

SPECIAL REPORT

# 5 Exercises You Can Do Today To Let Go Of Your Painful Past



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## **5 Exercises You Can Do Today To Let Go Of Your Painful Past**

Are you haunted by your past? Is there a memory or a series of memories that you can't seem to let go of? Many people still play past memories in their head and feel the feelings of those experiences with the same intensity as if the event were happening now.

Perhaps your parents or some other significant person in your life abused you. This abuse could have been physical abuse, where you were hit or kicked with no or little provocation. Maybe you grew up with an alcoholic parent who would single you out while drunk and take their frustrations out on you.

Abuse doesn't always have to be physical to hurt – emotional abuse can be just as painful. Maybe while you were growing up you were blamed for everything while your siblings were treated as if they were perfect and could do no wrong. Maybe you grew up with a parent who was away from home all the time so they were unavailable when you needed them. You may have experienced a painful parental divorce where you felt that you were to blame for the breakup.

Were you bullied at school? Bullying can take the form of physical aggression, or it can take the form of relational aggression such as being ostracized from a group of people who were your friends or perhaps having rumors spread about you that were completely untrue.

Other bad memories might include losing a job you liked, sustaining an injury that caused you to have to change your career and life plans, or a chain of failures in relationships that make it hard to have positive and fulfilling relationships now.

Do you live with a lot of guilt? Maybe you were raised in an environment where you were chastised for every mistake you made. Maybe you remember hurting someone and now you wonder if they are scarred for life. If you have this kind of memory, you need to take care of yourself and shed the guilt.

Healing your memories does not have to be long and complicated. Below I have included 5 simple exercises to help you rid yourself of the painful and tortuous feelings that you are experiencing because of past memories. Whether you have the kind of painful memories described in this article or different ones, these five exercises can help you get rid of the pain.

Someone might ask, “How do you get rid of a memory?” Erasing memories is not the purpose of the following exercises. The goal instead is to be free from the pain caused by the memories. You are likely to remember any life incident that had a strong emotional impact on you at the time that the incident occurred. The emotions that you felt at that time were so strong that you can feel them now even though the threat or perceived threat is gone. If you follow through with the exercises below and are able to rid yourself of those negative and painful feelings, it will not matter if the memory surfaces again. You will not have the sad, angry, or anxious feelings and those memories can no longer haunt you.

I know from experience that what I’ve just said is true as I can remember every day of my life since I was six years old. I can remember the day of the week and the corresponding date, the weather, the news, and all of my own personal experiences. Every bad day, every slight and offense, and every romantic breakup is lodged in my memory never to go away. Through my training in psychology (I am now a Licensed Professional Counselor and Life Coach) and through my own perseverance with the exercises that I’m going to share with you, I have learned how to get rid of the painful feelings from the past even though the memories remain.

Even if you do not remember every small detail or day of your life, I have no doubt that you have at least a few memories of experiences that make you depressed, anxious, or angry when you think about them. Some people reading this may even struggle with chronic depression, fatigue caused by constant worry and anxiety, or anger issues because of the painful memories from their past. All of this can be helped by healing your past memories.

I have had countless people in my counseling and coaching practice heal themselves by healing past memories using the following exercises.

## **Exercises**

The following exercises are designed to help you heal from the influences of emotions attached to past, painful memories. It is advisable that you do them in the order that they appear and that you complete all of them, as each exercise builds from the previous. You do not have to do all of them in one sitting. To maintain momentum, try doing one exercise each day for five days.

### **Exercise 1 – You Are Not a Victim, You Have Positive Memories**

For this exercise, you will need to recall positive memories. It may be useful to have some visual cues such as pictures, or any other memorabilia from your past. Some paper or a journal and a pen will be helpful too. If you are more comfortable typing, feel free to start a Word document on your computer.

Step 1 – Make a list of some of your positive memories. Gather old pictures, talk to family and friends, or chat with people on Facebook whom you have known for a long time to help you recall some positive events from your past. For example, you can think of a memory of having fun with friends, or a family picnic with fireworks, or a field trip you took in Middle School to the zoo. The idea of this exercise is to recall positive experiences where you enjoyed yourself so that you can conclude that you are not a victim. Everyone has at least one good memory.

Step 2 – Find a relaxed place and position either on your couch or on your bed or on the floor and take a deep breath. Loosen your clothing, take off your socks, let your hair down and get comfortable.

Step 3 – Visualize one of the positive memories that you recalled in Step 1. Imagine the sights, sounds, feelings, scents. Don't pressure yourself to remember everything perfectly or to create perfect pictures. The idea is to relax and enjoy the memory. Stay in the memory for as long as you want – there is no time limit.

Step 4 – Open your eyes and sit with the good feelings a few minutes longer.

Step 5 – Write the following in your journal: "I am not a victim. I have had good experiences in my life." Record your thoughts and feelings of the pleasant memory.

Congratulations! You have now completed the first exercise. You may be wondering how recalling a happy memory can help you heal from unhappy memories. The positive memory from Exercise 1 will provide you with a tool that you will need for Exercise 2.

## **Exercise 2 –Pair a Positive Memory with a Negative Memory**

For this exercise, you will need a chair to relax in, a quiet room where you will not be disturbed, your journal or Word document, and a pen.

Step 1 – Think of a painful memory from your past to use for this exercise. This memory doesn't have to be the worst thing that ever happened to you, just something that you remember that was unpleasant.

Step 2 – Find a relaxed place and position either on your couch or on your bed or on the floor and take a deep breath. Loosen your clothing, take off your socks, let your hair down and get comfortable.

Step 3 – Visualize the positive memory that you used for Exercise 1. Remember the sights, sounds, scents, and any pleasurable sensations. Let yourself enjoy the memory

for several minutes. Do not worry too much about the timing such that it interferes with your ability to relax and enjoy the memory.

Step 4 – Now visualize the unpleasant memory that you picked in Step 1. In the same way that you visualized the positive memory, now recall any sights, sounds, scents from the unpleasant memory. See things as they looked at that time. Hear the sounds around you, including if someone was yelling at you or talking to you or about you. Notice any physical sensations. Notice what feelings emerge. Visualize the unpleasant memory for approximately five minutes or until you feel that you can't anymore because the pain is too great.

Step 5 – Switch your attention and visualization back to the positive memory from Step 3. Imagine everything the way it was. Continue visualizing the positive memory until you feel that you have focused on this memory longer than you did the unpleasant memory. Aim for about 10 minutes but remember not to worry too much about timing.

Step 6 – Now switch back to the unpleasant memory. Dwell on it for less than five minutes. Notice if you feel any differently about the negative memory this time.

Step 7 – Record in your journal the difference in how you feel about the negative memory versus how you felt about it at the beginning of this exercise.

Congratulations! You have now taken a bold step. You risked feeling bad by reliving a past memory that was not pleasant. It is likely that you noticed that the feelings about the bad memory were not as intense the second time as they were the first time you visualized it. What you have done is flooded your negative feelings with positive ones. When you do this in the way I've described, the positive feelings tend to win over the negative feelings.

If you did not experience a significant reduction in the intensity of your negative feelings, the next three exercises may help.

### **Exercise 3 – What Beliefs Did You Adapt From Your Memories? You Can Change Them.**

You will need your journal or Word document and a pen.

Step 1 – At the top of a new page in your journal, write down the unpleasant memory you used in Exercise 2. .

Step 2 – Brainstorm and try to identify any beliefs you may have adapted from the experience you went through in your memory. Beliefs are conclusions you have drawn about life. They are not facts. For example, if you have memories of being a poor student in school, you may have adapted a belief that you are not smart like the kids

who constantly harassed you about being poor while they got excellent grades. However, the fact of the matter is that your financial position in life has no bearing on your intelligence. Perhaps you have not found something interesting enough to learn about in any great detail and if you did, you would become well educated in that subject. Write the beliefs you've identified under the title of the memory.

Step 3 – Notice if any of the beliefs you've written down are negative. It is likely that the beliefs you adapted due to the negative memory will be what are called self-limiting beliefs, such as that you are not smart, not strong, or not good with people.

Step 4 – Now think of statements to counter your self-limiting beliefs, but do it in a way that is believable. For example, if you believe that you are shy and not good with people, it would not make sense or be possible to immediately convince yourself that you are the friendliest and most outgoing person in the entire world. It would be reasonable and believable to change your belief one small step at a time perhaps by saying, "I am friendly with certain people, maybe I could be friendly with more people." Pick a change in a belief that is important to you.

Step 5 – Keep in mind that you can adapt a belief even if it seems that you have no evidence to support it. Suppose you want to learn to play a musical instrument but have never done anything musical. Instead of believing that you can't do it because you have no experience with music other than listening to it, believe that you will enjoy playing an instrument and give it a good try.

Congratulations! You now have completed an exercise in changing your beliefs. When you change a belief, you change your life.

Imagine that you are riding a train that has four station stops. The first stop is Memory Lane. Think of this station as the memory that you are recalling. The second stop is Belief Avenue. At this station, you will encounter the belief or beliefs that you adapted from the memory at Memory Lane. The third stop is Emotion Junction. This stop is where you experience the emotions attached to the belief you have adapted. Finally, the fourth station is at Action Arena where you perform or fail to perform actions based on your beliefs and feelings that were formed in your memories.

Let's take the example of being shy. First you have a memory of being ridiculed or bullied – this is Memory Lane. Then you form the beliefs that you are not fun to be with and people do not like you – this is Belief Avenue. Then you feel anxious when you meet people – Emotion Junction. Last stop, you don't talk or act friendly when you meet people – Action Arena.

Once you do Exercise 3 and revisit the memory of being ridiculed or bullied, you can identify the beliefs and change them so that you can be friendlier to people you

meet. You then decide that if you can be comfortable and friendly among some people you can do it with more people. Then you act friendly and feel relaxed when you meet people. Congratulations! You have changed your belief and changed your life.

Everyone has things in their life that they consider more important than others. For some people, family and friends are more important than career advancement. For others, physical fitness is more important than money. Some people may equally value all of those things.

Similarly, you have memories that you value more than others. This means that you have some memories that have influenced you more than others. For example, you may have memories of your parents fighting and as a child you believed you caused the disagreements. Now when people argue in your presence you feel scared and guilty as if you had caused it.

You also have good memories that shaped your life. For example, if you were always good with your hands and encouraged to do manual work, you may now define yourself as a handy person.

Exercise 4 is a good opportunity to see if you give your bad memories too much power. They may be impacting your life more than they should.

#### **Exercise 4 – Disarm The Bad Memories.**

You will need your journal or Word document and a pen.

Step 1 – Select a memory that you would like to forget. You could use the one from previous exercises or another one. Choose one that you still get emotional about.

Step 2 – Ask yourself the following questions about the memory.

- a) Do I still see and have contact with the people who were involved in the memory?
- b) Do the circumstances of the memory affect my life now?
- c) Is there anything about this memory that I can laugh about now even if I could not laugh then? Often when we reflect on what we were upset about, we see the silliness of it. Suppose you are now the vice president of a major corporation and the memory you chose for previous exercises was an occasion where you cried forty years ago because you could not master twirling a baton.
- d) Can I feel good that my life is now different from how it was then? Although your life is not perfect, it is better even if you don't have the problem you had then.
- e) Am I a different person from who I was then?

After answering these questions, it is likely that you no longer attach importance to the memory. It can feel good to let go of something that now feels silly. Also, sometimes you might react to releasing a past memory by berating yourself for letting it bother you for so long. If you feel that way, then answer the next question.

- f) Will I forgive myself for letting myself be upset for so long? The key to forgiving is simply to do it.

Congratulations! You have now completed four exercises. You are probably feeling good about yourself, and you have let some of your past go. Freedom comes from letting go.

Don't be discouraged if there are some memories that carry feelings that you are having trouble releasing. Sometimes it just takes practice. Exercise 5 will help you see any memory in a positive way. Mistakes are to be learned from.

### **Exercise 5 – What is the Meaning of This?**

You will need your journal or Word document and a pen. You may also need to schedule for some undisturbed time in a comfortable place.

Step 1- Pick a memory that is unpleasant, maybe one that brings guilt when you think about it or a memory where you blame yourself for something.

Step 2 – Go through the memory as vividly as you can. It may be helpful to pair this memory with a memory that was pleasant and repeat Exercise 2. Write in your journal any thoughts and feelings that you have about the memory.

Step 3 – Decide if there is anything that you could have done differently. Don't blame yourself for anything that happened, just ponder the circumstances and determine what you could learn from the past experience.

Step 4 – Write a lesson that you learned from the memory. You could start by writing, "This Memory Has Meaning Because I Learned . . ."

Congratulations! You have now learned to give meaning to your memories. You can now look at painful memories with the attitude that they improved your life because there are valuable lessons to be gleaned from them.

Did you enjoy these exercises? It feels great to let go of pain from the past. You can take your learnings a lot further by ordering my book "Heal Your Memories, Change Your Life". Each chapter has exercises like the ones you did. They can free you from your past and lead you to a lighter, happier, exciting, and successful present and future.

Perhaps you would like to be part of a web community and share your successes with others. Join my Phenomenal Memory website community where you can share with others and have new exercises and success stories that people share. If you feel that you need personal help in healing, contact me for a free coaching consultation.

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