

# Feeling, Healing and Growth

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*Life is a series of experiences. When these experiences are positive, all's well. But negative experiences are a whole different story. They can stir up a whole range of negative, uncomfortable memories and emotions. Rather than sit with and experience negative feelings, we often seek to 'numbing' these feelings with alcohol, shopping, drugs, food, or other distracting and sometimes risky endeavours. Understanding why we seek to numb negative emotions and learning how to navigate through and clear negative emotions are essential to navigating unpleasant memories and uncomfortable feelings as they arise.*

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Most of us are uncomfortable with negative memories and emotions. We often feel overwhelmed when unpleasant emotions arise. At times, we hold onto negative emotions and catastrophize to a point where we spiral into anxiety, self-doubt, despair, and a pervasive sense of dread.

It's no wonder that rather than sit with and live through these unpleasant emotions, we sometimes seek relief, and choose to numb ourselves. Numbing ourselves can take on many forms, from overworking, over-eating or oversleeping, to self-medicating — often over-indulging — in alcohol or drugs. Other forms of numbing include excessive viewing of porn, video games, TV watching, shopping, or socializing... we'll do virtually anything to distract from what naturally arises, rather than sit in silence with our negative emotions. While such choices and behaviours offer short-term relief, they often lead to challenging long-term consequences.

## **All-encompassing and overwhelming**

Rather than providing a sustainable perspective, calmness, and an ability to see the good over the bad, at best numbing provides temporary relief. Over time, numbing our emotions leads to overwhelmingly bleak feelings about life. As we numb, we retreat into a grey zone, where life can become mundane and routine. We stop living fully and start merely existing.

By numbing our emotions we also block our awareness of deep feelings that are most likely seeking release. By hiding from our pain, we risk losing a sense of ourselves and our self-awareness. This can lead us settle for less than we aspire to and accept mundane or unfulfilling but safe situations that restrict us from being truly happy.

## **The unpleasant truth**

The unpleasant truth is that uncomfortable, negative emotions — just like the pleasant ones — are meant to be truly and mindfully experienced. In my clinical practice, many of my patients ask why they suffer through memories of difficult, painful, and sad times, reliving unpleasant moments of past hurts and traumas.

## **Processing and clearing**

I call these unpleasant moments that pop up from the past boulders. Every year, as Spring arrives, farmers prepare their fields for planting, and remove all the debris from the previous year's harvest... dead leaves, grass and weeds, and whatever the wind may have deposited into the fields. But the lion's share of the spring clean-up involves removing large stones and boulders that have risen up from ground after a long, cold winter.

Just as these boulders are pushed up to surface over the winter, we work on ourselves, and we grow, taking on more expansive roles over time. As we grow, our boulders of past hurts, fears and concerns rise up. Just as farmers remove these impediments to their crops every Spring, when negative emotions arise, we have the opportunity to deal with what stands in the way of our happiness and progress and clear the way for our future possibilities and growth.

Numbing simply leaves our boulders in the ground, where they continue to serve as barriers to our healing and growth. When we sit with and process our negative emotions, our past hurts remain as memories, but they are no longer intense, disruptive, debilitating and limiting. We begin to see past hurts and events as a part of our journey. What's more, we begin to see them as isolated incidents rather than repeating patterns.

### Healing and growth

We need to have faith and trust that whatever comes up, we can work through and clear it away. Allowing our boulders to come up and choosing to acknowledge and clear them is necessary as we are constantly evolving and growing. Rather than numbing what we dread and fear, connecting with and to fully feeling our feelings — in the moment — allows us to create opportunities to heal, clear and evolve, to move toward manifesting a better future, clear of limiting thoughts and fears of repeating past hurts and patterns.

### Faith bigger than fear

Life comes at us one day at a time. Sometimes everything feels great and falls into place, and other times prove far more challenging. We need to celebrate, enjoy and be grateful for the good days. And when the challenging boulder days arise, we need to make our faith in our ability to process and move past our pain bigger than our fear of reliving painful memories and feelings. We can add in extra self-care, reach out for support, and be compassionate to ourselves as we strive to move beyond our past sufferings and hurts... and toward our highest and best.

### Taking the edge off

#### Remember the good days!

We all have good days and bad. Acknowledging and celebrating the good days can take the edge off the challenging ones.

#### Acknowledge the bad.

If you're having a bad day, check-in with yourself. Validate your negative, low feelings and moods.

**Choose** to sit with, rather than numb your feelings with substances or behaviours that offer short-term relief but negative long-term consequences.

**Show** compassion for yourself if you're in the midst of a bad day, rather than admonishing yourself for feeling negative or angry.

**Bring in** self-care, in activities that bring you joy, or small acts of kindness to yourself when you're having a bad day.

**Seek help** from a mental health professional if you feel overwhelmed and stuck in low moods for a prolonged period of time.



Heal your past, deal with your present  
and take control of your future.

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With Dr. Monica Vermani, C. Psych.



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#### About the author

*Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021. <https://www.drmonicavermani.com>*

