



# LUKENOTES

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## Spontaneity and Health

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*Spontaneity is an adequate response to a new situation or a creative response to a known situation. J. L. Moreno.*

There are many ways to understand hurting persons and how they cope with life. One possibility is to frame their difficulties as resulting from a lack of spontaneity. Some individuals are not able to come up with an adequate response to the challenges presented to them, whether in day-to-day living or in times of crisis. Often their solutions are temporary and include such dysfunctional behaviors as angry outbursts, exploitive relationships, and using alcohol or other mind-altering substances or processes. When asked to explain their problematic behaviors, individuals will frequently identify needs or wants, often relational in nature, which were not being met in an effective or appropriate manner. They mistakenly excuse themselves by saying, "I was being spontaneous." Rather than responding creatively or adequately, the individual actually exhibits impulsive behaviors that all too often backfire, causing harm to self and others.

For a model of spontaneity in action, we merely need to observe children. For them, life is a series of new adventures and experiences. Each challenge demands a response and frequently a child will devise a solution that is sufficient and self-satisfying. It is important to note that this initial spontaneity can easily be damaged or inhibited. How many parents show enthusiasm when their child's most recent artwork is crayoned onto the walls? When children are raised in dysfunctional or violent families, their only semblance of safety is through rigid control and adherence to rules which offer little support for a spontaneous response.

### True Spontaneity

One of the best ways to understand spontaneity is to examine these five characteristics: consistency, connection, compensation, creativity and contemporaneity.

**Consistency:** Consistency does not refer to rigidity, or adhering to a restricted plan of action. Rather, it refers to an individual holding certain qualities or characteristics as core values independent of sudden shifts in his or her environment. During times of stress or conflict, we tend to return to what is familiar. An individual's priorities offer a template for choosing an action in the moment based on what was learned through both past successes and failures. A consistent person is not swayed by external dynamics and does not react to needs in the moment without considering them within a context.

**Connection:** Who we are is strongly determined by those with whom we are in relationship. A healthy spontaneous response generally emerges from being in supportive relationships. The health of the person's support group, friends, work colleagues, and community can be a springboard to developing adequate responses. Conversely, one's relationships may lead a person to fall into patterns of failure. Collaborating with others is often one means by which we uncover a new insight or recognize a new way to better accomplish a familiar task. Fostering relationships that are mutual will be essential to developing a more spontaneous response pattern. It is important to examine relationships for unhealthy dependency, trying to achieve self-esteem by surrounding oneself with certain individuals, or entrenching oneself with like-minded people so that there is no one present who might suggest an alternative perspective. Spontaneity requires an interdependence that permits us to both give and receive, each in its appropriate time.

**Compensation:** Does a person show flexibility, the capacity to adjust to shifts in his or her own life? In 12-step wisdom, one definition of irrational thinking is to continue the same behaviors but expect a different result. Compensation or flexibility does not necessarily mean a radical shift, but the ability to modify perceptions and behaviors as a given situation evolves. Complementing consistency, compensating allows someone to recognize th

**Creativity:** This capacity to examine an event, behavior, or relationship from an alternative perspective is a sign of good mental health. Individuals frequently develop their coping skills at an early age as a means of adapting to problems within their family of origin. While certain solutions might have been a creative response for a child, they may be much less effective or even destructive when utilized as an adult. For example, a person who as a child had to care for siblings because a parent was ill or alcoholic, may as an adult be a workaholic or engage in pathological care-taking. They may use ministry to avoid personal needs or to mask anger or depression.

**Contemporaneity:** Spontaneity occurs in the present. It is not something that can be planned, as this only leads an individual into adhering to a set pattern. Instead, it is "a readiness of the individual to respond as required." To be able to respond in the immediacy of a situation requires an individual to recognize his thoughts as well as current feelings and to find some point of balance between the two.

Spontaneity is important in recovery. When an individual develops this capacity to generate an adequate response, we can expect a decrease in self-sabotaging behaviors. This will be evident through healthier intimacy in close relationships, a more positive sense of self, and an ability to function with reduced stress. Spontaneity does not attempt to avoid life's difficulties, but opens possibilities for how we can face them.

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