WORKING TOWARDS CLOSURE

EXPERT INFO & TIPS

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Introduction

This is a short guide on how to handle the effect of traumatic events in your life – you need to be able to close the door on events that have left an emotional scar in your life, closure is the process by which you reach that stage.

[This guide has also been published in The Hindu – you can verify its authenticity here.]

Why is closure important?

Closure of past emotionally traumatic life events in the mind is extremely important to overcome the continuing anguish produced by repeated thoughts about the event. No particular incident is traumatic only the way in which the person perceives makes it so; love failure, rejection by a partner, divorce etc.

Don't get stuck

Repeatedly thinking about an event can produce much more anguish than the distress experienced during the life event. An analogy would be that of spoiled vegetable; the longer we keep the more mess it will create, so it is very important to dispose it. Similarly in the thought process one should not get stuck with an old traumatic experience and allow it to affect the present and future, though that is what will happen naturally.

In very rare incidents traumatic events can have a detrimental effect on a person's personality. People who have experienced emotional trauma can programme themselves to have repeated abusive self-defeating experiences – needling a person periodically to make him have an anger outburst and then feeling bad of being screamed at. Some people can also be found constantly brooding and cursing that the stress levels would rise, release cortisol in the body which would have a detrimental effect on the heart.

Ways to reach closure

The closure can be done by taking a philosophical perspective; that it happened due to fate or karma. Having multiple interpretations of the incident; I had to suffer, it was an unfortunate experience, it enabled me to know about people, it enriched me to be strong etc.

Closure can also be in the form of performing ‘rituals'; a symbolic act to overcome the trauma of an event: a girl after being ditched by her boyfriend, literally digging a hole and burying all the things which remind her of him. The act of forgiving the abuser will help the person to overcome thoughts of rage and anger. Channelling one's energy and coming up in life can be another form of closure towards criticism during childhood about poor academic performance. Talking it out would be another good idea with people close to you: talking would provide a cathartic effect on emotional wounds.

Never get stuck

While working on closure it is important not to stay stuck in life: if you have a bad boss, move to a better work atmosphere; if ditched by a boyfriend, develop a good relationship; if divorced do not remain alone for long. Making
decisions to move on in life is very important to make closure effective. The more a person remains in the same situation the more he/she will be compelled to recall and brood.

**Be assertive**

At work, people may have to work with superiors who have low self-esteem. Working with such people would necessitate putting up with verbal abuse. Though the initial response may be to cope by laughing it off; after few years it can make one feel violated and emotionally abused. In the long term it is advisable not to put up with such people for the sake of one's own emotional well-being; be it husband, superior, colleague or even a friend. It is very important to be assertive with such people and discourage them from getting abusive. It is very important to protect ourselves from emotional harm as we protect ourselves from physical harm!
AFTERWORD

This guide has been prepared by an authority on psychotherapy, Dr. Ravi Samuel, founder of UrClinic, a specialty psychotherapy clinic based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India and made available online on the UrBrainClinic website by Checktech, an internet technologies firm, also based in Chennai.

If you think that you or a loved one needs therapy for issues related to emotional closure, please contact Dr. Samuel at UrClinic.

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