

Leach

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August 2007 Newsletter:

Good Coping Skills: Positive Thinking and Reframing!

Dear Patients & Friends:

A chronic herniated disc. A boss that's driving you nuts. Weather that's aggravating your Fibromyalgia. Scientists believe that you can be under a lot of stress without becoming ill if you have good coping skills. One coping skill that can be very effective is termed reframing.

Reframing occurs when we take a negative thought and turn it into a positive thought. Losing our job becomes an opportunity to get a better job. Being forced to exercise to overcome chronic back pain becomes an opportunity to improve overall health.

When things go bad, it is especially important not to make them worse by thinking bad thoughts. Thinking about how awful our problems are can lead to feelings of anger or fear, and can make a "mountain out of a molehill."

Psychologists say that perhaps the most important way to stop this process is by replacing negative, self-defeating thoughts with positive, affirming feelings. This in turn makes a threatening problem feel like a non-threatening situation.

Reframing in this way is also called cognitive restructuring, cognitive reappraisal, cognitive relabeling, cognitive reframing, cognitive therapy, and attitude adjustment.

But whatever the name we use to describe it, thinking positively in a potentially negative situation is a way that we can help our body fight inflammation and disease by triggering the release of "happy hormones" that are instead anti-inflammatory in nature.

As we reported in earlier newsletters (see December 2006, and July 2007), a shortened lifespan, early disability, asthma, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity are associated with depressive disorders and poor coping skills. So we can be sure that positive thinking and reframing are important skills for fighting stress, hence disease and disability.

Another important reason to practice reframing is that it helps avoid *victimization*, an attitude in which a person feels the target of events or circumstances and that suffering is inevitable. Obviously there are times when we are innocent victims of crime or terrible situations. In such circumstances we are justified in feeling victimized, and counseling or comfort may be needed to help us adjust to the stress.

However, the problem with feeling victimized, is that one tends to blame others for their circumstances and perceived injustices when this may not usually be the case. Further, since "victims" are able to receive instant sympathy and pity for their problems, they may tend to see themselves as martyrs and find it difficult to change their perceptions.

It is interesting that the writings of Christian authors like Norman Vincent Peale offer scriptural support for the positive thinking approach, despite obvious philosophical differences with the approach tendered by secular psychology.

For example, instead of the "I'm ok, you're ok," approach of secular psychology, Christians hold to teachings such as, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Great comfort in a higher purpose and a higher calling is found in many scriptures, such as, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor principalities nor

powers nor angels, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus [Romans 8:28-30].”

Further, Christians are taught to “turn the other cheek” and to, “Pray for your enemies and those who would spitefully use you.” Rather than being victimized and engage in blaming, the command is to turn justice over to God who is a perfect and just judge. This releases the Christian from harboring anger, fear, and resentment.

Hence, both psychological and Christian viewpoints share some common endpoints in terms of mental processes: we are to see possibilities even in the midst of our trials, and avoid feeling like we are a victim in need of blaming others for our circumstances, helpless to change our lives or direction.

While the secularist looks inward and the Christian looks upward for inspiration, to reframe we must, at a minimum: a) be aware of our frustrations and worries, and of the triggers, b) reappraise, or determine what factors we can control and what we must accept as out of our control, c) adopt and implement a new frame of mind, for example that, “I am in control,” or rather, that, “He’s still working on me, to make me what I ought to be!” and finally, d) evaluate our new attitude, “Did it work?” Initially reframing may not work because of deep-seated resistance, so reappraisal may be necessary several times.

In subsequent newsletters we will give you other tips and ideas for good mental health such as mental imagery, meditation, art therapy, use of a daily journal, and other proven techniques. We’ll also discuss exercise as it relates to wellness.

So get your adjustments, do your exercise, and take charge of your attitudes today, the first step toward mastery of positive thinking© That way your body won’t have to suffer twice...the first time from the actual circumstance, or physical impairment, and the second time from the worry that scripture teaches, “...rotteth the bones.”

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert A. Leach

For More Resources on this subject:

- For an article on assisted or joint reframing from the University of Colorado: <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/jtrefram.htm>
- For information on local regional mental health agencies in Mississippi: <http://www.msresource.com/mental/mh-mr.html>
- For an excellent article on victimization associated with family violence: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/386/mentaleffects.pdf>

To assess these links online, go to: www.drleach.com and click on *Newsletters, August 2007*

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