

***Live in The Present:
Don't Dwell on
Your Past “Mistakes”***

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Agenda

- **3 Adults who are stuck**
- **Common “mistakes” we get stuck on**
- **Stick to the present: Goals**
- **Cognitive Restructuring**
- **More examples**
- **Thought Stopping**

Bill & Grace

Grace is really mad when she catches Bill sneaking looks at his phone E mail while she is telling him about some real problems she is having with one of her close lady friends.

Grace: “This is the **3rd time today** your doing the phone thing while I’m talking to you! You take me for granted and don’t care anymore!”

Bill: “Well, but....” (**latest lame excuse**)

Bill knows he is messing up but “forgets” & keeps doing it. He obsesses about his failure to change & how he is messing up his marriage.

Alicia

Recently diagnosed with **ADHD** at age **54**, Alicia is having a difficult time keeping up with conversations- live & on social media- with her lady friends. She **can't keep track** of what's happening with everyone **like she used to**. She is **slipping up, missing important information**, embarrassed, & not sure how to cope. She is **thinking about this all the time** & doesn't know what to do.

Heraldo

Heraldo dropped out of college and lied to his parents about using the tuition money they gave him to fund his now successful career in popular music. He has ADHD and college just wasn't his thing. Five years later, he still obsesses about lying to his parents. He feels guilty about what he did, especially since it was the basis for his now financially successful music career. But he just can't get himself to tell them.

“Mistakes” Happen in ADHD

- ADHD is a Disorder of Self- Regulation.
- By definition we make “**mistakes**” or sometimes **poorly self- regulate**.
- “**Mistakes**” are not bad. They are an inevitable part of the process of living with ADHD. I prefer to think of them as “**ADHD moments.**”
- Sometimes we dwell on our **mistakes** too much & get stuck, so we don’t move on.
- We have strong negative emotional reactions of anger, frustration and/or anxiety, blaming ourselves or others.

“Mistakes” Happen in ADHD

- We should strive to be accurate, but take responsibility for our mistakes, fix them, deal with the damage, move on best we can, **but try not to get stuck obsessing about them.**
- I have a few suggestions that might help you if you get stuck dwelling on the past.

***First, These are Things
We May Dwell On....***

A Few Things We Dwell On

- Will I ever be a good parent?
- Why do I put up with such abuse from _____?
- Why am I wasting so much time/money doing _____?
- When will they find out that I am really a fraud?
- When will I think before I run off at the mouth?
- Will I ever get my Mom/Dad's approval?
- Do my adult children really care about me?
- Will my spouse forgive me this time?
- **Etc.....We each have our favorite ones.**

How to Stick To the Present

- **Basic Idea:** Take all the time you spend running the same thoughts about the past through your mind & making yourself miserable, and instead, ***devote that same time to a more positive activity that will clear your mind, put you in a problem solving mode, and move your life forward.*** **USE EVERY MOMENT OF YOUR TIME WISELY. ONCE IT IS GONE, YOU CAN NEVER GET IT BACK.**

How to Stick to the Present

- Translate “**Mistakes**” into Goals for Change
- Restructure your Cognitions
- Normalize it, Don't Dwell on it, & Move on
- Try Thought Stopping
- Don't Waste Your Time

Bill & Grace

Grace is really mad when she catches Bill sneaking looks at his phone E mail while she is telling him about some real problems she is having with one of her close lady friends.

Grace: “This is the 3rd time today your **doing the phone thing while I’m talking to you!** **You take me for granted and don’t care anymore!”**

Bill: “Well, but....” (latest lame excuse)

Bill knows he is messing up but “forgets” & keeps doing it. He obsesses about his failure to change & how he is messing up his marriage.

Behavior Change Program-Phone

- Listen when Grace speaks, put down phone.
- Grace makes point in 20 words or less, then asks for response
- Ignore phone if rings, buzzes, etc.
- Serious topics- no phones in the room.
- Short practice sessions daily. Increase length.
- Grace gives affectionate rewards for Bill doing this.
- Practice in therapy session at first.

Behavior Change-Showing Appreciation

- Bill makes list of things he likes/enjoys Grace does
- Spontaneously expresses >3 items on list each day
- Must really mean it, not just say it
- Notice Grace's appearance & comment on it
- Notice everything she does & comment on it all
- Bill does whatever it takes to remember to do this-reminder systems are OK if needed.

Alicia: Recently Diagnosed

- Alicia, age 54, recently diagnosed with ADHD, is having a very difficult time adjusting to the idea that her brain just misses stuff & it isn't her fault. She obsesses on her pre-diagnosis thinking that she should take in everything in all conversations & miss nothing. She has been missing a lot and feeling terrible about it, not knowing, of course, why, until she had the ADHD evaluation.
- Alicia told her psychologist she is in **menopause**. It was explained that **less estrogen** during menopause is associated with a **decrease in dopamine** in the brain. **Less dopamine** means **more ADHD symptoms**, and **it isn't Alicia's fault**. It's her changing biology triggering more ADHD symptoms.

Plus, Problems For the Newly Diagnosed

- **Getting used to a new way of looking at the world**
- **Attributing things to biology of ADHD, not our fault**
- **Still our responsibility**
- **We may obsess, needing time to shift attitudes**
- **Use brief strategies in specific problem situations**
- **Books, articles, and websites may help**
- **Cognitive restructuring takes time & work**
- **Cognitive Behavior Therapy can help**

What Could Alicia Do?

- Try stimulant medication. Titrate the dose to maximize understanding everything in the conversations.
- Estrogen replacement therapy. +/-
- Seek out Cognitive Behavior Therapy.
- **Try one of the following strategies when she misses things in conversation:**
 - Nicely ask for the comment to be repeated
 - Take notes or get permission to record on her phone
 - Paraphrase what she remembers and ask for the rest
 - Nicely ask speaker to use short sentences

Cognitive Restructuring

- Identify the extreme thought (e.g. “mistake”)
- Provide a logical challenge
- Identify a more reasonable thought
- Show whether the reasonable thought makes more sense than the extreme thought- either by logic or by an actual experiment

CR Example #1

- **Identify extreme thought:** I'll never get organized, so why even bother?
- **Logical challenge:** What about the times you got your closet organized & labeled? And your recipe cards?
- **Identify a more reasonable belief:** You can get some things organized when circumstances are right.

CR Example #1

- **Show how the reasonable thought makes more sense than the extreme thought.** If I can organize other things like I organized my closet and recipes, I guess there is a reason to try. It's not a lost cause. I just need some help.

CR #2: Heraldo dropped out of college

- Heraldo, an adult with ADHD, dropped out of college & lied to his parents about using the tuition money they gave him to fund his now successful career in popular music. Five years later, he still obsesses about lying to his parents.
- **Identify the extreme thought:** My parents will be very angry & disinherit me if they find out I misused their tuition money. I will lose a large inheritance, and I will feel like a nothing.

CR #2: Heraldo dropped out of college

- **Identify a more reasonable thought:** I don't need the inheritance. The tuition money was my "entrance fee" to music. ADHD'ers just do it differently.
- **Show how the reasonable thought makes more sense than the extreme thought.** College was not for me. I needed to work on my music. I hope my parents will understand the tuition money let me do that. I am proud of what I've done. I will tell them. Their money helped me.

CR #2: Herald dropped out of college

- **Conduct an experiment to test the reasonable vs. unreasonable thoughts:** Herald got up his courage & told his parents what he did with their money. They were angry at first, but when they realized that music was his dream & his gift, they came around and accepted his decision. He does not think he lost his inheritance, but of course he won't know for a while. In this case his experiment confirmed the reasonable belief.

Which Change Method?

- Will I ever be a good parent? **-Goals**
- Why do I put up with such abuse from _____? **-Goals**
- Why am I wasting so much time/money doing _____?
-Goals
- When will they find out that I am really a fraud? **-CR**
- When will I think before I run off at the mouth? **-Goals**
- Will I ever get my Mom/Dad's approval? **-CR**
- Do my adult children really care about me? **-CR**
- Will my spouse forgive me this time? **-Goals**

- **CR= Cognitive Restructuring**

Will I ever be a good parent?

- ***Convert to Goals for Change. Work on them.***
- What aspects of my parenting do I want to improve?
- I want to spend more time doing outdoor activities with my 10 and 8 year old boys.
- Observe & talk with them about their preferred activities. Establish a plan and if needed, schedule for such activities. Coordinate with your spouse.
- ***After you get this going, talk with your spouse about what other specific goals follow from wanting to be a good parent. What does your spouse want to do?***

When will they find out I am really a fraud?

- ***Use Cognitive Restructuring.***
- **Identify the extreme belief:** Because I have ADHD, I am really a fraud rather than a genuine person.
- **Challenge the extreme belief:** What is the evidence that I am a fake person when I interact with people rather than act genuinely like I really am a real person? I answer questions honestly based upon best info I have & my answers prove true when checked out by others. My ADHD misses stuff, so I have to cope.
- **Identify a more reasonable belief-** maybe I am a “real person,” not a fraud, & I just feel that way because of ADHD hurting my self-esteem & confidence. Yes, I miss stuff, but that’s my ADHD. I will deal with it.

When will they find out I am really a fraud?

- **Show that the reasonable belief makes more sense than the extreme thought- either by logic or by an actual experiment-**
Talk to other people with ADHD & experts- discover they also miss stuff, feel this way, & learn it is normal with ADHD. You have to develop ways to get others to slow down, repeat, feed you the information slowly, or you record the information electronically for later retrieval. You realize with ADHD is a disability, taking it all in quickly isn't realistic, and it is easy to feel like your faking it in a face-paced conversation. But you are not a fraud any more than a person in a wheel chair is a fraud because s/he can't walk.

We Waste Too Much Money Eating Out

- **Problem:** Brenda & Phillip, a dual ADHD couple, eat out 5/7 nights per week, but it is killing their budget. *They complain about all the money they are wasting, yet they keep doing it.*
- **Goal for Change:** *They are good cooks. Start cooking more or re-prioritize how they spend their money so more is allocated to eating out. We folks with ADHD are often **allergic** to effort like cooking.*
- **Issue:** They can't have their cake and eat it too.

Thought Stopping

- **Thought Stopping** is one of the first behavior therapy techniques from the 1960s. It is useful following **Cognitive Restructuring** and/or **Goal Setting** but not by itself.
- “Mistake”: ***“I should have kept my mouth shut and I would not have all these problems.”*** John lost girlfriends, friends, and a job by cursing people out, running off at the mouth, name calling, and blurting things out. Now he obsesses about this & drives himself crazy.

Goal Setting

- **He corrects the Biology of impulsivity by taking 72 mg. of Concerta 1/day, 7 days/week**
- **He practices daily “Think before Speak strategies” learned from weekly CBT therapy sessions**
- **He Make Amends to all the people he offended in the past in person or in writing if they are not in the local area.**

Cognitive Restructuring

- **Identify extreme belief-** I should have kept my mouth shut & I would not have these problems
- **Challenge extreme belief-** ADHD made it more difficult to resist running off at the mouth
- **Identify a more reasonable belief-** Even though I messed up badly, I am now taking steps for good self-control
- **Reasonable vs. Extreme beliefs-** the steps I am taking are the best ones for me, so I don't need to obsess about it anymore.

Thought Stopping

- When I think “I should have kept my mouth shut...,” I will imagine a big red stop sign, and if alone, shout **STOP.**
- I will fill my brain with the image of my favorite mountain scene.

Summary

- If you are obsessing about something you messed up.
- Try transforming it into a Goal for Change
- Try treating it as an unreasonable idea and using cognitive restructuring.
- Normalize it. Or even try thought stopping.
- You can't get your time back. Together with your health, time is your most valuable asset. Spend it wisely. *Don't waste it needlessly obsessing about past ADHD Moments.*