

Be Gentle With Your Pain

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by Monika

Alternatives for those hurting

While trying to have fun can be a good way to get to know more about yourself, your needs and desires, it may not be possible for you to do that right now. Once you have put aside the behaviors and beliefs of self blame, you may find that the issues underlying your self-destructive behaviors have risen to the surface creating you soul-wrenching pain. It is not always possible to push aside that kind of pain in order to laugh and play on the beach. That is okay. Be gentle with yourself in your pain. Embrace your pain, as this will allow you to begin healing.

Being gentle, particularly with pain, may be something that is most unfamiliar to you. You may have always coped with pain by hurting yourself. You may even find that hurting yourself brings you relief from your agony. I am asking you to try something new. Instead of turning to starving, bingeing, purging, or any other kind of self-injurious behavior, promise yourself that you will treat yourself with tender compassion. Promise yourself that you will unconditionally accept exactly where you are in your process. Do not walk away from yourself while you are hurting so badly inside... Be there for yourself.

You may instinctually be gentle with others when they are in pain or need comfort. Yet, when it comes to yourself, you may be at a complete loss of how to be gentle with yourself. You may feel completely undeserving of gentleness and compassion. Tell yourself, whether you truly believe it or not, that you deserve compassion. You have been through far too much pain and suffering already. You deserve to have only gentleness and love from here on in. Repeat this to yourself often throughout the course of each day, eventually you will come to believe those words. Below is a list of gentle things you can do for yourself to help you through your pain...

- Accept where you are in your process. This means affirming to yourself: "I am in pain right now. There are many things that have wounded me deeply. These wounds have not yet healed; it is okay to feel this pain. Getting in touch with my pain, feeling it, and sitting with it for a time is what will lead me to heal. I will be okay, even though I may not feel like I am okay right now: I will be okay."
- Allow yourself to feel that pain. Don't run away from your pain or try to cover it up with food issues. Connect with the hurting inside yourself. Remember that you must walk through the pain in order to truly heal. You will get to the other side. You will survive; you will thrive!

- Quiet the critic in your head. Tell the critical voice inside yourself that you have heard enough from it. Teach it to respect you. Tell your critical voice that you will no longer listen to its hurtful messages. Tell it that you will be listening to the soft loving voice of your heart instead. Then connect with the voice in your heart. What does it tell you about your pain? What things does it suggest you do? In what direction does your heart guide you? Does it tell you to honor your process? Does it tell you to be true to your inner feelings and spend time with them? Does it tell you to give yourself a break from them by taking a peaceful walk or listening to music?

- Cry it soothes the pain. Just curl up in a comfortable spot and cry your heart out. You most likely have a lot of tears in you that have never been cried. Now that the dam of self destructive thinking and behavior is no longer blocking your tears, you are free to cry them. Crying ensures that your spirit does not drown; crying can begin to set you free.

- Cuddle with a soft teddy bear. No one is ever too old for the comfort offered by a plush stuffed animal. If you don't have one, go to a store and look for one that looks friendly and loving. A stuffed animal can be especially comforting if your pain of the moment is related to your childhood. Even if your pain is connected solidly to the present, the stuffed animal can help you to feel safe and comforted. Remind yourself that you deserve tenderness and comfort.

- Call someone who will be gentle with you and talk to them. Call your therapist or a close friend—someone who will listen without judging you, someone you can say just about anything to. Call someone who can hear your cracking, crying voice and soothe you. Talk with someone who can reassure you that it really will be okay again. Let them provide reassurance that you can and will get through this. Sometimes pain can be opaque and we cannot see the brighter skies that lie ahead. It helps to have someone who can see those bright skies and assure you that they are there.

- Go outside and take a walk. Smell the flowers, listen to the sweet sound of the singing birds. Lift your face to the sun, close your eyes and feel it warm your face. If it is wintertime, notice how the sun sparkles on the blanket of soft white snow covering the earth. Feel the crisp air as it touches your skin. Go to a park and watch children sledding on the snow or skating on the ice. Remind yourself that there is a world beyond your pain; that you will not get lost forever in its depths... you will resurface.

- Buy yourself a card. Go into any card or gift shop and look for a card under the section entitled encouragement. Read each card in this section and choose the one that offers you the most hope and comfort. Choose the one inscribed with the message that you like best. Bring it home with you and read it often. Keep it with you wherever you go, so that you may pull it out at a moment's notice and read its tender words.

- Buy yourself flowers. Choose or create an arrangement that makes you feel peaceful inside, one that has all of your favorite flowers and colors. Bring it home and put it where you can see it all day. Smell the flowers often. Touch the soft petals and admire them... they

are beautiful... just like you.

- Play music that soothes your aching heart. Perhaps it is soft tender music that makes you feel calm and relaxed. Maybe it is music that helps you to cry so that you may begin to release some of your pain. Perhaps it is lively music that lifts you slightly and helps you attain a new perspective.

- Have someone you trust make a tape for you. This person could be your therapist or a close friend. The tape could be a relaxation tape with exercises for you to do, or it could simply be their voice encouraging you, and offering you support and hope. Listen to the tape whenever you feel sad and alone. Listen to it whenever you need comfort. Listen to it as often and as many times as you need to.

- Keep a picture of someone who is important to you and who cares about you. Look at the picture and remind yourself that this person cares about you and how you are doing. Keep it with you so that you can look at it whenever you like. Sometimes a picture can help you to feel as though that person is there with you in your pain. It can help you feel less alone in the world.

- Write down a list of nice or comforting things people have said to you. Keep adding to this list and keep it in a place where you can read it often. Sometimes writing down the exact words people have said will help you remember the sound of their voice when they said it to you. Many times this vivid memory will bring you the same kind of comfort you felt when it was said to you.

- Have your therapist or one of your friends write something to you that will give you hope. Something that will tell you that you are not alone, and that you are cared about. Seek solace in these written words whenever you need to.

- Go somewhere where you can just scream. Sometimes certain kinds of pain can make you feel like screaming. Go ahead. If your pain is begging you to scream it out, then scream in the woods, in your house, or in your car with the music turned up. Let it out... it's okay.

- Go to a glass recycling plant and break bottles. Many glass recycling plants will allow you to do this. You can throw bottles against a wall and yell while you smash them. Sometimes shouting eases the heartache. You may choose to do this by yourself or you may choose to bring a friend along with you. If you are with a friend, the two of you can yell together and support each other.

- Find a sound that expresses your pain. What does your pain sound like? Perhaps it is a sobbing, a wild scream, a throaty yell, a long agonizing wail, or all of these. Do you feel like dropping to your knees, throwing your head back and wailing up to the sky? Then do it. It's ok to find creative ways of expressing your pain. Let your pain emerge from your body, whatever sound comes to you naturally...let it out.

- Seek solace in your own artistic expression. Use paints, pastel chalk, crayons, or markers

to draw pictures or designs that convey how you feel. Perhaps it will be a mix of colors that symbolize your emotions. Many people use red to express anger and rage, and black to express hopelessness and despair. Certain shades of blue might be used to convey sadness. Which colors are you using? What do they mean to you? Perhaps you would like to bring your work into therapy to talk about what each color symbolizes for you and what you were thinking and feeling as you created this particular piece.

- Write a poem that describes your feelings at the moment. Compose a poem that in some way addresses the memories or experiences that cause you this pain. You may choose to share it with a friend, loved one or your therapist, or you may choose to keep it for yourself.
- Confide in the pages of your journal. Pour your heart out into its pages. Bear your soul. Write about the things that torment your being. Let your thoughts and feelings flow from the end of your pen and form into expressive words. Sometimes writing about your thoughts and feelings can sometimes provide you with tremendous relief. Many people find that they can write things that they cannot say. Maybe you would like to share your writing with someone close to you. Perhaps you would like to bring it into therapy with you. Sometimes it helps to feel as though at least one other person in the world knows how you are feeling.
- Risk... try telling another person how you feel while you are feeling that way. Share your secrets, your heartache, and your shame with a safe person in a safe environment... perhaps in therapy. It is truly an amazing experience to share your inner most self with someone and find out that they will not walk a way from you. It can be a frightening thing to do, but the rewards can be incredible, too. Perhaps you would like to try.
- Think about how your friends cope with pain. Is there anyone who does something especially kind for him/herself when s/he is hurting? Would you like to try doing that particular thing for yourself? Add ideas to this list as you go along, don't be afraid to try new things. Sometimes taking risks and trying new things, although scary, can be a gentle act of self-care.

Perhaps you have obligations that you must meet, which prevent you from allowing yourself to fully experience your feelings. Promise your heart that you will attend to it later. Imagine wrapping it in a soft, warm blanket to keep it safe and comfortable until you are able to come back, and spend time with it while tenderly attending to its wounds.

Remember pain requires time in order to heal. Some pain requires more healing time than others. Promise yourself that you will walk through it no matter how long it takes. There is light at the end of the path; there is wellness. Pain is an inevitable part of living and loving in this world. Remember that all pain is legitimate and has a purpose. So many times we feel unentitled to our pain and feelings. Feeling unentitled leads us to push them away, reject them, or bury them. You are entitled to all of your feelings; embrace them. They are what make you whole.

Something to hold on to:

As you walk the road to recovery you may find yourself getting tired. At times your life may feel too difficult. I wish it was possible to make the landscape of your life brighter, smoother, and filled with more flowers. If I could make the terrain you walk on gentler, I would in a moment. You are a beautiful soul who does not deserve to be in such agony. You deserve to have all the glistening things in life. Hold on to the fact that there is light, even when you cannot see it. Hold on to the fact that it is possible to lead a full life, even though your own may feel empty at this moment. Not knowing what to do at times, and struggling and trying to figure out what to do is the very thing that will lead you to freedom. If you look inside your heart, really look, you will see a beautiful person with a kind and gentle soul. You will see a person who needs comfort, a person who needs you. As you search around in your heart, you will find the warrior spirit and courage that you need to win this battle. You will find the courage to face your demons and triumph over them. You will walk through your pain. Remember that you bless this world and make it a more beautiful place to live in.

These are things you must tuck away and remember from time to time when the pain feels too unbearable. It is possible to have hope and soul shattering pain at the same time. Keep fighting and never give up. You are too valuable, too special. Know that you are not alone: there are other warrior sisters who are walking with you in spirit

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