



Bulimia/Anorexia and Compulsive Overeating: When Family and Friends Don't Get It

If you are dealing with an eating disorder, you may be in a situation where many well-meaning people in your life do not take your anguish seriously.

Perhaps they feel helpless because they don't know how to help. They wish and try to believe that whatever is bothering you would just go away.

But as you well know, recurrent bouts of anxiety are not something you can make go away through an act of will. Anxiety like yours is often a signal that something needs to be dealt with. It's what usually sends people looking for relief and then real help. Attempts to find relief take many forms such as starving, overeating, drinking, using drugs, over-sleeping, overplaying, over-TV viewing, over exercising, over-flirting, over-dating, i.e. doing anything to excess in order to block out thoughts and feelings.

Some people never get past the search for relief in these ways, and they cause great havoc and destruction in their lives. Others like you, since you are still reading this, start exploring and looking for the meaning of their symptoms. You know a better, happier life is somehow possible, even if you don't know how to achieve it yet.

Deep down you know you need to work to discover what the anxiety signals, what it means for **you**, and what kind of developmental process is called for now.

Family and friends don't have to get it. It's **your** healing path, **your** understanding and **your** willingness to go for what you need that matters. It's **your** life. It's **your** pain. It's **your** pathway to health. It's **your** eventual freedom and capacity for joy. In time, as you go through recovery with a psychotherapist and a chosen support system, you will be able to meet your friends and family on emotional ground they can tolerate.

What's important is that you understand and proceed with the actions and commitments that will bring you health and freedom.

Someday, they may or may not recognize or appreciate what you had to accomplish to achieve health and freedom. But you'll appreciate yourself. And from a position of strength and health, you will be able to have compassion for them. In this way, you can maintain relationships you wish to maintain because once you can be present and genuine with yourself you'll know how to be present for what and who matters to you.

Your friends may not get it. But you get it. And that's how you get well.

—JOANNA POPPINK, LMF /MENTAL-HEALTH-MATTERS.COM

Rx for Life: *Gratitude*

Today researchers are studying gratitude as part of the broader "positive psychology" movement that seeks to understand, not why some people become mentally ill, but why others become happy, optimistic, and altruistic.

"Psychology has generally ignored the positive emotions," says Robert Emmons of UC Davis, a psychologist and leading figure in the new field of gratitude research. "We tend to study the things that can go wrong in people's minds but not the things that can go right. Gratitude research is beginning to suggest that feelings of thankfulness have tremendous positive value in helping people cope with daily problems, especially stress, and to achieve a positive sense of the self."

Grateful people are not necessarily ones whom the world has showered with gifts; people of modest financial means or who have suffered personal tragedies nevertheless may report themselves as grateful, while the well-to-do and good-looking may exhibit little gratitude.

"To say we feel grateful is not to say that everything is great," Emmons says. "It just means we are aware of our blessings. If you only think about your disappointments and unsatisfied wants, you may be prone to unhappiness. If you're fully aware of your disappointments but at the same time thankful for the good that has happened and for your chance to live, you may show higher indices of well-being."

Emmons notes that grateful people are not ones who take a Pollyanna view of the world. People who score highly on various indicators of gratefulness also report strong awareness of the "bad" in their own lives and in society. In fact, some research finds that grateful people may be slightly more likely to be cynical than the population as a whole. But they achieve the ability to be wary of life's problems and yet thankful for the ways in which the actions of others lighten their burdens.

Studies suggest that increasing a person's sense of thankfulness could lead to lower stress and better life "outcomes," meaning success in career and relationships. If a sense of thankfulness can turn someone's life from bitter to positive, that makes gratitude an important aspect of psychology.

—FROM TANGENTS, GREGG EASTERBROOK

REGRETS—Healthy and Unhealthy Ways to Deal with ‘what might have been.’

Psychologists have recently released some interesting discoveries about this “least” favorite feeling—regret. One thing on which they all agree: regret is a little word with the power to define how people choose to live their lives.

The bad news is, if regret becomes the defining emotion of your life, it can lead to depression, emotional paralysis, and despair.

But if you can use it as a stepping stone to learn from the past, forgive yourself and others, the regret can be transformed into a motivator for positive action and healthy change.

In a recent study, researchers found that the healthiest way to deal with regret actually changes as you age. From young adulthood to middle age, the best way to deal with regret is to shoulder most of the responsibility yourself. This means admitting that you trained for an occupation that doesn’t interest you, married an abusive spouse, or have a bad relationship with your parents. At this time in your life, taking responsibility for the choices that led to your regrets can motivate you to make new choices and change your life.

The benefit of taking action was borne out a study, that followed 200 female college graduates for more than thirty years. In their 20s and 30s, most of the young women’s regrets concerned missed career opportunities or difficult personal relationships. By the time they reached their 40s, 65 percent of the women had used those feelings of regret to spur them to action: they had gotten more education, created better job opportunities, worked to find and enhance personal relationships. And, not surprisingly, the same 65 percent scored very high on positive mental health indicators. The remaining 35 percent who were still nursing the same regrets without changing their situations scored much higher on symptoms of depression, anxiety, lack of sleep and worthlessness.

As you get older, you have fewer opportunities to alter the situations that led to your regret— your parents have died, you’re retired, you have no interest in remarriage, etc. The best response is to let yourself off the hook. Senior citizens who were happiest accepted that others shared responsibility for the regrettable situations. They might acknowledge that their late father made it difficult to get close or that they did the best they could in a difficult work environment.

Dealing with regret and remorse can be a tremendous opportunity for growth. While the process of dealing with regret can be painful, it is a necessary step. Ultimately, true peace in life comes when we know that we are worthy for who we are, not for how good we’ve been or how few mistakes we’ve made. Mistakes are a given, and we’re worthy anyway.

The quicksand of regret can often be the endless loop of “if onlys” that we play in our minds. Neal Roese of University of Illinois at Urbana, points out that not only are “if onlys” pointless—

—that alternate version of the past can never happen—but “you must remember that you’ve created a *fictional* account of what life would be like if you’d made a different choice. You could just as well ask how it could have been worse.”

One thing on which all the psychologists agree: Regret is a natural part of living a fully engaged life. The more you take risks and relate to others, the more often you’ll be called on to make complex choices that will lead you to regret—but also to intimacy, joy, and satisfaction. You’ll never know what would have happened if you’d chosen differently over the years. Seen in that light, regret becomes its own badge of honor—evidence of a life well lived.

—SHARON LINNEA, CHICKEN SOUP FROM THE SOUL OF HAWAII

Your Child May Need the Help of a Counselor

- If** the child’s symptoms of distress or problem behavior persist despite repeated attempts to help by parents and/or teachers.
- If** the child’s problems are interfering with his overall development, self-esteem, and success.
- If** the child and his/her behavior is affecting the family and taxing the time and energy of parents to the point of exasperation.
- If** parents are worried that “something’s not right” with their child.
- If** the child has experienced some unusual stressor—e.g., adoption, divorce, abuse, loss or death of someone close, and has difficulty talking and expressing feelings about it.
- If** a change has occurred such as a drop in school performance, friendships, a radical shift in behavior, or other symptoms with no apparent explanation.
- If** school or a physician or another professional recommends a consultation.

Human Behavior Associates, Inc.

HBA is the provider of your Employee Assistance Program. Employees and their family members can call **1-800-937-7770** 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to request assistance with personal or family problems.