

The Seven Habits of Highly Emotionally Healthy People

How to treat psychological injuries and improve emotional resilience

Published on July 9, 2013 by [Guy Winch, Ph.D.](#) in [The Squeaky Wheel](#)

Most of us pay close attention to our health and we treat threats to our physical well-being as soon as they occur. We dress warmly when we feel a cold coming on, we apply antibacterial ointments and bandages to cuts and scrapes, and we don't pick at scabs as they heal. We sustain psychological injuries in life just as often as we do physical ones, but we are much less proactive about protecting our *psychological* well-being, than we are our *physical* well-being. Adopting the following seven habits and 'treating' common psychological injuries when they occur will help protect your mental health and improve your emotional [resilience](#).

1. [Gain Control after a Failure](#): Failure distorts our perceptions such that our [goals](#) seem more out of reach and our capacities seem less up to the task. Once we feel as though there is little we can do to succeed, we become demoralized and lose our motivation. Adopt the habit of ignoring this misleading 'gut' reaction and make a list of the many factors related to your goal that were in your control (e.g., effort, preparation, planning, different approaches you could have taken, and others). Then, consider how you might go about improving [each](#) of these factors. Doing so will not only combat defeatist misperceptions, it will drastically improve your chances of future success.



2. [Find Meaning in Loss and Trauma](#): One of the main factors that distinguishes those who thrive emotionally after experiencing loss or trauma from those who do not, is their ability to eventually find meaning in their experiences and to derive purpose from them. Of course, doing so takes time, as does the process of [grieving](#) and adapting to new realities. However, adopting the habit of searching for ways to recognize not just what you've lost, but what you've gained as well, will allow you to develop new appreciations for your life and the people in it, to make important changes, and to find value, meaning, and purpose even if you lacked them before.

3. [Disrupt the Urge to Brood and Ruminates](#): When we brood over distressing events we rarely gain insight into them. Instead, we replay upsetting or angering scenarios in our heads, which only increases our urge to brood and makes us feel worse ([read more about the dangers of brooding here](#)). Therefore, despite how compelling the urge to brood is, adopt the habit of disrupting the brooding cycle as soon as you catch yourself ruminating about the events in question. The best way to do this is to distract yourself with a task that requires concentration—such as a game of Sudoku, trying to recall the exact order of the stations on your bus/subway line, or watching an absorbing show.

4. [Nurture Your Self-Esteem](#): Our self-esteem fluctuates such that we feel better about ourselves some days than we do others. But many of us become self-critical when we're feeling bad, essentially kicking our self-esteem when it's already down. To improve your mental health, adopt the habit of regarding your self-esteem as an 'emotional immune system' that needs to be nurtured back to health when it's ailing ([read more about that here](#)). The best way to 'heal' damaged self-esteem is to practice self-compassion. When you have self-critical thoughts, consider what you would do if a

dear friend had similar feelings. Write out what you would say to them in an email if you wanted to express compassion and support. Then read the email as if they had sent it to you.

5. Revive Your Self-Worth after a Rejection: Rejections are so hurtful we often try to make sense of our emotional pain by finding fault in ourselves. Our reasoning is that if we hurt so much, we must be really weak/pathetic/a loser/unworthy/fragile/unlovable, etc... Rejection hurts as it does not because there's something wrong with us but because of how our brains are wired ([read more about that here](#)). The best way to ease emotional pain and revive your self-worth after a rejection is to adopt the habit of affirming aspects of yourself you value, qualities you possess that you find meaningful (e.g., loyalty, compassion, creativity, or a strong work-ethic). Make a list of such attributes, choose one or two and write a short essay about why the quality is important to you.

6. Combat Loneliness by Identifying Self-Defeating Behaviors: Chronic loneliness is much more common than we realize and it has a devastating impact on our emotional and physical health ([read how loneliness can shorten your life-expectancy here](#)). The problem is that once we feel lonely, we often act in ways to minimize the risk of further rejection by unconsciously engaging in self-defeating behaviors and sabotaging opportunities to make new social connections or to deepen existing ones. The best way to combat loneliness is to adopt the habit of identifying and challenging these self-defeating behaviors. Make a list of excuses you've used to avoid taking initiative in social situations (e.g., I won't know anyone at the party so why go? They don't call me so why should I call them? They're probably too busy to meet up. I can't just introduce myself to a stranger at a cocktail party). Now make a list of people whose company you've enjoyed in the past (go through your phone book, Facebook friends, and Email contacts) and reach out to one or two of them each day to initiate plans until your social calendar is full. Challenge yourself to avoid using excuses from your list when you feel anxious.

7. Shed Excessive Guilt by Repairing Damaged Relationships: Excessive guilt occurs when our actions or inactions have harmed another person (most often a close friend or relative) who has not forgiven us for our wrongdoing. Such situations usually have more to do with the inadequacies of our apologies than with the inability of the other person to 'let go' of their hurt. Indeed, the crucial ingredient an effective apology requires—and the one we most often miss—is empathy. For the other person to truly forgive you, adopt the habit of conveying *effective* apologies when you've done wrong. To do so, make sure the other person feels you totally 'get' how they felt as well as how they were impacted by your actions ([read more about rendering effective apologies here](#)). Once you've expressed adequate empathy, the other person is much more likely to feel your apology is sincere and to convey authentic forgiveness. Your guilt will dissolve soon thereafter.