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Soothing Yourself When Distressed©

Life is hard...It is easy to feel distressed. Sometime the harm we feel is happening in the moment, and sometime a current event causes us pain because it brings up painful feelings from a past hurt. We can't avoid this happening, so it is important to know what works for you to soothe yourself when distressed. Following are some ideas, but you will need to experiment for yourself with what works for you.

Let's say that someone does or says something that triggers feelings inside of you (anger, fear, distress, inadequacy, etc).

- Talk to yourself calmly. "Whoa...something is coming up. I need to take a look at this later, but right now I need to stay present at work, with my kids, while driving, etc."
- Calm yourself by gently rubbing your hand, side of leg, etc.
- Tell yourself you will attend to the feelings coming up as soon as possible after you've calmed yourself down. If you are afraid you will just react back and cause harm yourself, talk to yourself and say, "I can feel these important feelings, and I will give them the time they need as soon as possible. My feelings matter too, but right now is not the time for them."
- Do some slow deep breathing to slow your system down.
- If you are with kids or in a place where you can't process the feelings right away. Take a restroom break and do some slow deep breathing, say a prayer for help, and tell yourself you'll be OK.
- Sometimes when someone is really angry with you, you might say, "Whoa, the pain and anger you are expressing is really

affecting me. Let me take a minute to calm myself.” Besides being genuine, it also models for the other person: Their anger is powerfully disturbing; they can slow themselves down when they are distressed. People who are quickly reactive usually have no idea how disturbing their reaction is to others.

- After the interchange is over, take the first viable opportunity to process what happened inside of you...with a friend, family member, coach, journal, counselor, self, etc.
 - Relate the gist of what happened.
 - Relate the feelings that occurred inside of you (anger, fear, inadequacy, etc.)
 - Ponder where those feelings might have originated in you.
 - Write about the current and past feelings.
 - If strong and/or recurring, get some therapy and/or consultation to do whatever is necessary to not repetitively act out on others.

- There are other soothing things you can do to help calm yourself at these times. Some ideas include:
 - Talk a walk in a pretty part of town
 - Listen to beautiful or soothing music
 - Pay attention to calming sounds of nature either in person or listening to nature CD's
 - Light a scented candle and focus on it
 - Have a favorite soothing drink such as Hot Tea, Warm Milk, Hot Chocolate, or your favorite Coffee. No alcohol
 - Slowly suck on a piece of peppermint candy or hard candy
 - Take a bubble bath or hot shower with soothing music playing in the background
 - Pet your dog or cat
 - Get a massage
 - Take a bike ride
 - Go for a run
 - Soak your feet
 - Put creamy lotion on your body
 - Put a cold compress on your head, or wrap your face in a very warm, damp facecloth...it is very relaxing

- Ask for a hug
- Relax in the warmth of the sun
- Gently stretch your body
- Watch a funny movie or TV show
- Read a good book
- Say positive, encouraging messages to yourself
- Do some slow, deep breathing to expel emotional pain and energy
- Do some yoga
- Call an understanding friend who will listen and empathize as opposed to tell you how to “fix” it.

I hope these ways of interacting with yourself has been helpful to you. Remember, everyone feels distressed. It is normal to have them...it is wise, healthy, and responsible to deal with your distress by self-soothing. Take some time to practice some self-soothing with yourself. You deserve it, you need it, and it will help!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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