

Getting Through our Long Winter

As we enter into Term 3, the days are becoming a little longer but the cold mornings and evenings are still with us and long summer nights still seem a long way off.

You may be aware we have both recently had some extended leave. We have now returned to work, refreshed from our travels and would like to share a cultural treasure encountered while we were away. It is a little more philosophy than psychology this week, but it is a good message.

Some of you may have already heard of the Danish concept of 'hygge'; the philosophy that helps the Danes get through the long dark days of winter and remain one of the happiest peoples on the planet.

Hygge is a difficult concept to describe, as no equivalent word exists in the English language. A quick search of Wikipedia tells us:

'A FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF DANISH CULTURE IS "HYGGE". HYGGE, MEANING "SNUG", IS A CONCEPT THAT EVOKES "COSINESS", PARTICULARLY WHEN RELAXING WITH GOOD FRIENDS OR LOVED ONES AND WHILE ENJOYING GOOD FOOD. CHRISTMAS TIME IS A TRUE MOMENT OF HYGGE, AS IS GRILLING A DANISH SAUSAGE AND DRINKING A BEER ON A LONG SUMMER EVENING. IT IS SUSPECTED THE CONCEPT OF HYGGE IS PART OF THE REASON DANES AND OTHER SCANDINAVIANS SCORE HIGH ON HAPPINESS.'

According to the website <http://hyggehouse.com>:

'HYGGE (PRONOUNCED HUE-GUH NOT HOO-GAH) IS A DANISH WORD USED WHEN ACKNOWLEDGING A FEELING OR MOMENT, WHETHER ALONE OR WITH FRIENDS, AT HOME OR OUT, ORDINARY OR EXTRAORDINARY AS COSY, CHARMING OR SPECIAL.'

Hygge is neither deep nor challenging, in fact, simplicity is an important component. We thought you might be interested to learn about hygge and maybe even look for ways to bring some into your family life.

The beauty of hygge is that it doesn't require you to buy anything, or even to learn 'how to do it'. You don't have to change your house or eat special foods. It is simply a way of being. It is about slowing down a little and taking pleasure in the moment, in what you are doing ... especially when you are with family and friends. It is about being present with each other, a kind of mindfulness if you like, in a more intimate way.

The Danish people do not have ownership of enjoying being with family and friends, but they have certainly made it an art form, given it a name and provided us with a few tips on how to achieve it in our own homes.

I guess feeling cosy, content and secure with your loved ones in a warm, familiar and comfortable home is an attractive proposition for keeping spirits lifted when faced with the long dark days of winter in the north of Europe. Indeed the Danes actually practise hygge 365 days of the year.

We are not Danish, and certainly not hygge experts, but so much of what is hygge we have talked about in our articles before; rituals, family meals, kindness, stress reduction, family togetherness and fun.

So, what might the Danish do to generate this undefinable feeling of hygge? Anything really. They turn everyday activities from routine tasks into enjoyable rituals. For example, making tea in a china pot, lighting a candle to create atmosphere when sitting down to enjoy that afternoon coffee or the evening meal, picking or buying fresh flowers for the house each week, hanging colourful towels in the bathroom, baking a cake, or turning domestic tasks into a pleasurable art form.

Are family meals a stressful event at your house, whether that involves getting people to the table, or sorting family disputes? Does the sound of sitting with the family for the evening meal, lighting a candle, turning off the television, phones away, creating positive and friendly conversation (i.e. no talk about disagreements, homework, work or tests), seem desirable but 'mission impossible'? Change to family habit and routine is often difficult to implement but may work if introduced, say one or two nights a week. Better late than never, and all rituals have to start somewhere.

You might like to try lighting some candles, sitting around the fire with woolly socks or ugg boots on, and sharing an evening hot chocolate together as you discuss the big and small things of life with the family. Have a jigsaw puzzle on the go, read to your children for pleasure, talk to them about your life growing up, let them in on a few of your secrets. Build bonds. Connect.

We hear the collective mutter of, 'Ain't nobody got time for dat', but finding and valuing the time to spend together is the very essence of hygge. If achieving this stuff creates stress, then it's not hygge. Relaxing into it and enjoying each other – that's hygge.

Summertime hygge might involve evening walks (to the icecream shop), family bike rides, picnics at the park or beach and family barbecues.

We all worry about the amount of time our children spend on their devices. Provide them with a desirable alternative, such as the luxury of being with you doing something simple and enjoyable together. It doesn't have to cost a cent. 'In this moment are all here together and all is well' ... what a wonderful, safe message.

Don't over think it, and don't take our word for it either. This is just a simple introduction to the concept of hygge. Do some research and create your own hygge. It's good.

The following websites were referenced in the development of this article:

<http://www.visitdenmark.com/hygge>

<http://hyggehouse.com>

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