into a puddle of water left after a night-time rain? Maybe 6 or 7, the age when our cognitive processing kicks in and says, "I don't want dirty, wet feet." Or maybe as old as 13, if you're a boy, and you wanted to splash some girl you were secretly interested in, just to hear her shriek and see that feigned, huffy irritation, that only 13 year old girls are so skilled at. I think we like to shriek and listen to others shriek. It makes us smile. There must be a primal, joyful and timeless quality inherent in puddle jumping and shrieking.

I also remember when primal scream therapy was in vogue and I had my counseling graduate students take a field trip to the country so we could all practice screaming at the top of our lungs. The idea was that if we were angry, harbored grievances or grudges, the screaming would be cleansing, empowering and ultimately healing. Did it work? Yes, at least for that day. But we also found, after continuing the screaming, that any angry tears were soon turned into raucous laughter. I think the laughter was the most healing. It's interesting how our perceptions can change in a flash, just like children's, from anger to joy.

Test it out yourself. Go outside in your yard, take a walk on the beach or a boat ride, or stay inside, if your neighbors might be disturbed or wonder if you've truly lost your marbles. Then, picture some irritating, angry situation. (As you know, I don't think others make us angry; our emotions are our interpretations of events.) Now scream and scream and scream! Get your family or your neighbors to shriek with you. You really don't need to have a puddle of water. Keep taking deep breaths and scream some more. Any awkwardness will soon fade.

If you don't want to shriek and scream out loud, just close your eyes and imagine doing it. You don't even have to be angry to feel a release. However, if you can picture a recent situation that triggered anger, scream it out in your mind, until you feel a smile or perhaps even a small laugh.

Then ask yourself if you felt any of the following to be true.

- It feels good to exercise my lungs.
- It feels good not to think, not to be contained.
- My body relaxes after letting go.
- My emotions are flexible and I can change them.

- My perceptions are flexible and I can change them.
- I can escape my adult conditioning.
- It can be healing to be child-like at times.

With this new experience, even if you just imagined it, the next time you see a child jumping in a puddle, you may smile. You have now just conditioned a new emotional response. We can let go of grievances. We can increase our awareness of situations that make us happy. We can choose to live joyful, joyous lives.