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Article Last Updated:

Monday, October 21, 2002 - 4:47:43 PM MST

Kids, you can try this at home

By Barry Caine - STAFF WRITER

In her cinematherapy brochure, psychotherapist Birgit Wolz writes, ``Watching movies at home ... serves as a bridge between therapy and life."

Here are her tips for crossing that bridge.

First, choose a movie that matches your goal - laughter, crying, communication, hope or understanding, or overcoming negative beliefs. Then, sit comfortably and relax. Pay attention to your body and your breath. Don't judge. Don't analyze while you watch.

- The rationale for watching a movie that makes you laugh: Laughter can help you decrease stress and make you feel better, Wolz says. It can also help you step back from your problems, see them more objectively, and, perhaps, find a fresh perspective.

Wolz's recommendations include ``Annie Hall," ``The Associate," ``Babe," ``The First Wives Club," ``A Fish Called Wanda," ``Four Weddings and a Funeral," ``Fried Green Tomatoes," ``The Full Monty," ``Home for the Holidays," ``Mother," ``Sister Act" and ``The Truth About Cats and Dogs."

- Crying for an emotional catharsis: A good cry can lift your spirits for a while and let you view the source of your pain from a different perspective, Wolz says. Then emotional healing can begin.

Her recommendations include ``An Affair to Remember," ``The Color Purple," ``Doctor Zhivago," ``Joy Luck Club," ``My Left Foot," ``Little Women," ``Love Story," ``Philadelphia," ``Rain Man," ``Shadowlands," ``Steel Magnolias," ``Terms of Endearment" and ``Welcome to the Dollhouse."

- Gaining hope and encouragement: Movies starting in despair and ending in triumph can provide hope if you feel momentarily helpless and discouraged, Wolz says. If you can identify with the characters, how they handle their problems may make you optimistic about your own and give you the courage to change the situation that's causing your discomfort.

In ``Field of Dreams," for instance, the character played by Kevin Costner was in financial crisis, ``about to lose everything, but he trusted his intuition

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and that guidance leads him to the right outcome," Wolz says. "He faces the challenge. His wife was scared and said give it up. He was about to sell (the farm), but inner guidance, a deeper strength, kept him going."

Other choices: "Chariots of Fire," "Do the Right Thing," "Forrest Gump," "Gandhi," "Gattaca," "Jonathan Livingston Seagull," "Life is Beautiful" and "The Shawshank Redemption."

- Questioning negative beliefs about yourself and rediscovering your strengths: An example of a negative belief is when somebody believes he or she is worthless or inadequate to handle a difficult situation. Wolz suggests you let yourself identify with the characters who have ups and downs, then reflect on the movie by yourself, or with a therapist or a friend, and ask - do I discount the skills and strengths that I have in common with the movie characters?"

Her suggestions include "Erin Brockovich" - to overcome negative thinking such as "I am too weak and I cannot make a difference" - "Dead Poets Society," "My Left Foot" and "Mr. Holland's Opus."

- Improving communications with your partner or friend: Movies can help you understand what's causing a strain in your relationship, by acting as metaphors that might more accurately represent the feelings and ideas you cannot always put into words," she says. "Choose a film with the message you want to convey to your partner," then watch it together and explain why you chose it. That might get you talking.

Her recommendations include "About Last Night," "The Brothers McMullen," "The Four Seasons," "Husbands and Wives," "He Said, She Said," "The Horse Whisperer," "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge," "Nine Months," "Scenes from a Marriage," "Tender Mercies" and "When a Man Loves a Woman."

Afterward, think about whether your breathing changed during the film, and if that could be an indication that something threw you off-balance," Wolz says. "In all likelihood, what affects you in the film is similar to whatever unbalances you in your daily life."

Notice what you liked and didn't like about the film and its characters.

Ask yourself if you identified with one or more characters.

Think about whether any part of the film was particularly hard to watch. If so, could this be related to something you might have repressed?" she says. "Uncovering repressed aspects of our psyche can free up positive qualities and uncover our true, authentic self."

Wolz recommends writing down your responses.

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