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let it go

*Experiencing emotional turmoil?
Take it, shake it, and learn from
it. After all, letting go is your
best chance of moving on*

A broken heart, a family feud, retrenchment, or just plain bad luck... Everyone deals with tough times in their own way, but "letting go" is always easier said than done. Even if you think you've put unpleasant experiences behind you, sometimes they continue to gnaw at the corners of the mind and affect your life long after they should have been forgotten.

Tough times can manifest themselves in many different ways. Regret, shock, denial and anger are just some of the feelings that can persist and even escalate if you let them. Getting stuck at any of these stages makes letting go of an issue extremely difficult.

"Part of letting go is understanding why you're holding on in the first place," says Bev Aisbett, a counsellor and author of *Letting It Go* (HarperCollins, \$17.95). "If we can accept that change is the norm rather than stability, and step back from expectations – remove the 'shoulds', 'musts' and 'have-tos' from our lives – we can adopt an empowered approach and address problems as they arise rather than ignoring them until a crisis occurs."

Whatever you're experiencing, it's best to confront it head-on – no matter how uncomfortable or painful it may be. "A certain amount of wallowing is necessary," says Amanda Ferguson,

a psychologist in private practice in Sydney and author of *Life Works* (HarperCollins, \$24.95). "It's important to mull over and think about situations, even if it hurts to do so. But it must be constructive."

However, if you find that you're thinking about your break-up or disastrous encounter with the boardroom bully to the exclusion of all else, try to find focus elsewhere.

"You must compartmentalise," Amanda says. "Our minds flood with thoughts when we're suffering, and while the last thing we feel like doing is the day-to-day stuff, it's important to get back into life. Having to be available and responsible to our work and family is actually respite from suffering and helps to give perspective."

Keeping a journal, writing never-to-be-sent letters to the people causing you pain, and talking to friends, family and, if necessary, a professional, are all tools that might help you gain some perspective. And although it never seems like it at the time, there is almost always something to be learned from a situation, such as understanding more about your strengths, your weaknesses, what you want out of life, or who you can depend on in times of trouble.

But bad feelings don't necessarily have to be triggered by traumatic events. Our society is highly geared towards gaining success in all areas of life, whether love, work, family or fitness. When hiccups, big or small, come our way, we are sometimes unprepared for them. We get thrown into an emotional spin, which in turn leads to anxiety – an escalating problem in modern life.

"Some people may have a mild uneasiness that runs like a thread through the background of their lives," Bev says. "At the other end of the scale are panic attacks – the physical symptoms of which are often confused with a heart attack."

If you find that you're having trouble coping – whether it be from a traumatic event or intense day-to-day stress – seek help from a

4 steps forward

Counsellor and author Bev Aisbett offers this simple program for moving forward.

Step 1 **Accept** the experience for what it is.

Step 2 Try putting some **distance** between you and the problem, and study the way you react to things.

Step 3 "Befriend" the part of yourself that is causing problems. Think about anxiety, depression or anger as being part of you, and start to **work with it** instead of pushing it away. "What you resist persists," Bev says.

Step 4 Learn to **love yourself**. "If you don't, you won't choose to pursue the things that support you."

Every little bit helps

These tips aren't the answer to tough times, but they're a step in the right direction.


> **Take a walk** Exercise is good for the body and great for the mind. "It helps us avoid depression by producing endorphins or natural opiates," Amanda Ferguson says. "Movement also helps us to process the adrenal cortisones that flood our bodies during times of stress." If a constant adrenaline rush is making you edgy, flatten it out and get fit at the same time.

> **Search for answers** There are many helpful books available. For two different perspectives, try *The Little Book Of Letting Go* by Hugh Prather (Vermilion, \$24.95) and *Letting Go Of the Person You Used to Be* by Lama Surya Das (Bantam, \$22.95).

> **Smell the roses** Or eat them... well, something like that. Bach's Rescue Remedy is a combination of five flower essences (star-of-Bethlehem, clematis, impatiens, cherry plum and rock rose), created in the early 1900s by Dr Edward Bach, a renowned British physician and biologist. It is said that four drops of the liquid at the back of your throat will calm, relax, imbue courage and enable clear thinking. It costs about \$22 for a 20ml bottle at pharmacies and health food stores.

> **Go native** Australian native wildflower essence *dampiera* (*Dampiera linearis*) is said to be the essence of letting go and allowing life to flow. About \$13 for 15ml.

professional such as a counsellor. They can help you look at things in ways you might not have considered. Taking the time to sort things out will pay off – and the journey is well worth it.

"It's all about baby steps," Amanda says. "Go easy on yourself and understand that processing traumatic events takes time. That problem might look like a mountain but, if you wind around and up, over and down, you'll eventually end up on the other side." 

www.

The web is a good place to start looking at how you can put troublesome things behind you. Try:

www.lifethatworks.com – psychologist Amanda Ferguson's website has a useful Q&A area.

www.psychology.org.au – the Australian Psychological Society's referral service can help you find a psychologist to suit your needs.

www.livingessences.com.au – to order Australian flower essence products.