

Presenting the perfect life on social media or just to our friends is a hard habit to break. But revealing the real you can be the key to a happier life

Why vulnerability IS GOOD FOR YOU

OUR EXPERTS



+ Fiona Austin is a counsellor and master practitioner of neuro-linguistic programming, specialising in insomnia, fears and anxiety-related disorders; bmcc.biz



+ Sally Bee is a health and wellbeing coach. She is also the author of *Being the Best You*, a support and treatment plan. sally-bee.com



+ Louise Greidinger is a wellness practitioner whose own admission of vulnerability changed her course in life.

VULNERABILITY – the state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed – can be painful, especially in this competitive world of social media and “Insta” perfection. But it can also be a strength. Here’s how to maximise that power...

Showing it is liberating

Vulnerability is misunderstood: rather than being a weakness it is, instead, a sign of resilience. It’s the ability to face the truth and expose your soul. It’s self-honesty in action – the kind that keeps you from complacency, propels you forward and enables you to grow. “True belonging only happens when

we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world,” says wellness practitioner Louise Greidinger. Be brave enough to say ‘I need help’ when you feel you’re buckling. The wonderful thing with close friends is they’ll rally round. The network is there, you just need to access it. Vulnerability is ultimately rewarding – it empowers and liberates, creating a ripple effect that encourages others to do the same.

DO IT *Have a conversation with yourself. Get familiar with checking in with your feelings regularly. Once this becomes a habit, it’s easier to identify and vocalise anything that feels not quite right. It’s in these moments that we figure out who we are and which of our needs aren’t being met. >>*

2 Create deeper relationships

It's such a strength to know your own mind and it makes life so much less complicated. "Once it's easy to speak about your vulnerabilities, you become more relaxed and your energy is peaceful. You laugh from the heart," says counsellor Fiona Austin. And a profound ability to empathise is infectious. But it's not about oversharing; identifying one person you can talk to honestly has a very positive effect. Nothing makes us as happy as a true and deep connection.

DO IT Write a love letter to yourself and include the top 10 points of your personality, talents and skills. Then ask your partner, close friends and kids to add theirs. It helps see yourself through others' eyes. Make sure you keep what you've written. If you have a wobble, a bad day or are experiencing a stressful period, it will remind you that you will feel OK again.

3 Try to spot vulnerability in others

You can't teach anyone else how important honesty is unless you are practising it yourself. Only then can you spread the word of kindness by sharing. Women, in particular, are intrinsically good at this. Acts of kind-heartedness remind us what matters and is important in life. Once you become the one who is no longer "frightened", you'll find people want to be around you and are naturally drawn to you because you make them feel good about themselves. For maximum effect, be sure you practise it at work, as well as in your home life.

DO IT Think of a time when someone exposed their vulnerable side to you, and how it enriched your relationship. That is a very personal gift, one that can make us truly happy.

4 Identify what makes you uncomfortable

"Listen to any anxiety," explains Austin. "That sense of unease within needs to be identified, processed and vocalised, or written down."

Instead, we tend to block or bury uncomfortable feelings of perceived inadequacies. For example, you may say or think: "I was a rubbish mum today and shouted at the kids"; "I should have told my boss I need a pay rise"; "I really need help, I'm feeling depressed." We all have these inner voices. When we feel stressed, we tend to push them away. We want

to numb our feelings and comfort ourselves. We eat more, drink more, work harder in order to create distraction. "The front door of vulnerability is fear, so get comfortable with it," adds Austin. Practise listening and then addressing needs head-on, or with the help of a friend. A daily practice of honesty about how you feel, why you have those feelings, and your capacity to process them is a skill worth developing.

DO IT This exercise sounds a bit touchy-feely but packs a powerful emotional punch. Put your hand on your heart, stare at yourself in the mirror and ask, "Why am I anxious?" And listen for the real answer. After all, it's only yourself you'd be lying to.

"Once you start being true to yourself, you will attract people who value you because they feel utterly secure in your honesty"

5 Put your own needs first

"As a species, we have to be survivors, so showing vulnerability is the same as asking for help, which can be difficult," says health and wellbeing coach Sally Bee. There's

also the issue of women being notoriously good at putting themselves last. In truth, you cannot be there for anyone else unless you put your needs first. Even if feelings of vulnerability are painful, lean into that emotion until the hurt turns to understanding, acceptance and wisdom. Once you start being true to yourself, you will attract people who value you because they feel utterly secure in your honesty.

Take a leaf out of talk-show host and acclaimed actress Oprah Winfrey's book. The queen of the confessional, Oprah talks openly about her weight

battles, relationships, losing a child, and physical and emotional abuse. These were all taboo subjects until she made the unspeakable relatable and, by sharing her own vulnerabilities, opened up a safe place for others to articulate and accept theirs.

DO IT Keep an honesty "thoughts and feelings" diary, suggests Bee. When things are going well, we don't feel the need to write it down, but when the chips are down, it's cathartic to offload. It can be hard reading back and reflecting on how you felt, but it will stop you becoming complacent. It might sound unlikely, but when things are fine you can end up in a danger zone because you're more likely to go with the flow, rather than being mindful and proactive in achieving your goals. The hungrier you are, the more creative you'll be with your life.

READ MORE Try Dr Brené Brown's excellent books on vulnerability: *The Gifts of Imperfection* (Hazelden), *Daring Greatly* (Penguin), *Rising Strong* (Ebury), and *Braving the Wilderness* (Vermillion). **w&h**

