

"Letting Go: How to let go of old hurts so you can heal"

Letting go. "Let go" of a kite string and your kite soars to the heavens. "Let go" of a rope during tug-of-war and it drops. Sounds easy!

In daily life, people say, "let it go" This refers to "letting go" emotionally, or no longer being upset by people or situations. If you aren't "letting go", you must be "holding on", meaning you are clinging to some negative emotion(s) that prevents you from getting on with life.

Sounds easy. Letting go of a kite string or a tug-of-war rope is easy. What about "letting go" of hurt resulting from your mother calling you derogatory names? How easy is it to "let go" of the fear you felt as you watched your father beat your mother? Is it easy to "let go" of your own habit of referring to yourself as "stupid"? No - letting go of emotional issues is not easy.

There are similarities to the process of letting go of emotional issues and letting go of a kite string or a tug-of-war rope. Having a fight with your husband about which route to take to the movie theatre may upset you for a few minutes, but letting go of the frustration should be as easy as letting go of a kite string.

Some emotional issues are more like a tug-of-war game. If the game isn't important to you and you let go of the rope, you won't be upset with yourself. In real life, this is like going shopping with a girlfriend and hoping to have lunch at a new deli. Turns out she has her heart set on Italian food. Because you are not concerned about where you eat, you "let go" of your initial disappointment that she doesn't want to go to the deli, and you eat Italian. You don't "hold on" to the frustration. You "let it go" and enjoy your day.

If the tug-of-war game means a lot to you, you will hold on to the rope longer. If your opponent is physically stronger and it becomes clear that you are going to get hurt if you continue to hold, you "let go" of the rope so you don't get rope burns. In life this could be like attempting to resolve an emotional wound with a sibling who treated you badly throughout high school. She regularly made fun of you in front of friends. You have "held on" to the pain for years and want to "let go" of the power that the feelings, and your sister, still have over you. You confront her: "I felt angry when you made fun of me in front of my friends all through high school. I was hurt because I looked up to you and wanted you to like me. I am choosing to let go of my anger toward you and will no longer be intimidated by you". Your still-cruel sister laughs at you and calls you "ridiculous". No matter. You didn't talk to her so she would agree with you. You talked to her so you could stop being intimidated by her and so you could let go of painful emotions. You put up a good fight at the tug-of-war match and smartly "let go" of the rope (stopped fighting with your sister) before she hurt you further (like getting rope burns).

Many emotional issues are like this. It's good to stay in the game to demonstrate your strength and willingness to fight for yourself. If the others involved don't respond in healthy ways, it may be good to let go of the rope. That doesn't mean you have "lost". It means you have done what you needed to do and have chosen to "let go" to avoid getting hurt further. In life this means standing up for yourself. It means protecting yourself from harmful people and situations. It means taking yourself seriously and treating yourself with the care and respect you treat your best friend.

Sometimes we hold on to painful emotions for too long and for unhealthy reasons. This is equivalent to holding on too tightly to the rope in tug-of-war and ending up with badly burned hands. A woman may blame her husband for not being a good partner. She complains to her friends that "he doesn't want to go anywhere with me", and "he doesn't hold my hand". In therapy, she recognized that it was easier to "hold on" to resentment toward her husband than to admit she is afraid of intimacy and did not make attempts to improve her marriage, either.

How do we let go of emotional issues?

- 1) Identify the issues (this often requires therapy):
 - childhood wounds and being angry with mom/dad/whomever

- betrayal by friend/spouse/whomever
 - a history of being harshly criticized/called names and having residual low self-esteem
- 2) Recognize thoughts and feelings related to the issues:
- I am angry with my father for beating my mother and brother; it was very scary to witness that.
 - I am hurt that my friend shared what I told her in confidence. I think it was rude.
 - I am sad that I was called names and am angry that my self-esteem was damaged. I think it's terrible that parents can treat their children so cruelly.
- 3) Determine what we need in order to "let go" (meaning that the issue no longer has power over our lives).
- My father is deceased, but I need to talk about and feel what it was like when I was a child. I need to talk about how situations in my present life remind me of back then and how I sometimes feel like I did then. I also need to learn to respond to my situations in the present from an adult perspective and not that of a scared child.
 - I need to let my friend know how badly I was hurt. I need to remember that she may or may not apologize for her behavior and that my purpose for sharing my feelings with her is so that I don't develop resentments toward her or keep negative feelings inside myself. I need to hear her side of the story and see if I can understand her perspective. Then I need to determine if this is a healthy friendship and if I want to continue in it.
 - I need to tell my parents how badly they hurt me and affected my self esteem. I need to stop calling myself derogatory names. I need to stop using low self-esteem as an excuse for not taking healthy risks.
4. Follow through with action, remembering to let go of the rope if there is danger of additional hurt. Sometimes people are stubborn and because they need to win they will hold on long after their hands are badly burned. We need support in the way of healthy friends a trained therapist to "let go" of past hurts.

We need to let go of past hurts to help ourselves heal.

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