

LESSON 3

Understanding What Happens Mentally

Now that you know what happens emotionally and physically when you've experienced the deep pain of loss, it's time to look at what happens with your thoughts and how you process information.

THE POWER OF YOUR THOUGHTS

When you've experienced a deep emotional wound, the natural response is to attempt to make sense of it.

YOUR THOUGHTS CYCLE THROUGH MANY QUESTIONS, SUCH AS:

1. Why?
2. What did I do?
3. How could this happen to me?
4. Am I being punished for something?

These questions spring from the raw pain you feel.

It's crucial to realize that your thoughts are so powerful that they can intensify your emotional pain by increasing the production of the chemicals we discussed in the last lesson.

You've already been hurt by someone else. Don't make the pain worse by your own thoughts. Recognize the areas which can sabotage your healing and discover how to stop them.

THREE COMMON WAYS YOU HARM YOURSELF WITH YOUR THOUGHTS

You can bring healing to yourself through your thoughts, or you can make life more miserable. Do any of these apply to you?

1. **You keep thinking about what happened.** When you're caught up in the emotions and memories of an event, your subconscious mind responds as it did when the event first occurred. It produces the same stress hormones, creates the same neurotransmitters, and makes the same tracings in your brain.
 - **When you recall a painful event, you re-injure your brain.** Your brain and body respond just as it did when it first happened. Instead of being betrayed once, you are betrayed as often as you relive what happened.
 - **Find something wonderful and marvelous to think of** instead of reviewing the painful past.
2. **You make up stories to explain what happened.**

Stick to the facts of the event. Don't make up anything as to why they did what they did. That just makes it worse. Unless you were told, you just don't know.

- When you make up stories about what happened, you're also creating feelings, which has your body making all those chemicals, which then has you feeling worse, which has your body making more chemicals, which...
- **If you didn't see it or weren't told by the other person, precede your interpretation with "the story I'm making up is..."** This helps you realize that you just don't know.

3. **Your friends and family keep you stirred up.** You gotta love them. Your friends and family want to support you. They may be angry about what happened and let you know. They need to heal, and you need to heal.

- At first this is supportive. If it continues, your feelings are stirred up and you relive the event again.
- **Use these strategies to help you and**

your loved ones who want to support you:

- Let them know how much their support helped you.
- Tell them, in order for you to heal, you need to quit reliving it. They may ask how you're doing, but please don't rehash the story.
- Ask them to assist you by helping you to quit reliving the story. Give them something to say such as, "I'm glad to listen, but you did say you didn't want to relive what happened. How can I help you most right now?"

These strategies will assist you in breaking the habit of continuing to relive the painful event. Once you quit thinking about it, you can move back into happiness. (You'll learn more in Module 3.)

SUMMARY

Your self-talk can support your healing or make it more difficult. Avoiding re-living the painful situation and asking others to not have you relive it will assist you in moving forward.

By managing your thoughts, you'll decrease the chemicals in your body which affect your attitude and mood.

EXPLORING LETTING GO

In the next module, you'll explore the concept of forgiveness, what it is and what is isn't. Before moving on, please anchor in this lesson by spending a few minutes with the following reflection questions.

REFLECTION

The following questions are designed to assist you in coming to know yourself better. Answer them as fully as you can.

1. Think back to someone who hurt you emotionally.
How often did you keep re-living the situation?
What did re-living the situation do to you?

2. What kinds of stories did you make up about what happened? Explore the motives you attached to the other person and what you made up as their thoughts about you.

3. Consider a time the support of family and friends kept the pain alive. Explore how their bringing up the event either helped or hurt you.