

Healing the Hurt You Didn't Deserve

By Suzie Johnson

Dear Suzie, Although it's been more than five months since I discovered the affair, every day I still wake up feeling like I'm drowning in these painful emotions. I feel like I will never be normal again. No matter what I do, I can't seem to stop wondering how I'm ever going to get over this type of hurt when it was so unfair. How do you heal a hurt you never deserved?

Tell me if this sounds familiar to you: Do you fall asleep thinking about what happened, only to wake up thinking about what happened? Does it feel like you're going through the motions of life but not really living? Are some days better than others? Do you tell yourself to just get over it, and yet, you can't seem to think of anything else? Do you find yourself constantly wishing it had never happened, imagining how your life could have been so much better if it hadn't?

And what about your moods?

Have you noticed you're more prone to angry outbursts than ever before? Are friends and family using words to describe you like moody, irritable, and hypersensitive? Are the kids tiptoeing around you for fear they might set you off?

Have you noticed how certain things trigger the hurt?

For example, you can't listen to certain songs, watch certain movies, or do certain things because they trigger so much hurt and painful feelings. Do you find that you've had to throw out anything that reminds you of what happened? Do you try to avoid any place *they* went or avoid doing anything *they* did?

And what about at night?

Do you find it hard to quiet your mind? Do you find that your thoughts churn, turn, and return to evidence over and over again? Do you find yourself replaying the conversations, the lies, the stories, and the contradictions, hoping beyond hope to discover some new thing that will help you make sense of it all?

If any of this sounds familiar to you...

...then chances are, you've been caught in the backlash of the negative stress that comes in the wake of betrayal. Some people refer to it as heartache; others see it as a milder form of post-traumatic stress disorder. Call it what you want, but don't call it painless.

What makes betrayal so hurtful?

The hurt is caused by the influx of negative stress. How did all that negative stress come into your life? You guessed it. It came through the backdoor left open by your partner's deception. In other words, a big part of the hurt and pain you feel is a direct result of your boundaries being violated.

What are boundaries?

Boundaries are the line in the sand between what is OK and what is not OK. It's useful to think of boundaries like the borders of a country—invisible and yet very real. And like borders of a country, our boundaries have very important protection and security functions.

What do boundaries protect us from? Healthy boundaries keep out the majority of negative stress. This is why it's often said that people with healthy boundaries are generally happier. (Happiness can be described as the absence of negative stress, or peace.)

However, since infidelity is an inside job, you didn't have the usual protective layer of your boundaries to block the incoming hurt. So, even the people with the healthiest boundaries can find themselves blindsided. And even the strongest people sometimes fall apart.

What does all the negative stress feel like?

Here are some examples:

- Burning resentment about the affair
- Fantasies of getting revenge
- Wishes to punish or get even
- Anxiety about future affairs
- Anger about unwanted consequences and inconveniences
- Loss of love, respect, and trust

- Recurring questions like “Why is this happening to me?”
- Preoccupation with images of the affair partner
- Rehashing the details
- Reopening old wounds of past betrayals and past hurts
- Disgust towards our own naïveté or innocence
- Self-blame, self-loathing, and guilt
- Resistance to having to deal with change
- Denial of reality (This isn’t really happening.)

Did you notice something?

As you look closely at each of the examples of negative stress, you’ll discover they all have one thing in common: They’re rooted in some form of fear. So while painful feelings and negative stress can come to us from many places and have many names, it always has the same source—*fear*.

What is fear?

You could spend all day trying to define this word. However, here’s a definition that I’ve always found useful. Fear is the *positive* expectation of a *negative* result.

Here’s something surprising:

Negative stress is caused by the expectation of future negative results. What this means is that it’s not the past betrayal that is causing most of the hurt, as much as it’s your worry of future betrayals. Keep this in mind. Fear (your negative expectations) don’t have to be rational. They don’t have to be logical. And they don’t even have to make sense to create negative stress. However, know this:

If you’re hurting, you are in fear. And if you’re in fear, you are hurting. The two are attached like Siamese twins. You can’t have one without the other. This tells you that if you release the fear, you also release the hurt. And if you want to release the hurt, you must be willing to release your negative expectations.

What is healing?

All healing is a release from fear. It’s a shift from negative expectations to positive expectations...from fear to love...from pain to peace...from anger to

compassion...from unhappiness to happiness. *Notice the word “shift.”* This is a key word here. Because when you heal, you’re not being asked to do something that causes you strain, but rather something that allows you to relax. And here’s another thing about healing: You don’t *create* healing, you *allow* healing to happen. This means healing is a decision. It comes by your invitation. It cannot be forced *on* you; it must be welcomed *by* you.

So, to answer your question, *“How do you even begin to heal the hurt you didn’t deserve?”* *Step one* is overcoming the fear of healing.

It might surprise you to discover that although betrayal is painful, many people are actually afraid of healing that pain. This is a totally irrational fear...and yet, it persists. So rather than asking *how to heal*, I find that it’s more useful to ask *how to overcome the fear of healing*. And to help you do that, let’s take a look at the six major reasons why people fail to heal.

6 Reasons Why People Fail to Heal

What causes the fear of healing? There are many erroneous beliefs that create confusion, fear, and ultimately, resistance to healing. Let’s take a look at six of the more common ones.

REASON 6

Staying angry gives me power.

It’s an irrational (and seductive) belief that anger gives power. But does it, really? Or is it just a ruse to hide the fact that we actually feel powerless? That’s something to think about, huh? Here’s the thing about anger: It doesn’t give you any more power than a lampshade gives a lamp power.

REASON 5

Staying hurt gives me control.

This is a victim's coping strategy. In an effort to reverse the injustice done to them, many people hold on to the hurt and then use their pain as an excuse to hurt others. But does it work? Can you really find happiness by collecting injustices and using those injustices to control others? I'm not so sure you can.

SIDE NOTE: All victim coping strategies are *learned* behaviors. This means, they can also be *unlearned*, once a person clearly sees how unattractive they are.

REASON
4

It's not my responsibility to heal.

This is another type of learned helplessness. It comes from the belief that those who cause us harm are also responsible to bring us healing. (This is why so many betrayed partners wait in vain for their wayward partners to do something to make them feel better.) Waiting for those who hurt you to heal you is like waiting for a bee that stings you to come back and soothe your wound. The truth of the matter is, regardless of *who* or *what* causes the hurt, the healing is *your* responsibility.

REASON
3

If I stay hurt, it will teach them a lesson.

Here's the essence of this belief: If I punish, pressure, and cause them to hurt like I'm hurting, they will feel the pain I feel and that will teach them a lesson and make them change for the better. But does it really work? I'm not convinced it does. From my observation, punishment doesn't automatically correct behavior (or else, the prison system wouldn't be a revolving door for repeat offenders). If you want to look at the reality of what punishment induces, it's more like compliance, at best—where people do right for fear of being caught, but not from the desire to do right. Watch out! Beneath the mask of compliance lurks defiance. Staying hurt in order to teach someone else a lesson is *not* effective...not to mention, it's actually counterproductive.

REASON
2

If I heal, they win.

Here's another irrational concept. If you were to let it go and move on with your life, then it means they got away with it. So in order for YOU to win, you

mistakenly believe you have to hold on to the pain. But when you hold this argument up to the clear light of day, you can see how illogical it is to believe that you must lose in order to win. *And now, drum roll, please...*(Here's the biggest reason people fail to heal.)

REASON
1

It's too soon to heal.

Maybe you're thinking, "*What if I'm just not ready to heal? What if feels like it's too soon? The wound is too fresh? Are you implying that's wrong for you feel that way?*" Here's what I want you to understand: It's not about being wrong or right. This is about confusion versus clarity. Because why would anyone postpone their own healing, unless they were *confused* about the benefits of healing? This is like not cashing in a winning lottery ticket, because you feel like it's too soon to be rich. Trust me. Only a confused person could believe that staying hurt is more of a payoff than healing is.

The Moment of Choice

Healing doesn't wait for time. It awaits the decision to heal. This means you can begin the healing journey right now. In order to do this, you must make an important choice.

You must decide...

Would you rather keep the hurt or welcome the healing?

Take a moment to really think about this, because you can't have both. To keep the hurt, you must reject healing, and to heal, you must reject holding on to the hurt. If you would rather keep the hurt, then our conversation ends here. We part as friends. *How do you know when you're ready to welcome healing?* You know you're ready to heal when you're willing to release all the beliefs that create fear, no matter how warmly you cherished them in the past. You know you're ready to heal when you become sick and tired of being afraid, insecure, miserable, irritable, moody, mistrustful, and anxious about the future.

You know you're ready to heal when you can honestly say, "I want peace, more than I want to punish. I want to be happy, more than I want to be right. I want to

feel good, more than I want to feel guilty. I want to live in love, more than I want to live in fear.”

Remember:

Reading and learning is good. But it's by experience that we are transformed. It's not enough to read about healing; you must allow yourself to open up to it. What if you still feel some resistance to healing? Then chances are, you have failed to recognize that healing means winning back your power. And staying hurt means losing your power to the situation. But if that doesn't sound like something you're willing to embrace right now, then I'm not concerned in the least. Because here's what I am certain of: It's not a matter of *will* you heal, it's only a matter of *when*. Because even if your tolerance for pain is high, it's not without limits.

Eventually, there will come a day when you simply cannot put it off anymore. A day when the fear becomes unbearable, the negative feelings become intolerable, the misery becomes too much for you to bear, and you finally reach a point where you say, "I just can't take it anymore." In that moment, you will begin to search for a way out.