

The Power of *Negative* Emotions:

Tips from Dr. Darek Dawda

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Nobody likes feeling negative emotions. But, according to expert psychologist Dr. Dawda of DAVDA Psychology, we should not only deal with negative emotions but also cherish them.

DD: Negative emotions are, first of all, informative reactions you experience in response to situations, circumstances, and people. They are useful because often you will feel a negative emotional reaction before you consciously realize that something is not quite right. It is best to take advantage of this built-in capacity to judge what is and what isn't good for you, and listen to your negative emotions, learn from the signals they are providing, and take steps to correct the situations that trigger those emotions.

MW: *If negative feelings are so useful, why don't we listen to them?*

DD: Many people can't handle the pain that emotions cause, and so they put great effort into escaping, avoiding, or suppressing the feelings. This is a good short-term strategy that can bring some relief, but in the long-term, avoidance can lead to significant emotional problems. Some people are also busy judging their emotions, blaming themselves for how they are feeling, beating themselves up. This is never a useful strategy.

MW: *Why then do we judge our feelings?*

DD: You judge your emotions because others have judged your emotions. You internalize messages you hear, such as 'Oh, don't be such a wuss,' 'No need to feel sad,' 'Stop being so angry.' Others judge your negative feelings because those emotions stir similar feelings in them. And since they don't feel comfortable with their own negative feelings, they don't want to be disturbed by yours. Plus, there is also a cultural component here. North American culture is saturated with the ideology of positive thinking, of optimism, and this can be oppressive at times. We all are supposed to feel cheerful all the time, and if we aren't, there must be something wrong with us. Just look at the images on any magazine rack.

MW: *OK, let's be more specific. How do you handle anger?*

DD: OK, so you feel angry. Sure anger is a problem for some people. Some people feel angry most of the time, as their anger is rooted in unresolved resentments stemming from past hurts. But most often, you will be angry because the situation you are in is unjust, because someone is disrespecting you, because someone is using you. If this is the case, it is not useful to stuff your anger up and allow the situation to continue. You will be better off to respect your anger. Use it as a sign that something needs to change. Maybe even use some of its energy to get empowered for positive action. If you stuff up your anger, you will grow resentments and you may grow into one of those angry people yourself, which is a sure path to relationship difficulties.

MW: *How about sadness?*

DD: Sadness is a natural feeling in response to a loss. You experience losses all the time, big or small, and so you are bound to feel a great deal of sadness during your lifetime. A loss sets in motion a grieving process, small or big, and you need to allow this process to happen. If you don't, you will accumulate unresolved grief that may eventually result in depression. Not to mention that life without sadness is an empty life.

MW: *Won't you get depressed if you feel the sadness?*

DD: It's the opposite. You are more likely to get depressed if you avoid sadness. First of all, sadness is not depression. Sadness, if you allow yourself to feel it, if you are not scared of it, is a fine emotion that doesn't really feel so bad. Plus there is usually a relief that accompanies the allowance of sadness. Depression is something else. Depression is a depletion of energy that happens when you get emotionally exhausted, often by inner conflicts. For example, when you feel sad but, at the same time, you don't want to feel sad, you create an inner fight - you're fighting yourself. And this burns energy, deprives you of deep rest, puts your body in a state of overdrive, and may lead to depression.

MW: *What if the emotions are overwhelming?*

DD: It's impossible to give comprehensive coverage to this topic in such a short discussion. But there are techniques that will help you settle in and become more comfortable with the complexity of your inner life. Psychotherapy is usually quite effective in this respect, and not only for people with anxiety, but also for people with depression and post-traumatic stress. An open chat with a close friend might also help, providing that such a friend is strong or smart enough to handle your emotions. Whatever you do, don't stay suffering in your shell. It is worth trying to find someone who can guide you onto a path to yourself.

* Visit www.davda.ca for free Sleep Quiz with Sleep Tips or more information on Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology. To find other psychologists, visit www.mps.mb.ca