

The Starting Point in Overcoming Abuse & Trauma

Dr. Ron Kaiser January 20, 2014 No Comments

The Starting Point in Overcoming Abuse & Trauma (Transcription)

Hi everybody, this is Dr. Ron Kaiser with your October 2011 podcast from The Mental Health Gym. As you know at The Mental Health Gym we tend to emphasize positive psychology but sometimes we have to deal with the fact that not everything that happens in life is positive. And today's podcast addresses the effects of lousy things happening including abuse and trauma. In a previous podcast I identified the question of what's it got to do with me as being one of the critical questions that help to form appropriate thinking processes in order to move ahead and gain emotional health.

I believe that that question what does it have to do with me is particularly important when bad things happen including questions that need to be raised by victims of abuse, trauma or general bad things happening such as being exposed to an overly critical supervisor an overly critical parent, having to deal with bullying, things of that nature. One of the unfortunate things that happen when people have been abused or mistreated in any particular way is that it can impact upon self esteem.

Individuals who have suffered from child abuse and trauma may blame themselves in some cases they may do some self defeating behavior such as drug abuse, promiscuity and failing to pursue their best possible hopes of achievement. Now it's very important I believe under those circumstances to remove the issue from yourself and place the blame directly on the person who has done the inappropriate behavior in other words what does that have to do with you if you were the victim.

Now in working with individuals who have been traumatized or mistreated in any particular way, one of the critical things that I might point out to them is the question of when you drive some place if you go to the mall or to some place where there are number of cars, do you lock your car? Most people will reply of course I do. And I would ask you know, why do you do that? The most typical answer is because I don't wanna get my car stolen. Then I would ask, well why would a thief necessarily steal your car? I mean there are lots of cars in the world why would you be particularly concerned about it. And frequently they'll appropriately say, well I don't think they are necessarily looking for my car but if it's easy to steal they're going to steal it.

If my car's locked, if I don't have a lot of things visible through the window, the car thief may very likely go to another car. Sometimes I'll use the example of a pickpocket, you know when you go into crowds, do you put your wallet in your more difficult place for pick pocket to reach and if carrying a purse or pocketbook you keep it in front of you wrapped tightly and so on and I'll usually get the same answer that it's not that the pickpocket necessarily is targeting them, but the pick pocket is looking for somebody who's pocket or pocket book to pick.

That's what pick pockets to just as car thieves steal cars. They don't necessarily target their particular victim. Now of-course there are some instances where a car thief may be doing something on demand because particular car is needed, a pick pocket may have seen somebody leaving the bank and carrying a lots of money and observing where they place it on the person but in general a car thief will steal any car that he or she can take to a chop shop and acquire the necessary money that will make their thievery worthwhile.

I believe that it's also very important to apply the same kind of thinking and recognition when you're dealing with people who have mistreated you and in some cases traumatized you. So the notion of dealing with abusers of any type is to place the blame back on their shoulders. In other words what do rapists do? They rape. They rape people who are convenient to be raped. What do individuals who are child abusers do? They abuse children. Now if you happen to be abused by someone who operates in that way the chances are it's because you were convenient to that abuser.

It had nothing to do with you other than the fact you were in that place at that particular time. Consequently I think it's very critical to think in terms you know, what does that have to do with me? If some other child were in a child abuser's area would that person not have been abused? If another person was walking down the street that was relatively deserted and the rapist came along, would that rapist have thought, no I'm going to rape her because I know this other person is more deserving of it. People, who are working for critical employers, will be criticized because that's what critical employers do and if you had an ineffective parent, do you honestly think that they would be more effective if they had a different daughter or son? The answer probably is certainly not. In essence, people who blame themselves for having been abused are taking the abuser off the hook and it's important to not do so.

At the same time if we are adults we can learn from certain experiences, if you've had your car stolen while you left it unlocked because you were running into the store for brief purchase, chances are you won't do it the second time, but it is important to recognize that some people who have been abused and have been traumatized were not in a position to make any kind of right or wrong judgment, they were simply abused. Nobody can reasonably blame a young child for having been abused by sex or emotional or physical abuser but by the same token when we get to be adults we

can move toward not having that person control our thinking about ourselves any longer.

Think in terms of the person who had the car stolen again. And there's a reasonable chance that that person has driven in hundreds and thousands of time and parked in probably in many cases locked his or her car. But even if they haven't they have been successful in not getting stolen. Once it gets stolen you change certain behaviors. Same applies when dealing with any kind of mistreatment particularly among adults. If you've got a particularly critical friend, employer, co-worker, so on, you must even learn to disregard those criticisms if they are unwarranted or learn from them or move on to having different associates or think in terms of applying for different kinds of jobs.

The thing that we must not do is confirm that person's criticisms by letting that person control the way that we feel about ourselves. And that's why think it's very important to ask that question what does that have to do with me because it allows personal growth and it allows dealing with the issue from the position of strength rather than feeling negative about ourselves. I hope this has been helpful to those of you who may have had to deal with difficult situations of the type that I have described. Finally I would like to note for those professionals who may be listening to this podcast that in your working with patients I consider this question as the, an important first step. As we know there're many types of approaches in psychotherapy that are very effective if a therapist is very effective. And so I don't believe that this question requires abandoning your own beliefs whether they be from a psycho dynamic stand point or cognitive behavior stand point or any other type of approach to psychotherapy. I believe that the question has relevance as a starting point regardless of your therapeutic approach and I believe that it will help your patients deal with issues of abuse, trauma and mistreatment from a positive and stronger stand point.

Again my purpose and the purpose of the Mental Health Gym is to build strength so that people can move forward and do goal achieving. This has been Dr. Ron Kaiser with your August 2011 podcast I hope that you found it helpful and will be speaking with you again next month.