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## **THE HIDDEN EFFECTS OF EMOTIONAL WOUNDS AND PAINFUL MEMORIES**

- Do you overreact?
- Do you have emotional blocks?
- Do you sabotage yourself?
- Do you have insecurities, fears and phobias?
- Do you have emotional 'hot buttons'?
- Do you have painful memories?
- Does it take you a long time to calm down?

Unresolved emotional wounds can lead to many of these problems.

## PAINFUL MEMORIES

Most people have gone through at least one stressful, traumatic, or tragic event in their lives. These difficult events leave an emotional wound, a memory that recreates the original pain whenever you think about it. These experiences usually cause a mix of anxiety, depression, and sometimes guilt.

## THE NORMAL COURSE OF HEALING

For many people, when they are given enough support and guidance, these memories heal over several months. When you recall a memory that has healed, you can remember what you felt, but you don't feel upset in the present. As the memory fully heals, the symptoms of anxiety, depression and anger subside and disappear.

## UNHEALED MEMORIES CAN LEAD TO POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Sometimes, these painful memories do not heal but instead become stronger and more upsetting. In this case you may go on to develop a condition called Posttraumatic stress disorder or PTSD. PTSD can lead to flashbacks, nightmares or just upsetting recollections of the memory. When you have PTSD you often work hard to avoid thoughts, feelings or situations that may trigger the memory. Getting upset so often can cause you to startle easily, always be on guard, have difficulty sleeping and have frequent temper/anger outbursts. The high level of stress may also make you withdraw from relationships, lose interest in activities, have suicidal thoughts or become emotionally numb. PTSD can also cause other problems such as depression, substance abuse, fears and phobias, etc.

## MANY EVENTS CAN CAUSE LONG-LASTING EMOTIONAL WOUNDS

### Childhood Causes

- Sexual or physical abuse
- Emotional or verbal abuse
- Death or serious illness of a parent, grandparent or close relative
- Serious illnesses or prolonged hospitalization
- Near drowning or asphyxiation
- Severe asthma or allergy attacks
- Family substance abuse or alcoholism
- Divorce or separation
- Domestic violence
- Prolonged separation from a parent or close family member (due to hospitalization, military service, incarceration, etc.)
- A family member's depression or mental illness
- Emotional or physical neglect
- Less severe events such as bullying/teasing, parents fighting, frequent moves, or being left home alone as a preteen can cause emotional wounds if they occur over and over again.

### Adult Causes

- Sudden or traumatic deaths of loved ones
- Miscarriages, stillbirths and sometimes abortions
- Serious accidents, illnesses or injuries to self or loved ones
- Near drowning or asphyxiation
- Rape or sexual assaults
- Physical assault, mugging or domestic violence
- Military combat
- Less severe events such as romantic breakups, being fired from a job, harassment or discrimination at work can cause long-lasting emotional wounds when you are at a particularly vulnerable time (such as being pregnant or during prolonged stress).

## PARTIALLY HEALED MEMORIES CAN CAUSE HIDDEN PROBLEMS

When a memory heals just enough so that you don't think about it anymore it can cause hidden problems. Let's say that you witnessed domestic violence as a child or that your first boyfriend beat you. Recalling this memory brings up intense fear and anger. The memory partially heals and so for years you haven't consciously thought about it. It will seem to you that the memory isn't affecting your life because you are no longer conscious of its influence. An argument with your spouse now may trigger this unhealed memory causing you to overreact with fear and anger. But since you have learned to keep the memory itself from coming into consciousness you will have no idea that the memory has had any effect. Instead you will probably just think that you are an overly emotional person or that you in fact must not really love your spouse.

These hidden emotional reactions can lead you to make wrong decisions about your career, romantic relationships, parenting, etc. For instance, women who were sexually abused as children often get a strong urge to divorce their husband when their daughter reaches the age that they were abused. People who were physically abused as children often either are overly harsh with their children or they overcompensate and don't discipline them enough.

## PAINFUL MEMORIES CAN FULLY HEAL

Powerful techniques have been developed over the past 10-15 years to help people identify the effects of painful memories and to get those memories to fully heal. After appropriate treatment, most people report that they can't get themselves upset about the memory no matter how hard they try. It is now possible for people to reach a place of peace about even the most horrible things imaginable. ***If a therapist tells you that the pain associated with a memory will always be there, find another therapist.***