Emotional Pain is Not a Sickness

There is nothing wrong with feeling bad. There seems to be someone going around giving emotional pain a bad name. This type of slander is undeserved, sad, angry, dejected, gloomy, or unhappy.

It may not be pleasant to feel bad, but it can be very good for you. Often, the appropriate thing is to feel bad. When you leave a place you love, sadness is just the thing to feel. When you lose a friend or lover, miserable might be in order. When someone does you wrong, it is probably appropriate to feel angry. Leaving home for the first time calls for a little homesickness. Many people don’t let bad feelings happen. Everyday, in many ways, we are told not to feel bad. “Oh, cheer up!” “Sleep on it. You’ll feel better in the morning.” “Drink ________. A great way to perk you up…” “Take two of these pills and you’ll feel great.” These messages usually come from well-meaning people who don’t want you to feel bad. That’s the catch--too bad.

It is not possible to feel too bad, and, it is possible to feel bad for too long. If depression, sadness, or anger persists, get help. Otherwise, allow the feelings. They are usually appropriate and necessary for personal growth. When a loved one dies, it is necessary to grieve. The grief might appear in the form of depression, sadness, or anger. That is O.K. The sadness might feel out of control. That is O.K. There is nothing wrong with extreme emotional pain. It is natural, and it doesn’t have to be fixed.

When feeling bad becomes a problem, it is usually because you didn’t allow yourself to feel bad. So, next time you feel rotten, go ahead and feel rotten. It will pass; and it will probably pass more quickly if you don’t fight or pretend it doesn’t exist.

How to feel bad

1. Give yourself permission. Most of us have been taught, from the time we were little, not to feel bad. Send yourself a reverse message. Say to yourself, out loud if you can, “It’s all right for me to feel the way I do,” or “I feel bad and that is good.”

2. Don’t worry about reasons. Sometimes we allow ourselves to feel bad if we have a good reason. “Well, I feel very sad, but that is because my best friend is moving to Cleveland.” It’s all right to know the reason that you are sad, and its fine not to know. You can feel bad for no apparent reason. And, the reason doesn’t matter.

3. Set a time limit. If you are concerned about feeling bad, if you are worried that you need to “fix it”, give yourself a little time. Before you force yourself not to feel the way you feel, set a time limit. Say to yourself, “I am going to give myself until Monday at noon, and if I don’t feel better by then, I am going to try to fix myself.” Sometimes, it is very appropriate to fix a bad feeling. There might be a problem that needs a solution. You can use feeling bad as your motivation to solve the problem. And, sometimes you just need to feel bad for awhile.

4. Tell others. Often, other people (friends, family) have a hard time letting us feel bad. They are usually worried that they did something wrong, so they want to make it better. They want you to quit feeling bad. Tell them you will. Assure them that you will feel good again, but for now you just want to feel bad.

Sometimes students think this whole idea of allowing yourself to feel bad is a joke, reverse psychology, or something. It isn’t. It is a suggestion that is based in the notion that good mental health is only possible if you allow yourself to feel bad as well as good. So, have a rotten day.

Excerpts from Becoming a Master Student, Dave Ellis. 1985