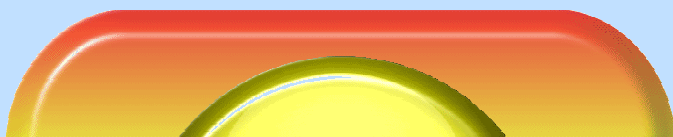


Feeling Better



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Compiled by Dawn R. Pokorney,
The Connection Helpline

FEELING BETTER

Most of us have times when we'd like to feel better about the things that are happening in our lives. Stress is an every day part of life for many people. How we react to the stress has a huge impact on the way we feel. The way we think during each challenging situation can create a positive or negative outcome. It's empowering to realize that no person or situation can *make* us feel bad. We're the ones responsible for our feelings. If we think of something in a negative way, we'll usually feel upset. If we think of it in a positive way, we'll usually feel good about it.

Let's look at an example that illustrates this point. Liz received a message on her answering machine from her doctor's office asking her to call them in the morning. She smiled and thought, "Wow, they must have my lab results already! I think it's a sign that everything's fine!" She felt good all evening and slept like a baby. Carol also received a message to call her doctor's office and immediately felt worried and anxious. She put her head in her hands thinking, "Something must be wrong with me. The blood work was just done yesterday and they're already calling me. What if I have diabetes or cancer? I sure wish I'd signed up for that life insurance policy last month. Now it's probably too late!" She tossed and turned all night and felt exhausted the next morning. Both Liz and Carol received news the next morning that their lab results were perfect. Unfortunately, Carol had a headache and felt exhausted all day from worry and lack of sleep.

Here's another example. The boss stopped by Cathy and Rachel's desks one morning, asking each one to come to her office at the end of the day. Cathy felt excited all day, thinking she was going to get a pay raise. Rachel was afraid that she was going to get fired and felt so upset all day that she could hardly concentrate on her work. At the end of the day they each learned that the boss just wanted

to explain some positive changes in the companies' insurance policy. Cathy went home happy and full of energy, while Rachel felt irritable and was hard to get along with all evening.

A modern French philosopher, Montaigne, said, "A man is hurt not so much by what happens, as by his opinion of what happens." What we do usually depends on how we feel about a particular situation. For instance, a person who is happy may be friendly and talkative. An angry person may treat others with disrespect.

UNDERSTANDING AND CHANGING OUR FEELINGS

Here is a formula designed to help us understand our feelings and to change them, if we so desire.

1. Write down the event that is stimulating an emotion.
2. Write down what we're telling ourselves in regard to the situation.
3. List the feelings or beliefs we're having about the event and the resulting behavior.
4. If we're feeling or acting negative, question the thoughts that are causing the feelings and actions.

Since this formula can help us understand what happens in problem situations, let's look at some examples.

Example 1

1. Event- Your friend criticizes you.
2. What you tell yourself- "She shouldn't have criticized me. I'm right."
3. Feeling/Behavior- Angry, Yelled at friend.
4. Questioning or Disputing the feeling & beliefs- After asking yourself why she was critical you tell

yourself, “She must have been having a bad day. I know her husband has been sick. I’m not going to take it personally.”

Example 2

1. Event- Wife breaks the news that she wants a divorce.
2. What you tell yourself- “I must really be worthless.” “I’ll never find another woman like her.” “She doesn’t want me, so no one else will ever want me.” “This is terrible. Bad things always happen to me.”
3. Feeling/Behavior- Anger and depression.
4. Questioning or Disputing the feelings & beliefs- “Where’s the evidence that I’m worthless because she wants a divorce.” “Who says I’ll never be able to have a really good relationship with someone else, or that I couldn’t be happy alone?” “Why shouldn’t the world be full of injustice?”

In many situations having upset feelings is understandable, however, justifying being upset keeps us from looking at the underlying beliefs that are causing us to feel upset. An important question to ask ourselves is: “What is the result of my getting upset?” If the answer is a negative behavior, then it’d be better to do something constructive about our feelings.

The purpose of this booklet is **not** to suggest that we learn to like people or things we now dislike. It’s perfectly normal to have likes, wishes, and preferences. The purpose is to help us stop inflicting needless psychological pain on ourselves: to help us change intense, painful feelings into milder, less painful emotions. Here are some more examples of instances when the formula was used to help change negative feelings:

Example 1

1. Event- A thunderstorm
2. What you tell yourself- “This is terrible. Now the ballgame is cancelled.” “I can’t stand thunder and lightening.” “I hate rain!”
3. Feeling/Behavior- Disgust and anger.
4. Questioning feelings & beliefs- “Why is it awful that I’m not getting what I want?” “Why shouldn’t it rain? After all, now we can turn off the sprinkling system for a few days.”

Example 2

1. Event- A woman is scheduled to give a talk in front of a group.
2. What she tells herself- “I should give a perfect presentation.”
3. Feeling/Behavior- Tense and anxious
4. Questioning feelings & beliefs- “What is so terrible about making mistakes?” Nothing. It’s human to make mistakes. “I’ll just do the best I can and that will be good enough.”

Example 3

1. Event- Husband comes home from work and complains about the house always being a mess.
2. What the wife tells herself- “I’m a failure. I can never keep the house clean. I’m a terrible wife.”
3. Feeling/Behavior- Angry with herself and depressed
4. Questioning feelings and beliefs- “Is it true that the house is always a mess? No, it was clean all weekend. I was busy baking for a bake sale today and didn’t have time to pick up after the children. Maybe he had a bad day at work and just wanted to complain to someone.”

Example 4

1. Event- Wife wants husband to attend a picnic. He doesn't want to go.
2. What wife tells herself- "He's boring and never wants to have fun."
3. Feeling/Behavior- Irritated and annoyed
4. Questioning feelings and beliefs- "Is it true that he never wants to do anything fun? No, he went to a party with me last week and we had a good time. Maybe he's just tired and wants to spend time relaxing."

After mastering these four steps, it will be time to learn the last step. Step number 5 has to do with problem solving. In steps 1-4 we become less agitated with the situation by modifying our thinking. In step number 5 we determine what we want to see happen regarding the situation and we set some positive, realistic goals to replace our unrealistic demands. We ask ourselves what we can change about the situation and what we will have to accept. We normally find that we can only change our own behavior and will have to accept other people's behavior. Here are some examples of changing unrealistic beliefs:

1. **Unrealistic belief-** "Everyone should like and approve of me."
Realistic belief- "It would be better if everyone liked and approved of me. Their acceptance and approval is desirable but not necessary."
2. **Unrealistic belief-** "I should not make mistakes. Making mistakes is awful. I should be perfect."
Realistic belief- "I feel satisfied when I do things well, but making mistakes is human. I'll work towards success and learn from failures."

3. **Unrealistic belief-** “People should act differently. They should do things the way I want them done.”
Realistic belief- “Although I wish people would act differently, I may have to accept their behavior realizing that acceptance doesn’t mean I like or approve of their way of doing things.”
4. **Unrealistic belief-** “Things should go smoothly in my life. I shouldn’t have to deal with one problem after another.”
Realistic belief- “Although I wish life was always free of problems, I know that problems are part of life and I know I’m strong enough to deal with them one at a time.”
5. **Unrealistic belief-** “If I go for a walk outdoors I might be attacked by dogs or hit by a car. I should stay inside.”
Realistic belief- “While there’s a possibility I could get hurt outside, the majority of people go out every day without being harmed. The chances of me getting hurt on a walk if I’m careful are pretty low.”
6. **Unrealistic belief-** “If I take the college entrance exam I might fail.”
Realistic belief- “There’s a chance that I could fail the entrance exam, but I can probably do well at if it I study adequately.”

As we set positive goals in step #5 it’s helpful to make a list of any possible constructive actions we can take to help us reach the goal. Then, we can decide which goal to work on and begin putting it into practice.

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO FEEL BETTER

In addition to changing our way of thinking, there are other things we can do to improve the way we feel. Here is a list of excellent techniques that can make a big difference on days when we need a boost in morale.

- Aerobic Exercise- 20-30 minutes of bicycling, brisk walking, swimming or dancing can be rejuvenating.
- Deep Breathing Exercises- 5-10 minutes of deep breathing can oxygenate our bodies and help to relieve negative emotions.
- Get Plenty of Rest- Overtiredness and depleted nerves can cause a feeling of depression.
- Take up Journaling- Writing down our feelings in a journal will help us organize thoughts and provide an outlet for our feelings.
- Volunteering and Helping Others- This will help us not to dwell on whatever is making us feel unhappy. Staying active gives a sense of purpose for the future.
- Learn the Art of Forgiving- Holding a grudge takes an enormous amount of emotional energy.
- Listen to Soothing Music- This can actually relax cramped muscles, improves function of the glands, and promotes good digestion.
- Find a Friend to Share your Feelings with- When in a stressful situation, share it with someone who can look at it from a different point of view. Simply knowing someone cares and wants to listen can be quite helpful.
- Make a List of Goals- Listing goals we want to accomplish in the next week or month will give us something to look forward to and will provide a sense of purpose.

CONCLUSION

Following the five steps to understanding and changing feelings will take a few minutes, but it will be time well spent. You may want to keep a notebook or pad of paper that you use specifically for writing down each event that stirs up negative feelings. Then you can follow the steps that will lead you to a more positive way of thinking. The more you practice these steps, the easier they should become.

Practicing several of the techniques listed on page five of this book should also help to improve the way you feel.

If you suffer from depression, you should see your doctor, as some depression can be caused by a chemical imbalance that may need to be treated with medication.

For more information
CALL
The Connection Helpline
at
352-483-2800
or
1-800-351-8082



The Connection Helpline
P.O. Box 1656
Tavares, FL 32778-1656
Email: Help@ConnectionHelpline.org
Web: <http://www.connectionhelpline.org>