

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

What Are Your Dreams Trying To Tell You?

from the American Counseling Association

When you wake up each morning do you remember your dreams in vivid detail? Or do you rarely, if ever, recall a dream? Whichever the case, researchers tell us that we all do dream, every night. In fact, they've found even primates and unborn human fetuses dream.

There have been many misconceptions about dreams. In ancient times, dreams were thought to be gifts from the gods. More recently, some believed you could die if you dreamt of falling off a cliff and didn't wake before hitting the ground. Or that dreaming was the cause of sleepwalking.

That's all false, but the reality is that scientists still don't know exactly why we dream. One theory is that dreams allow us to act out activities or desires that would not be acceptable in the real world. Whatever the reason for our dreams, there is no question they open a door to our subconscious.

Being able to remember and understand our dreams can often help us to better understand the hidden workings of our mind and possibly enable us to better understand ourselves. But how can you help yourself remember your dreams?

One way is to keep a notebook beside your bed and to record your dreams as soon as you wake up. Or you might dictate a summary of the dreams to your smart phone. Just do it soon after waking because memories of dreams fade fast. It also helps to tell yourself, as you're falling asleep, that you're going to try and remember your dreams.

Remembering dreams is one thing, but figuring out what they might mean can be harder. One place to start is looking for things in your dreams, such as settings, people, animals, colors, that often can represent a part of your personality.

At first, your dreams may appear illogical but interpreting your dreams is like learning a new language. It may take time, but soon you should find that the meaning of your dreams can become clearer.

When dreams seem silly they might actually be signaling something profound. Emotionally-laden dreams, such as nightmares and recurring dreams, often are signals of things we need to learn or change.

There are numerous serious books that can help you better interpret and understand your dreams, although the popular "dream dictionaries" are usually worthless.

In any case, don't just ignore dreams. They really are your subconscious communicating with you.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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