

# Healthful Changes

Proven Strategies for Taking Charge of Your Life

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## Confidence and Self-Respect Through Conflict

**Q**uestion: Would you rather go to the dentist for a root canal or go to a friend and confront her with something that bothers you?

If you picked a root canal, you're not alone. Most people will do anything to avoid conflict and all the accompanying feelings of anger and frustration. On the list of things people love to do, confrontation probably ranks lower than standing in line at the DMV or, yes, even oral surgery.

But conflict doesn't have to be like that. Not only is conflict a normal part of life, it can be managed and even made into a positive jumping-off point for becoming a stronger and calmer person. Confronting someone—be it a business partner or a family member—and feeling that both of you "won" can be as exhilarating as jumping out of a plane. And in the case of conflict, your life-saving parachute is a set of tools that help you survive any encounter or conflict situation.

"In many ways, conflict can be productive," writes Sam Deep, co-author of *What to Ask When You Don't Know What to Say*. "Like a grain of sand in an oyster, it can produce 'pearls' by encouraging creative thinking, risk-taking and entrepreneurial spirit."

It's not unusual for most people to hate confrontation; in fact, it's difficult for most people to skillfully handle any kind of conflict—at home or in the workplace. And yet, the benefits of doing so include more self-confidence, less anger, greater self-respect and more intimacy, according

to Tim Ursiny, author of *The Coward's Guide to Conflict: Empowering Solutions for Those Who Would Rather Run than Fight*. His book outlines practical tips for dealing with conflict with family members, friends and co-workers, including the following:

**Focus on the upside.** Conflict avoiders often perceive only the downside. They need to see the positive side of confronting someone.

**Start by finding something that you both agree on** (even if it's only 1%).

**Admit your role.** If you are even partly at fault, be sure to acknowledge your mistake up front.

**Don't react with anger.** This is vital! Realize that you might behave like the other person if you were in their shoes. Look objectively at your behavior as well as the other person's.

Where there's conflict, there's usually anger. Yet it's the angry reactions that often get in the way of a peaceful solution to a problem. Ursiny advises people to look beneath their anger.

"Anger is a secondary emotion," he writes. "Many people—men in particular—react with anger when they're really feeling shame, embarrassment, pain, frustration, fear, confusion or helplessness. When you feel angry or find yourself in a conflict with someone who appears angry, pause and ask yourself why." \*

**"Don't be afraid of opposition. Remember, a kite rises against, not with, the wind."**

—Hamilton Mabie

## 10 Ways to Love ...Fearlessly!

*Let's face it: love is messy. With its magnified highs and lows, love is unpredictable and never what we expect—so much so that we might be tempted to cower in fear. But if we approach love with the courage of a warrior, we can have relationships of heroic proportions. Here are 10 ways:*

**1. Be yourself.** If we want to be loved for who we truly are, why put on an act?

**2. Don't believe your stories.** Our interpretation of events and feelings is, in fact, just one possibility for what is actually true. Focus on what IS to get closer to the truth.

**3. Stay open.** Fear's favorite pastime is to shut us down. But when we are vulnerable, true connection to others is possible.

**4. Speak up.** We become silent when we desperately want to connect.

**5. Stop looking for perfection.** More than likely, what we call "high standards" is a mask for our own feelings of inadequacy.

**6. Embrace the messiness.** It gives us the gift of growth.

**7. Get mad.** Learn the difference, though, between expressing anger responsibly and dumping it.

**8. Love with no thought of what you'll get in return.** This is fearless love in action.

**9. Take responsibility.** Be accountable for your own emotions, thoughts and actions.

**10. Love yourself.** Only then can you love others and be loved. \*

## A Letter From Poonam Sharma, Ph.D.



I hope you enjoy this edition of *Healthful Changes*, a newsletter aimed at moving you toward greater emotional, psychological, and physical health. Let the words in this newsletter inspire you to embrace the personal power you have to make positive changes in your life.

As an experienced psychologist, I have personally worked with hundreds of individuals to get unstuck, gain clarity, and improve their personal lives. I provide counseling for adults seeking assistance with a variety of problems, such as depression, anxiety, or relationship difficulties.

I have a special interest and expertise in working with clients who are dealing with infertility, chronic illness, or injury.

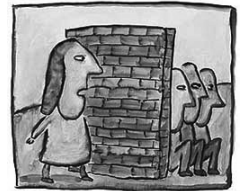
My professional style is to listen carefully to understand your situation clearly, help you set realistic goals, and then support you in taking steps to achieve the results you desire. I see us as partners in the change process.

Please call me if you have questions, are ready to make an appointment, or would like a free 30-minute consultation.

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## How Well Constructed are Your Boundaries?

Boundaries are those invisible lines of protection you draw around yourself. They let people know your limits on what they can say or do around you. Healthy boundaries give you freedom in relating to others. Make them too solid and you build walls, too weak and you allow others' actions to harm you. Take a few minutes to find out how well constructed your boundaries are.



### True False

- 1. I start statements with "I" rather than "you" or "we." This lets me own what I say and is less defensive than "you" and more clean than "we."
- 2. My boundaries are specific and clear. "I don't accept phone calls after 10 p.m." Rather than vague and mushy: "Don't call me too late."
- 3. I'm consistent when I create boundaries. If I say "no phone calls after 10 p.m.," I don't make exceptions unless the situation is truly exceptional.
- 4. When people attempt to cross my boundaries, I don't assume the worst ("they don't care," "they weren't paying attention," "they're selfish and inconsiderate"); I simply restate my position.
- 5. As soon as I realize I'm in a situation that might be headed for trouble, I announce my boundary. "I won't continue talking with you if you raise your voice at me."
- 6. I try to avoid situations and people where I know my boundaries will be continually tested.
- 7. I don't take responsibility for how others respond to my boundaries. If someone wants to get a resentment because I won't accept a 10:30 phone call, or because I didn't wait when she was twenty minutes late for our appointment, I don't have to try and make it OK for them.
- 8. I respect others' boundaries and ask for clarification when I'm not certain of limits. "How late do you accept phone calls?"
- 9. When people refuse to respect my boundaries, I walk away rather than get into a situation that could escalate. I say why I'm leaving.
- 10. I let people know when I have extended a boundary. "It used to be OK for you to be late, but now..."

Every individual has to create his or her own boundaries; what's OK for one might not work for another. But every person has a right to set boundaries and to expect that their limits will be respected. If your boundaries are flimsy you'll be the mat everyone wipes their feet on. Boundaries held firm will reduce conflict and improve relationships.

If you answered false to several of these, you may want to take an honest look at the impact your wobbly boundaries are having. Please do not hesitate to call if you would like support in strengthening your boundaries. \*

## When Envy Rears Its Ugly Head, Listen to What It Has to Say

When William's neighbor drove up with a new Mercedes sports car, William suddenly felt "less than." *Spoiled little inheritance baby*, William thought. *At least I work for my money.*

Frances pretended to be happy for her friend—who had just landed a lucrative book publishing contract and had a new boyfriend—but inside she fumed, ticking off all the reasons her friend didn't deserve either.

Joey's classmate was excitedly telling of his winning soccer goal over the weekend, when Joey interrupted to describe a movie he'd just seen—without even acknowledging his classmate's joyful report.

Envy isn't pretty, is it?

Even on a good day, news of someone else's good fortune can send us spiraling into a pit of bitter—though silent—accusations and weak self-righteousness. It poisons our confidence and undermines our sense of worth. Given enough energy, envy can balloon into outright hate.

But facing this green-eyed monster without flinching can tell you powerful things about yourself—what you really want, what needs to change and what you need to let go. Envy is information. It shows us the good we thirst for and points out our mistaken belief that good is out of our reach.

"It's really our getting mad at ourselves," says Debrena Jackson Gandy, author of *All the Joy You Can Stand*. "The other person is the character stand-in. It's about not being okay with where you are."

It's not the movie star or the seven-figure executive we envy but those closest to us in age, profession and life situation.

Frances was working in a low-paying office job, with no love in her life, when

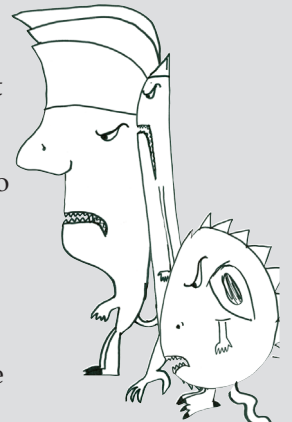
her friend called with her good news. Frances examined her envy and discovered that it wasn't about her friend, but that she was really feeling unfulfilled, stuck and lonely. Underneath that, she believed that fulfillment and love could never happen for her. Thanks to the guiding light of envy, Frances thought about what she really wanted in her life and decided to start her own business and join a singles group.

For William, it was entitlement that fed his green monster. He compared his long hours of physical labor with what he perceived to be "the easy life" of his neighbor. William thought that if anyone deserved lots of money, he did.

He later learned that the neighbor had inherited money as a child, after his entire family died in a plane accident. When William looked at his life, he realized he loved his work trimming trees and felt blessed to have a healthy and alive family. Acknowledging the goodness and grace abundant in his life helped him free himself from envy's grip.

Joey's parents helped him to see the envy in his ignoring his classmate's good news. It got him in touch with his need for competence in the sport he liked best, basketball. After that, Joey shot hoops every day and improved his skills to the point that he made the all-star team the following year.

As writer Bertrand Russell put it, "Where envy is unavoidable, it must be used as a stimulus to one's own efforts, not to the thwarting of the efforts of rivals." \*



### Taming the Monster

Acknowledging envy's power in our life opens the first door to the treasure that envy so closely guards. Here are some steps to take to tame this monster and gain access to its gold.

**Have the courage to catch yourself.** As awful as it may seem, let yourself fully feel the needs, desires, longings and yearnings behind your envy. Recognizing this begins to open you to the good that you seek.

**Ask yourself: What brings me joy?** Be very specific about what fulfills you in key areas of your life (finances, career, health, relationships, family, etc.). What actions can you take to make your life the way you want it to be?

**Tell the truth.** What have you done to further your own dreams and goals? Or, are you, perhaps, aspiring to goals that really aren't yours?

**Destroy all your yardsticks.** In other words, don't compare. How do you feel about yourself and where you are? If you're happy and satisfied with your life, it doesn't matter what someone else has or does.

**Count your blessings.** When we feel envious, we often discount the good that in our life. Notice what fortune life has bestowed upon you. Do you have use of all four limbs? A warm bed to sleep in? Make a gratitude list to post around the house or keep in your wallet.

**Let go, when necessary.** If you are 5' 4" and have brown eyes, you will never be 6' 2" with green eyes. This kind of envy is a true waste of time. Put it where it belongs: in the "waste" basket.

**Trust life's abundance.** Envy often stems from the unconscious belief that when someone else gets something good, there's less for us. Every time you feel envy, remind yourself that there is enough good in the world for you to have some, too. \*

# Learning to Trust After Betrayal

A man finds out his business partner has been using the company's profits to fund a gambling addiction.

A woman learns her sister has hidden assets from their parents' estate.

A husband discovers his wife has been having an affair with his friend.

Whether it's by a sibling, colleague, spouse or other close individual, betrayal slices through us like nothing else. It shatters close bonds, destroys self-esteem and breeds insecurity. It's almost guaranteed to cause pain, heartache, shock and fury.

But it's possible to mend the wounds of betrayal. It's possible to conquer rage and regain dignity. Most of all, it's possible to trust again.

To get through betrayal, it's helpful to have a roadmap—a plan, if you will—for what to expect and what you might want to consider. Here are some ideas, followed by a list of books that can help with the process.

**Get support.** Sharing your feelings helps to release the pain. Consider whether you will be best served by support from your family, friends, therapist or a supportive group.

**Consider when/if/how to confront.**

Thinking this through in advance and acting with intention can positively affect the entire healing process. Also consider how or whether to talk to children about what has happened.

**Weigh your options.** You could seek revenge, hold on to outrage and resentment, forget about the transgression or forgive. The choice is yours. What do each of these options hold for you?

**Examine why the person betrayed you and what makes you vulnerable to betrayal.**

Confronting the reasons behind betrayal requires a commitment to self-examination and mutual examination of the relationship itself. Doing so, while difficult, can create a stronger relationship than existed before the betrayal.

**Rebuild your self-image.** The journey back to trust also includes reconciliation with yourself, so that you can trust yourself again. Start by banishing self-blame; change the negative statements about yourself to self-loving statements. For example: "I am whole. I am a devoted friend /



spouse / sibling. I am loved from the inside out." Write lists of your positive qualities to keep perspective.

Trust is the cornerstone of all relationships. Moving past the trauma of broken trust can mean moving into a new realm of intimacy with ourselves and with others.

**Some Helpful Books**

*How Could You Do This to Me?: Learning to Trust After Betrayal*, by Jane Greer and Margery D. Rose

*Not "Just Friends": Rebuilding Trust and Recovering Your Sanity*, by Shirley P. Glass

*Back from Betrayal: Saving a Marriage, a Family, a Life*, by Suzy Farbman

*After the Affair: Overcoming the Pain and Rebuilding Trust*, by Janis Abrahms Spring and Michael Spring

*Betrayed!: How You Can Restore Sexual Trust and Rebuild Your Life*, by Riki Robbins \*

Please visit  
[www.FertilityCounseling.com](http://www.FertilityCounseling.com)  
for a FREE audio download  
of Dr. Sharma's presentation,  
"Ten Tips for Surviving Infertility."

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