

TEN SECRETS TO HEALING WELL FROM LIFE'S ORDEALS

by Judy Tatelbaum, LCSW

Although we would rather never have to confront the ordeals of life, painful situations like loss, the death of a loved one, life threatening illness, or danger in the world, sometimes we have no other choice. It is my experience in assisting people to overcome life's adversities that we each need as many tools as possible for dealing with difficult times. Following are ten secrets for facing painful events as best we can.

1. Hang in - don't run away: Our natural inclination may be to run from pain, to avoid the feelings, to ignore the circumstance that hurts us. However, it's when we stay, sit in the feelings, and face what's happening that we cope best and heal most quickly. Facing pain empowers us and strengthens us. Denying it or running away does not.

2. Allow and respect feelings: We don't want to feel what we feel -- sadness, anger, guilt, resentment, regret, or fear, yet owning our feelings, and expressing them **aloud** can free us from them. Suppressing our emotions or being stoic in response to pain, may deplete our strength. Feelings expressed disappear. Try it and see.

3. Seek the help of other people: Life is harder, when we force ourselves to cope with pain alone. The support of others -- whether friends, family, counselor, or support group -- adds to our strength, energy, and insight for facing distress. Often our greatest solace comes from the help and understanding of others.

4. Do not hold yourself a victim: Whenever we feel like a victim, we are powerless. No matter what happened, alter your view so you don't put yourself in this "one down" position. Even when the circumstances were terrible, acknowledge how terrible things were, but don't add victim to the awfulness.

5. Have an "I can" attitude: Realize you can cope, even if you don't know how. When we give ourselves positive reinforcement like "I'll get through this" or "I will survive," we empower ourselves and our future. Our supportive words serve as a positive self-fulfilling prophesy. When we say "I can't..." we take away our own power, and hinder our chance for recovery.

6. Know you are not the only one to have this situation: When we think we are singled out to suffer, we suffer all the more deeply. Painful experiences are part of the human condition. We all hurt. We all experience loss. Be inspired by the fact that other's recover, and so can you.

7. Ask - what can I learn from this? We never think painful or upsetting experiences are worth it, and yet those are often the main events through which we grow and expand. Pain grows us. If we saw pain as a natural teacher, maybe then pain wouldn't be our enemy. We can learn courage, strength, persistence, grace, compassion, and tools to face something seemingly impossible.

8. Ask - How can I be powerful in the face of this problem or trauma? We don't think about having power over life, until we feel overwhelmed or powerless in the face of pain or loss. Life is like a laboratory where we get to experiment with what works, and what doesn't. Painful and traumatic experiences offer us a chance to learn to empower ourselves, to overcome adversity.

9. Ask - What could be a great outcome? Ordinarily, when we are in the midst of pain, we can see nothing but our pain. What if we considered who we might become because we are facing this loss, this trauma squarely. A great outcome might be not to be overwhelmed by life's adversity ever again, or to be more confident about our abilities, or to teach or write about this someday, or to help others with their pain.

10. Be willing to recover and go on with life - no matter what:

This may be the toughest, but also the most important step we take, after we face a painful life experience. It's not unusual to want to quit because we hurt, because this loss or trauma or disappointment is so hard to face. Personal power comes from not quitting, but from having the courage to go on with life - even when someone or something important is missing. We must remember pain eventually ends, and life goes on. And so must we.

We may not be able to control life's adversities. We cannot prevent people from illness or dying, or stop accidents or danger, but we can have power over how we confront the painful times in our lives. Use these secrets to heal yourself, to recover, and live a wonderful life.

About the Author:

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