

Decentralize the Pain

Dr. Ron Kaiser January 31, 2014 No Comments

Decentralize the Pain (Transcription)

Hi everybody this is Dr Ron Kaiser with The Mental Health Gym podcast for January of 2012. This is the first podcast of the New Year and I'd like to start by wishing everybody a very happy new year. The new year started by going on vacation and consequently this podcast is being done a little later in the month is normally the case. I do try you get it done somewhere in the single digits, the first ten days of the month. I don't always succeed but I was especially tardy this time and hope you guys will forgive me for kind of enjoying myself rather than doing a recording, you know, quite as soon as I got back from vacation.

As we go through the New Year I think one thing that we can be certain about is that from time to time we will be greeted with the question of hi, how are you doing or how's it going or something along those lines. Most times this is just asked as kind of an informal greeting without the person doing the greeting really wanting to know a whole lot of about how it's been going. They don't necessarily want to get a litany of complaints and so on and for most people the general response is pretty innocuous and somewhere along the lines of fine, how you've been doing. At the same time though I would like you to think about how you really would introduce yourself to somebody who wants to know how you've been doing.

I know many of you who are members of Mental Health Gym are known to me because you're headache patients and have gone through our program and are involved at Jefferson Headache centre. Others of you have other kinds of medical issues and some of the work that we do in positive psychology has a particular appeal to you. And pretty much all of us have had to deal with emotional pain. The pain of loss of a loved one, the pain of a breakup, the pain of

losing the job or the daily nagging pain of going to job that we don't particularly like or having to deal with the discomfort of people in our environment who may be toxic either family members or friends.

There's a pain of having to confront a spouse or child or parent, to discuss something uncomfortable about their behavior and pretty much all have to deal with acute pain from time to time. Those of you who are currently dealing with pain from either a physical or emotional stand point, I would like to point out that there is a cognitive component to what you're dealing with and that's a part of it that you can kind of control. So when somebody asks you how's it going or how're you doing, if you really felt that the person wanted to know, how would you introduce yourself? Would you introduce yourself as a headache patient or as a person who's suffering or as a person who's depressed or a person who's experiencing a considerable amount of pain or is the way that you introduce yourself really based on a more comprehensive picture of yourself than that.

I think it's very important to recognize no matter how much you're hurting from either a physical or emotional standpoint, that that part of you is only a part of you. It's not the total definition of yourself and what I would like to argue for in this podcast is that you be fair to yourself and give yourself a really fair definition. I think it'll do two things, number one; it will force you to think more comprehensively about yourself rather than defining yourself by the pain but also it will project a more comprehensive picture and hopefully more positive picture of yourself to other people who you meet.

So today's podcast is really based on the issue of pain and how we can decentralize it. The key thing in decentralizing pain is not to deny that it exists, we have to acknowledge that we're going through some struggles and that we are feeling in pain, but we also have other kinds of things going for us. And so I'd ask you just as an

exercise to kind of list the various things that you consider parts of yourself definition. Think about it.

I know in my case I would define myself in terms of being an involved husband, father, grandfather, friend, psychologist, somebody who's interested in keeping in shape, I enjoy sports, I enjoy reading, I enjoy art, I enjoy travelling, there're lots of things and I can, though I may not particularly wanna share them at this time, there're are few things that I can find in myself definition that I'd like to go about changing, but I don't try to identify pain or medical conditions as the first things that I think about.

Fortunately unlike many of you I'm not often troubled by headaches but I have had three dislocated left shoulders, I've had knee surgery because of a torn acl that occurred in my youthful basketball playing days and every once in a while these things will act up just like everybody else once you reach a certain you also can manage to be hurting a little bit of just from normal activities of living and like everybody who reaches adulthood I've had to experience my share of losses and disappointments. So there is pain there but it is not the primary definition of myself.

I would strongly encourage you to make sure that it's not the primary definition of yourself. I'd like you to think in terms of decentralizing the pain. And that's where the cognitive component of dealing with pain comes from. If in fact we don't focus on the pain as a central definition of ourselves one of the really amazing things that will happen is that you will find that it's much easier to not concentrate on the pain all the time.

Now I know some of you sitting are there saying well this is easier for me to say than for you guys to experience because you've been experiencing pain for a long long time. And I know for some of you

the pain threshold and the pain tolerance may be different than for others but everybody can pretty much modify the experience of pain other than in the acute stage if you exert some cognitive control. The same kind of control that we've talked about in other aspects of living, the same kind of control that hopefully can get you in setting goals, the same kind of goal that can get you thinking in terms of what can go right, instead of focusing on the negative. The same kind of thinking that can make the pain be a part of you rather than the central part of you.

So, and again I'm not asking you to not acknowledge something that exists, I'm not asking you to be a Pollyanna, but I am asking you to be fair to yourself, to recognize that you have many other things going for you than just your pain and whether we're dealing with a chronic condition or whether we're dealing with a current acute condition or one that will occur in the future. It is quite possible and quite important to be able to keep it in perspective to be able to consider it as just one part of you rather than the total definition of yourself.

As usual I would be glad to hear your perspectives on it and please feel free to communicate with me at the website, but I hope some of you will be inclined to change some thinking and change perspectives on a way that you deal with pain as a result of this podcast. This is Dr Ron Kaiser and this has been your podcast for January 2012. Happy New Year to everybody, let's make this a year of accomplishment, goal achievement and hopefully improved pain control. I'll talk to you next month.