

THE SEVEN HABITS OF EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY PEOPLE

EMOTIONAL FIRST AID MEANS SUMMONING COMPASSION
AND TAKING PERSPECTIVE. **by GUY WINCH, PH.D.**

M **MOST OF US PAY** close attention to our health, and we treat threats to our physical well-being as soon as they occur. We apply bandages to cuts and scrapes, and we don't pick at scabs. Still, we sustain emotional injuries in life just as often, but we are much less proactive about protecting our mental well-being than we are our physical well-being.

1 **FAIL SUCCESSFULLY:** Failure distorts perception; goals seem out of reach and our capacities seem less up to the task. We become demoralized and lose motivation. Ignore this gut reaction and make a list of the



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factors related to your unattained goal that are in your control (effort, preparation, planning, different approaches you could have taken). Then, consider how you might improve each of these factors.

2

FIND MEANING IN LOSS: What distinguishes those who thrive emotionally after experiencing loss or trauma from those who do not? The ability to find meaning in 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, searching for ways to recognize not just what you've lost but what you've gained as well will allow you to develop new appreciation for your life and the people in it.

3

STOP BROODING: When we ruminate over distressing events we rarely gain insight into them. Instead, we replay upsetting scenarios in our heads, which only increases the brooding and makes us feel worse. While the urge to ruminate is compelling, try disrupting the cycle. The best way to do this? Distract yourself with a task that requires concentration—such as a game of Sudoku, naming the stations on your subway line in exact order, or watching an absorbing film.

4

NURTURE SELF-ESTEEM: We feel better about ourselves some days than we do others. But many of us become self-critical when we're feeling bad—kicking self-esteem when it's already down. Instead, regard your flagging self-esteem as an emotional immune system that needs to be nurtured back to health. The best way to heal damaged self-esteem: Practice self-compassion. When you have critical thoughts about yourself, consider what you would do if a friend had similar feelings. Write down what you would say to your friend in an email; read the email as if it were addressed to you.

5

REVIVE SELF-WORTH: Rejection is hurtful. We often try to make sense of our emotional pain by finding fault in ourselves. Our reasoning: If we hurt so much, we must really be weak, pathetic, unworthy, and so on. The best way to ease emotional pain and revive self-worth after a rejection is to affirm the aspects of yourself you value, qualities you possess that you find meaningful—loyalty, compassion, creativity.

6

COMBAT LONELINESS: Chronic loneliness is more common than we think, and it has a devastating impact. The problem: Once we feel lonely, we often act in ways that minimize the risk of further rejection; we unconsciously engage in self-defeating behaviors and sabotage future opportunities to make or deepen connections. To combat loneliness, identify and challenge self-defeating behaviors. Make a list of excuses you use to avoid taking initiative in social situations ("They don't call me, why should I call them?"). Now make a list of people whose company you've enjoyed and reach out to a few each day.

7

ABSOLVE YOURSELF: Sometimes our actions or inactions harm others, and sometimes the harmed do not forgive us. We are left with guilt; this usually has more to do with our inadequate apologies rather than with the inability of the other person to let go of the hurt. An effective apology requires a crucial ingredient—empathy. For the other person to truly forgive you, convey an effective apology. Make sure you understand how he felt as well as how he was affected by your actions. Once you've expressed real empathy, the other person is much more likely to feel that your apology is sincere and give you authentic forgiveness.

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