

HEALTH

Resolving unfinished business

YOU'RE NOT ALONE



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I settled into my seat as the professor began the lecture. As soon as he started talking, I started feeling uncomfortable. I shifted in my seat. With each word he spoke, I found myself feeling more and more nauseous. It felt like the walls were closing in on me. I began to sweat and feel dizzy. I wanted him to talk about something else. Within minutes I stood up and left the classroom. I went to the bathroom. I felt sick to my stomach. I took a few deep breaths and splashed water on my face. I realized that if I ever wanted to be an effective psychologist, I would have to do something about how I felt. My professor was talking about how to help clients who are suffering with

unresolved grief issues. Unexpectedly, I had been flooded by memories of something I hadn't thought about in years.

During the lecture, I flashed back to when I was 11 years old, and the moment I got the news that my older brother had died unexpectedly. It came as a total shock, and to cope I shut down and avoided thinking about it as best I could. While I had been a client in therapy for several years prior to the class, my brother's death had never come up for me as an issue I needed to explore. However, in that moment, I realized that I had "unfinished business" surrounding his death and its impact on my life. I realized that if I wanted to move forward, both in my personal life and as a future psychologist, the unfinished business I had around his death would need to be resolved.

"Unfinished business" is the phrase therapists use to describe the emotions and memories surrounding past experiences that a person has avoided or repressed. The feelings around the event are not fully processed at the time, often because they are too overwhelming or traumatic. Since they are unresolved, they linger in the background of a person's heart and mind. When not appropriately

expressed, the sadness, grief, fear, anger, anxiety, mistrust, or terror associated with these events are carried into our present lives where they interfere with our ability to be emotionally present in our current lives. Unfinished business limits our ability to connect with ourselves and others. Research has shown that unfinished business is associated with anxiety, depression and interpersonal problems.

Children instinctively know how to deal with difficult feelings. However, they are often taught by parents and society to not cry or be angry. As such, when difficult thoughts or feelings come up, many of us are trained to push them aside or avoid thinking about them. In fact, human beings are experts at finding ways to avoid uncomfortable feelings or dial down their intensity — often resorting to things like alcohol abuse, smoking, compulsive eating, compulsive spending, to keep the volume down. However, these avoidance techniques only end up adding to our problems. While our ability to distance ourselves from painful feelings helps us survive in traumatic or overwhelming times, this same numbness can limit our ability to feel joy, love, peace and serenity when we are no longer in

danger.

But who wants to dredge up the past, especially the painful parts? Shouldn't we just let bygones be bygones? Ironically, while we have a tendency to avoid unfinished business, the effects on our life persist until we face the issue and deal with the unexpressed feelings. There are many avenues for allowing these feelings to be addressed — including journaling, therapy, support groups, pastoral counseling, or a talk with a close friend. When we access these old memories, we are able to supplement them with new information and insights, and thus change the hold they have on our lives.

Addressing my unfinished business with my brother did not change the reality of his passing, but it did significantly change my experience of his death. Prior to talking about it in therapy, I had no idea that I carried feelings of guilt and anger, as well as unexpressed sadness. By facing this very difficult experience I had tried to forget, and by fully experiencing the emotions I had about the event, I was able to release pent-up tears and express unacknowledged anger. Almost instantly, it felt like a great weight had been lifted from both my heart and mind. I was able to look at the

experience in an entirely different light, allowing me to challenge some of the distorted lessons I learned about myself and life by my 11-year-old mind.

While I will never be able to get my brother back, the intensity of the pain has diminished. By resolving my unfinished business around his death, I was able to get a part of me back that I thought had died with him. As a result, I believe I experience life more fully and with greater appreciation than I may have otherwise. While we can never change the past, resolving our unfinished business can improve our moods, lighten the load on our hearts and minds, improve our relationships, give us new understandings and enhance our appreciation for the basic and fundamental aspects of life.

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American seniors facing government sanctioned discrimination



Photo courtesy of ProtectSeniors.Org

ARACONTENT

According to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission it is now legal to discriminate against senior citizens in this country.

This happened in late March when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review a lower court decision in the case *AARP vs. EEOC*, which ruled the EEOC can implement a new regulation allowing employers to reduce health care benefits when retirees become eligible for Medicare and do so without facing age discrimination charges.

The ruling allows companies to cut back or simply eliminate benefits, including earned lifetime medical benefits for retirees once they

turn 65 and are eligible for Medicare. Many retirees across this nation, who voluntarily accepted lower wages during their working years in return for a commitment of supplemental employer medical benefits during their "golden" years, are beside themselves.

According to Paul Miller, executive director of ProtectSeniors.Org, "The government has opened the door to allow companies across America to dump the health care benefits of retirees over 65 with no repercussions." Miller's group represents more than 45,000 corporate and municipal retirees from over 20 industries and companies affected.

To find out more about ProtectSeniors.Org and its effort to stop the reduction and elimination of earned retiree health benefits call 800-398-3044 or visit www.protectseniors.org