

Psychology

The power of choice

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It sounds outrageous to talk about cancer and choice in the same sentence. No one chooses to have cancer, no one chooses to be sick or to suffer.

When receiving a cancer diagnosis, most of us would be feeling helpless, lacking control, scared and even angry. We might cautiously put our hopes and trust in our doctors, modern medicine, and even alternative treatments. Some people recall, that for the first few weeks they seem to operate like robots, moving automatically in a fog of tests, waiting rooms and unfamiliar terms. Choice seems to be a distant luxury, reserved for healthy people, not for you – the cancer patient.

Every day of our lives we make hundreds of choices. Some of them so small we don't even notice that we are making them. Tea or coffee? The stairs or the lift? The red shirt or the green one? Major decisions require more thought. We weigh the options, maybe speak with someone we trust to get a different perspective, or toss & turn at night not sure which is the right choice for us.

When it comes to our emotions, we seem to think that we have no choice. If someone does something infuriating – we have no choice but to feel angry. If a sad event happens, sadness is inevitable. If someone says something hurtful – how can I avoid feeling hurt? Our emotions seem to be a 'knee-jerk' reaction to an event, something we have no (or very little) control over, and if we perceive those feelings as 'bad' or 'negative' – we will do anything to avoid or suppress them.

But the truth is we do have a choice, even when it comes to our feelings. That choice can make us feel really empowered and in control.



The emotional suffering that is present when you are sick is often far greater than any physical pain you might experience. The suffering is a direct result of the thoughts that fill our mind at that time. "What if I won't make it? Who will take care of my family? Will I be able to go back to normal life ever again? Why me? Why now?" These thoughts produce very strong feelings.

We can't (and we should not) 'programme' or control our thoughts. But we can become aware that our emotions are an important and powerful mechanism to process those thoughts. We should not avoid or suppress them, we should use them to our benefit. So, what should we do with our feelings? How can we stay calm and feel in control, no matter what is going on? As you become aware of an unpleasant emotion...

The first powerful step

The first powerful step we take is using three words: "Something in me." When you use the words "something in me" to refer to an emotion you're caught up in, you are actually shifting your whole perspective from small to large. You are stepping outside of the emotion and getting bigger than it is. As you get bigger, you get calmer, because you're not caught up in the small stuff. For example, instead of saying, "I am anxious." say: "Something in me is feeling anxious." After you shift your

language, notice what a difference it makes.

The second powerful step

Our second powerful practice is to say, "Hello" to our emotional state. We're talking about a calm, matter-of-fact hello, like: "Hello, I know you're there." It's the natural follow-up to the practice of saying, "Something in me..." I recommend using them together. With any feeling you're having, say: "Something in me is anxious... and I'm saying hello to it." What are you saying hello to? Not the feeling itself, but to something in you that has the feeling. The feeling could change — it will change! — and it's more likely to change when you aren't fighting with it.

The third powerful step

Now sit with it for a while and focus your attention on how it feels in your body. Note that emotions always manifest in our body like, a knotted stomach, a heavy head, a tight throat and tense shoulders. As you become aware of the physical sensation, place a loving hand on it. With the third powerful practice – placing a gentle hand on it – you bring a gentle, soothing contact to something in you that feels anxious or overwhelmed or angry. It is so simple – it takes no special equipment, no special training. When you do that, you remind yourself to bring a friendly quality of 'keeping company' to what you feel.

It's truly that simple!

- You become aware of an unpleasant emotional reaction.
- You say, "Something in me feels" and you say, "Hello" to it.
- You let a gentle hand move to the place where you're feeling it.

The three moves work together so smoothly, it's as if they're just one. Try it!

As your awareness grows, so does your control, your freedom and your choice.