

How Good Are You at Emotionally Ignoring

Dr. Ron Kaiser January 31, 2014

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Hi everybody this is Dr Ron Kaiser with your audio podcast from The Mental Health Gym for January 2013. First of all although I believe that I've already utilized newsletters and blogs and personal training to wish some of you a very happy new year. If I haven't gotten to you yet, let me take this opportunity to wish you a really wonderful 2013. Let's hope that it's a positive year, a year for healthy change and hopefully The Mental Health Gym will be able to contribute to you own personal growth and development throughout the course of the year. So let's get started with the first podcast of the year and this one is in entitled "how good are you at emotionally ignoring".

Now the concept of the emotional ignoring is the one that maybe new to some of you. I don't know too many other people beside myself that utilize it very widely but I think it's really quite important. The concept really grows out of learning theory, kinds of things that they teach in school and in parenting classes and things of this nature. The basic principles of learning theory include the concept of rewarding moves in the right direction and not punishing but emotionally ignoring moves in the wrong direction. Thus for example, somebody who does really good work in school, hopefully will get rewarded with an A.

By the same token those of you who have young children or who have raised young children in the past may have learned that that's a really important concept to keep in mind during the child rearing process, so that you're not spending a whole lot of time criticizing and paying attention when somebody kind of fouls up in some way because that can wind up being treated as a reward. Some kids get more attention from their parents when they don't do the right thing then when they do. And consequently we're a whole lot better off

ignoring inappropriate behaviors than rewarding them with detention.

For example if you have a bed time for your child and he or she climbs out of bed, it's very important to get them back in bed not with a major lecture, not with yelling, not with losing control but firmly taking the child's hand and walking him or her back to bed. Now that may require you to do so ten times tonight but if you keep doing it, hopefully in another night or two it will be down to times to six times, things of this nature. Just like in school, if a child who has the ability recognizes that if they don't put forth effort, they're gonna get a lousy grade. Then they can eventually put it together and recognize that the good grade comes with effort. So emotionally ignoring is in essence not ignoring per se but not attaching a lot of emotional baggage onto negative behavior.

So I think it's very important to keep this in mind when we think in terms of how do we manage our adult relationships? Throughout the course of our day to day living we obviously run into a number of people with whom we have relationships. Probably the largest bulk, largest category of those people are people who don't affect us too much one way or the other, so that if you have an associate and acquaintance whom you're not too involved with, you don't get too upset over whether that person has an opinion, so that they favor the republicans or the democrats or that they think this way or that way about a certain topic because most of them aren't very meaningful to you.

By the same token if we have a close friend or a relative with whom we feel that we have a really meaningful relationship, what they say to us may be quite important. Now some people in their relationships with others tend to be very toxic. In other words the only way they know how to respond is through sarcasm, put downs, things of this

nature. Other people are what I and a lot of other people call nourishing. Their interactions are such that even if you disagree with them they're not putting you down as a human being. They're making you feel like your opinion has value. Now that's what you want.

You don't necessarily want your relationships be filled with yes people but you do want them to be filled with people who respect you and who don't put you down for having an opinion that's different than they are or that they have, who don't put you down because your choice of clothing or cars or other items of personal appearance or where you choose to live or things of this nature, maybe different with them or theirs. So what we wanna be able to do is when we recognize that somebody is very toxic that their interactions with us are such that they can't feel good unless the other person's feeling badly, it's important to not reward that.

It's very difficult to get into an argument with a person who doesn't convey a sense of respect and wind up feeling that it's been a productive discussion. You can do it with somebody who's nourishing, with somebody who respects you, and so on, so I think that it's very important when interacting with peers, family members, coworkers or anybody else to be able to keep in mind am I buying into their crazy behavior by rewarding it, by trying to convince somebody who has no desire to have a real clear cut discussion and a respectful discussion, am I buying into that or am I doing what's best for me which is to emotionally ignore.

You know, do you remember the schools yard bullies when you used to grow up, they would get away with things, if they convinced somebody that they were really tough or better way in some way than others. People who had good respect for themselves, who knew they were strong enough, would frequently laugh the bullies off.

Bullies couldn't really get to them. The same thing happens in adult relationships. Bullies will often try and put you down, will try to get you to disrespect yourself. But they often have very little self esteem themselves.

So if they don't get rewarded they're gonna move on to somebody who does. I sometimes use the analogy of the slot machine. If you sit at a slot machine and time after time, every time you put money into the machine you don't win anything at all, you're probably gonna leave that machine. Yeah there's a possibility if you sit there indefinitely then that machine, the next time you put money in, it will win but it's unlikely. Actually the casinos recognize this and that's why they let you win once in a while so that you don't leave the machine. Same kind of thing here, don't reward bullies, don't let them win sometime by getting into a major logical discussion with somebody who's disrespectful of you.

So when I talk about emotionally ignoring, it may mean acknowledging it in some way, you know, so if somebody has a political belief that's different than yours is and is intolerant of your belief, you know, it's very easy to just acknowledge the belief, yeah you may be right, I don't feel like you know discussing it or, I guess we have to agree or disagree or yeah it's not something that I get too excited about. You know in other words I think it's important to have a few responses that are not really rewarding but enable you to move on from the toxic interactions that you're having with somebody whose life really depends on being able to put people down. We talk a lot at The Mental Health Gym about building self esteem.

There's a lot that you can do about building it internally. But for many people who have issues with self-esteem it's because they have incorporated some negative put downs from other people, either

during their childhood, or in their marriages or in their jobs or other aspects of life. Learning how to emotionally ignore is one of the most effective ways of dealing with people who disrespect you and who you really should have very little respect for.

It's something I would be glad to discuss with any of you at greater length and depth and certainly feel free to email me at ron.kaise@thementalhealthgym.com and perhaps we can get a meaningful discussion going on this topic as we have with some others. Anyway I think that's gonna wrap it up for the first audio podcast of 2013. This has been Dr Ron Kaiser at The Mental Health Gym, looking forward to talking with you next month and throughout the year.