

This 4-Step Exercise May Help You Heal From Past Abuse

Realize that when you experienced trauma, you were affected. Even if you didn't want to be, you were. This exercise is helpful for those who suffered emotional, physical, sexual or even spiritual trauma. The process I will outline is found in the Scripture where Jesus cleanses the temple by identifying the sin, expressing His anger—and once again the temple is cleansed and restored (Luke 19:45-48).

Note: As a word of caution, before you start the symbolic confrontations, if you have heart trouble or other health issues, consult your physician first.

Prepare Your Offenders List: Take a separate piece of paper and make a list of the offender(s) in your life. List the offenses they committed, your age at the time of the offense and a brief description of the offense.

Example:

- When I was 7 years old, a neighbor boy ...
- Dad left me when I was 9.

Rank these offenses in order of intensity, with the number 1 marking the highest level of trauma experienced. Next, you will need to confront each perpetrator symbolically, one at a time. (An explanation of how to do this follows.) Only confront one person per day, starting with the worst offender. I usually recommend that you give yourself about three days between confronting each perpetrator.

Symbolic confrontations have four components that are all very important:

1. Write your anger letter.
2. Warm up for your symbolic confrontation.

3. Read your letter out loud.
4. Carry out your symbolic confrontation (hit the target).

I will detail each step below. Before starting, turn the phones off and make sure you have complete privacy for your confrontation.

1. Anger Letter: Write down the name of your offender, if you know it, and then write him or her a letter expressing all your feelings. Do not mail the letter—it is strictly therapeutic for your own recovery. If you could put this person in a chair, strap them down and gag them, what you would like to say to them regarding they have done to you? Include in your letter the effects his or her actions have had on your life. Don't hold back any thoughts or feelings, and don't worry about your language either. More than likely, this abuse has dramatically affected your life and kept you from being completely successful. Your perpetrators deserve the rage you feel about them.
2. Warm Up: Get a racquet or bat (most stores carry sport bats that are padded) along with a mattress, pillow or punching bag. Using your bat, strike the mattress with small, medium, large and extra-large hits. Practice doing this a time or two. Also, warm up your voice by saying "no" louder with each hit. Although this may seem awkward at first, it is essential to your symbolic confrontation, which will enable you to release your rage.
3. Read the Letter Out Loud: Now read your letter out loud, as if you were reading it to your offender. This is an important part of the exercise as well. As you read the letter, feelings will swell up inside of you. That is normal. The next step will help discharge that trauma.
4. Hit the Target: Now go at it with your bat and mattress. Really let that mattress, which symbolizes your perpetrator, have it. You can hit, yell, kick or

whatever you need to do to get the rage, shame and hate out of you and put it back on your perpetrator where it belongs. It's their shame you have been carrying all these years and not yours. This last step can take anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour, depending on the ordeal you experienced and how deeply the pain is lodged inside of you. The more emotion you let out, the better you will feel afterward. You are now taking the bullet out of your being—spirit, soul and body—and giving it back to the person responsible for inflicting you with it.

This is how a symbolic confrontation takes place. I have personally done this exercise with each of the offenders in my life. Now I have a concrete place and time as to when I pulled the bullets out of my soul and began to heal.

I have noticed that everyone's experience with symbolic confrontation is quite unique. Some feel different immediately afterwards. For others, it takes a few days before they realize that they are free of the bondage that once strangled them. {eoa}

Doug Weiss, Ph.D., is a nationally-known author, speaker and licensed psychologist. He is the executive director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the author of several books including, *Sex Men and God*. You may contact Dr. Weiss via his website, or on his Facebook, by phone at 719-278-3708 or through email at heart2heart@.