



WAYS TO HELP LET GO OF RESENTMENT

By Shona Hendley, originally posted on ABC Everyday, 28 November 2021

While resentment can serve a helpful purpose in signalling something we might need to address or correct, it can often become harmful

Two weeks after Prisha* was diagnosed with a chronic health condition, her long-term relationship broke down.

(*Name changed for privacy.)

“I was crying non-stop for weeks,” she says.

“I had thought we would be married one day and envisioned my entire future alongside him.”

After grieving the loss of her relationship, Prisha says another feeling began to replace the devastation.

“I became resentful about what had happened.”

Stan Steindl, clinical psychologist and adjunct associate professor at the School of Psychology University of Queensland, says resentment is a complex and painful human emotion.

“It relates to a bitter disappointment coupled with anger and fear about having been insulted, wronged or treated unfairly by another person,” Dr Steindl explains.

WHEN RESENTMENT BECOMES HARMFUL

While resentment can serve a helpful purpose in signalling something we might need to address or correct, it can often become harmful.

Clinical psychologist and CEO of Relationships Australia New South Wales Elisabeth Shaw says it can lead to even more negative behaviours.

“It can be hard to reconcile or come to peace with what has happened, and that can lead to lingering anger, frustration, rumination and a need to keep discussing it with others,” she says.

Dr Steindl adds that “human resentment can often turn into vengeance motivations, and a desire to ‘teach them a lesson’ or get some sort of ‘payback’”.

While Prisha says she never felt the need to seek vengeance, her resentment did begin to dominate her life.

“I would talk to my friends and family non-stop. I thought about it when I wasn’t talking about it.”

While resentment is a commonly experienced emotion, it can negatively impact our mental health, relationships with others and self-esteem.

“Chronic resentment can be a precursor to anxiety and depressive disorders, relationship distress and dysfunction, withdrawal and isolation and sometimes aggression and violence,” says Dr Steindl.

For Prisha, constantly feeling resentful left her emotionally exhausted and began to impact her mental health.

“This is when I knew I needed some assistance,” she says.

TIPS FOR HELPING LET GO OF RESENTMENT

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Seeking professional support can help you work through resentment and any related issues.

This was the best option for Prisha.

“I’ve been working with a psychologist and it has helped me deal with what happened in a more positive way,” she says.

“I still have a way to go but I’m confident eventually I will fully let go of the resentment that was holding me back.”

(continued overleaf)



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BECOME AWARE AND SLOW DOWN THE BODY

Resentment arises from your threat system (an emotional system of the brain, often known as the fight/flight/freeze/appease response designed to help us with threat protection), and specifically some aspect of social threat.

Identifying the threat and feeling of resentment is the first step in addressing it, says Dr Steindl.

Resentment is related to sympathetic nervous system activation, so we want to try to slow down the body and the mind by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Activities like meditation, massage and deep breathing can help do this.

One exercise Dr Steindl recommends that can help ease body tension and calm the mind: Sit in an upright but relaxed position, relax your face, soften your self-talk so you're using supportive inner voice tones, and slow down your breath, breathing in for four and out for four.

PRACTISE FORGIVENESS AND IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE ACTION

To practise forgiveness and move towards a feeling of ease and peace of mind, Dr Steindl suggests the following exercise:

1. Slow down the breath, the body and the mind using an exercise like above.
2. Acknowledge we all have complex, "tricky" brains, including the person who hurt you.
3. Bring a picture of this person to mind and say to yourself slowly and gently: "May I begin to forgive you for what you have done, intentionally or unintentionally, to hurt me in some way."
4. Go on to say: "May I commit, wherever possible, to not being hurt like this again, by this person or anybody else, to the best of my abilities."

From this place of calm, Dr Steindl says you can start to consider: What would be most helpful in this situation? What could I do that would help to bring balance back to the needs of both parties? What is it that I really need right now from this relationship?

PRACTISE SELF-CARE

Resentment can cause us to be "narrowly focused", says Dr Steindl, so to help expand your attention do meaningful activities you enjoy with friends and family who make you feel good.

This is general information only. For detailed personal advice, you should see a qualified medical practitioner who knows your medical history.

Shona Hendley is a freelance writer and ex-secondary school teacher from Ballarat, Victoria. She lives with her four fish, three goats, two cats, one chicken, as well as her two human children and husband. Find her @shonamarion.

IF YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW NEEDS HELP:

- o Lifeline on 13 11 14
- o Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636
- o MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- o Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- o Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- o Headspace on 1800 650 890
- o QLife on 1800 184 527
- o Relationships Australia on 1300 364 277
- o ReachOut Australia