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## Active Mind & Body Newsletter - Issue No.7 September 2007

### Riding the waves of Sadness

In my last newsletter we discussed Guilt and how it can be used positively to own your mistakes and make them right. We also looked at how unrealistic beliefs can cause unnecessary guilt.

In this edition I would like to focus on Sadness.

Have you ever felt ...

- A heaviness in your body
- A pain in your chest around your heart
- Flat or blue
- Heaviness or teary behind the eyes
- Longing for something you have lost

These are all examples of how Sadness can express itself in us.

Sadness is a very natural and normal emotion. It is an emotion that can be caused by many things, but most often comes up around experiences of loss.

Finding the beauty in our sadness!

Staying present with your sadness and feeling it, both fully and in a meaningful way, can be a beautiful experience. It is therefore not surprising that artworks, poetry and music have been based on sadness and on finding positive ways to express it. Our culture is also filled with many beautiful rituals that allow us to express our sadness and say goodbye to something or someone. One event that crystallised this for me was giving the eulogy at my grandfather's funeral – a deeply meaningful moment in my life that still resonates with me today.

Therefore, the emotional logic of sadness is often about saying goodbye, letting go and loss.

When sadness goes wrong

For some of us, sadness becomes a problem because we don't allow ourselves to fully experience it. Three things can commonly go wrong when we feel sad:

1. Fearing sadness – People sometimes say, "What if I let myself feel sad and can't find my way out!"
2. Having unhelpful beliefs about sadness such as "Showing sadness is a sign of weakness."
3. Refusing to let go of something that has already gone.



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A few helpful steps...

When we feel sad, working through the following steps can help us experience our sadness in a more positive way:

- The process will start with you noticing the sensations of sadness
- Label your experience accurately as sadness
- Don't run from it, accept it
- Put it into words: "I am feeling sad ...". Or, if you know what it is about "I am feeling sad about ..."
- Ask yourself, "What can I do about my sadness"?

If we find these steps difficult, there may be an unhelpful belief getting in the way of feeling the sadness. For example, we may be in fear of it and believe that sadness is "bad" or "weak". Resisting the urge to run from our sadness by confronting the belief behind the feeling, and working towards changing it can be a very powerful way forward. One of the best and simplest ways of doing this is to follow the steps above. As we work through the steps, our experiences may lead us to re-train and change any unhelpful beliefs.

These steps can also be made difficult when we cannot accept the current situation, this mostly happens in the context of loss and our inability to accept that we have lost something. This often happens to my clients as they start improving, they come to realise they may have missed out on many opportunities because of their problems. They say things like, "My anxiety has cost me 5 years of my life". Coming to terms with this, finding meaning and a positive way forward is essential.

### Anger and Sadness

Sadness can sometimes be quickly followed by anger. A client recently was feeling quite sad her relationship with her mother. There were things missing in their relationship. Her mother has a mental illness and is unable to participate in many of the normal things a mother and daughter do together. My client's very normal response was to feel sad about what was missing; her sadness was quickly followed by anger towards her mother for not being able to do those things.

This angry response can sometimes confuse us. It can take our focus away from the current situation because we are confronted by anger, guilty or shame about it. This, in turn, can lead to suppressing the feeling of anger.

In situations like this, it is important that we recognise that anger is a very normal response, and that we avoid suppressing it or focusing on it in a negative way.

As I often say, there is no such thing as a "bad" emotion, because it all depends on the context, on how we respond and on the primary vs secondary emotional responses.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone who may be interested, email or call me with any questions you may have or better yet sent me stories about how you have used these ideas to make positive changes to your life.

Enjoy



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Coming Soon  
In the next newsletter we will be looking at anger.

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