

# ESTABLISHING HEALTHY HURT RESPONSE PATTERNS

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From birth to death, we will all face hurt and the challenge of life is to deal with hurt in healthy ways. How we deal with hurt will determine the course of our life. Jesus gave the greatest display of love so that we don't have to hurt for eternity.

- The importance of equipping clients to deal with hurt in healthy ways is the foundation for counseling. The application of what they have learned to their ongoing lives is the highest reassurance of the effectiveness of counseling.
- To accomplish such, it is important to be equipped in three avenues. 1) Counselors need to be able to identify response patterns in their clients. 2) Counselors need to be able to help clients develop an understanding of the unhealthy and healthy responses to hurt. 3) Counselors need approaches that equip clients with practical ways to remember and apply what they have learned in counseling to use when responding to hurts in their own lives.

## Learning Objectives

- Participants will be able to identify and describe unhealthy and healthy response patterns to hurt.
- Participants will be able to describe methods for assessing response patterns in their clients.
- Participants will describe acronyms for identifying healthy and unhealthy response patterns for monitoring and redirecting unhealthy responses to healthy response patterns.

\*\*\*The following are some of the common **UNHEALTHY** ways we respond to hurt.

**D.A.M.A.G.E.**

## **D – DEFINING GOD AND/OR OURSELVES**

One of the most common ways that we respond to hurt is by letting it define how we see God or ourselves. Any disappointment and hurtful event provides us an opportunity to define God or ourselves falsely. The more we do this, the more harm we will experience.

## **A-ACCUSING AND PROJECTING**

A destructive way to respond to hurt is to accuse others of wrongdoing and to project or transfer our hurt onto others.

Defense mechanisms are how people distance themselves from being fully aware and thus feeling their hurt. Psychologists have studied defense mechanisms for decades and recognize that it is common to use projection and transference when in pain.

## **M-MEDICATING THE PAIN**

We all likely respond to hurt sometimes by trying to medicate ourselves. When we medicate our hurt, we aren't really facing our hurt. Medicating hurt can lead to all sorts of addictions and increasing damage. Sometimes the damage from medicating becomes more hurtful than the original hurt.

## **A-ANGER**

Not all anger is unhealthy. The Word tells we are to “not be angry without a cause” (Matthew 5:22). Not to sin with anger: “Be ye angry, and sin not:” (Ephesians 4:26) and to work through our anger, not willing to keep and nurse such: “let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).

Psychologists say that anger typically isn't a primary emotion, but is a response to hurt. Hurt also leads to fear and fear is redirected into anger. Many don't know what to do with hurt and fear, but they do know how to be angry.

Frequently, we don't know that we are hurt. We just know we are so mad! Prolonged anger, frequent anger, or rage can be extremely destructive to our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. In *Deadly Emotions*, Dr. Colburn explains how excessive and prolonged anger damages our bodies. He describes it like bathing our insides with battery acid. The correlations between numerous physical diseases and conditions and difficulties with anger are dramatic warnings about turning our hurt into anger.

## **G-GUILT**

Many of us respond to having been hurt by blaming and condemning ourselves for actions that are not even wrong or sins for which we have already repented and been forgiven.

When such guilt continues to grow, we become increasingly bound with a depressing vice grip keeping us from going forward towards the life God wanted for us.

## **E-ENTERTAINING FEAR**

Living in a fallen world will cause all of us to experience fear. Fear is one of leading reasons for people to seek counseling. Some fear is healthy. It is not reasonable to expect that we won't be fearful at times.

However, when we respond to hurt by entertaining fear, we are on our way to increasing harm. Entertaining fear is engaging in excessive worry and "what if" thinking and it actually makes fear grow. In II Timothy 1:7, we read that God has not given us a spirit of fear. The more we respond to hurt by entertaining fear, the more we are growing a spirit of fear.

\*\*\*The following are **HEALTHY** responses to hurt.

## **M.E.R.C.I.F.U.L.**

### **M-MINISTER & SHARE WITH OTHERS**

ROMANS 8:28 tells us: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

One of the greatest ways to illustrate this promise from Romans is to minister to a hurting world.

A beautiful response to hurt is to use it as a way to connect with other hurting people, to minister to their hurt from a place of understanding and compassion. When we share with others about our own hurt and struggles, we show that we are willing to be real to a world used to others being fake or only willing to present what looks good in their lives.

When we share our hurt with others, we begin to heal. We begin to minister in ways we don't even realize.

## **E-ENCOURAGE OURSELVES**

A Powerful way to love someone is to encourage her when she is hurting. This applies to us. If we love ourselves, we will encourage ourselves when we are in pain. Yet, we frequently don't know how to encourage ourselves.

We need to begin early in life, learning how to encourage ourselves. This will always involve using the truth from Scriptures to remind us of how loved we are, who God really is, and how to claim His promises.

We can encourage with healthy self-talk. Cognitive therapy, which has been one of the most effective therapies, displays what the Word had proclaimed all along. We need to respond to hurt by intentionally meditating on thoughts that encourage us.

When we put scripture in our heart and mind, the Holy Spirit can bring it out when we need it. In turn, we need to intentionally bring out the Word and use it to encourage ourselves when hurting.

## **R-RESTORATIVE GRIEVING**

Not all grieving is restorative. We grieve when we face a loss, whether it is a relationship, a death, a bankruptcy, our sense of safety, or any other painful event.

Restorative grieving involves accepting the situation that provoked the hurt, while grieving with hope. When we don't grieve with hope, we aren't restored. When we live in denial, not accepting the loss, we don't restore. Sometimes we stay frozen with the pain, not willing to move forward. For example, we might not accept that we can ever have joy again after a divorce or death of someone we love. We may stay stagnant and focused on the loss, versus being willing to embrace life.

With restorative grieving, we allow ourselves to hurt, but the hurt will eventually be lessened the more we cling to hope.

Frequently, this means that we will always have some pain, like when we miss someone we love.

## **C-CONFRONT**

There are times, when a healthy response to hurt involves confronting someone. It is sometimes more effective to confront by using self-disclosure, i.e. "You need to stop telling me what to do" becomes, "When you keep telling me what you think I should do, I feel that you don't see me as capable or able to make good decisions."

Confronting sometimes promotes forgiveness and healing. We don't have power over how others respond to our confrontation. However, whenever we have prayerfully sought and found the Lord's leading to confront, we can either avoid or confront.

## **I-INSTALL BOUNDARIES**

Sometimes a healthy response to hurt is to install a boundary. A boundary is establishing protection for our own health. Boundaries aren't attempts to control another person, since we don't have the right or power to control another. Yet, we do have the responsibility and power to protect our well being.

## **F-FORGIVE**

When we have been hurt at the hands of others, the challenge to forgive begins. The more severe the hurt, the more difficult it may be to forgive. Forgiveness begins with obedience since we are told by our Lord to forgive.

Its important to recognize what forgiveness is not. It is not dismissing the hurt. It also doesn't always involve reconciliation. It involves not nursing a grudge or seeking revenge. It is a gift, it is birthed spiritually, and it sometimes is a process.

### **Some steps in forgiveness:**

After recognizing your hurt and taking steps to process such (i.e. talking about the hurt with counselor or trusted other, confronting if needed, setting boundaries if such is necessary):

**Pray:** for the person who hurt you, for help in seeing and feeling about the person how God sees and feels about him or her, for help in forgiving the person, and for insight into what provoked the hurt.

**Take thoughts captive:** Refuse thinking and fantasizing bad thoughts towards the person.

**Stop talking badly about the person:** Once you have shared your hurt in healthy ways, refrain from continuing to repeat the negative talk.

**Seek insight into the person:** After praying for insight, seek understanding into what damaged the person who hurt you.

## **U-UNDERSTAND AND FEEL OUR EMOTIONS**

To deal with our hurt in healthy ways, we must understand what we are feeling in the first place. Frequently, we don't recognize and understanding our emotions. We may be in denial or shrug off our hurt instead of trying to understand it.

Sometimes, we know we are hurt, but we tuck it away as if it was never there.

Women seem to instinctively interpret someone as caring for us when they want to understand how we feel. What greater way to show love then to try to understand how others are feeling and to allow them to feel what they are feeling without trying to shame them.

In loving ourselves, we need to actively seek and allow ourselves to understand and feel.

## **L-LOVE OURSELVES**

To love ourselves, we must treat ourselves the way we would treat others we cherish. Being merciful, attentive, forgiving, nurturing, and protective of ourselves is characteristic of dealing with hurt in healthy ways.

On the other hand, when we really love a person, if we see her acting in ways that will cause her harm, we will warn. We will warn with kindness, but we will warn when needed.

When we love ourselves in healthy ways, we will also hold ourselves accountable. Dealing with hurt in healthy ways also involves not allowing us to act in harmful ways without any attempts to redirect.

We typically are harder on ourselves than others. We typically neglect ourselves. We frequently find it more difficult to see our worth versus others' worth. The challenge is to recognize God wants us to love others AND ourselves.

## **Methods for Identifying Hurt Response Patterns**

### **UNHEALTHY: D.A.M.A.G.E.**

#### **D-Defining God and self:**

- Look for how they view themselves: How does client take care of herself? How does she allow others to treat her? How does her or she refer to herself?

- How do they view God: How do they refer to God? What efforts do they display in seeking God? Do they make references to blaming God (i.e. "Why did God do this to me? Why would God not help?")

### **Questions we may use to identify (D) hurt responses:**

We may ask directly or be trying to uncover answers as clients are sharing in counseling.

- How would you describe yourself? What do you like about you and what do you wish was different?
- How would others that really know you describe you? Do you think you would agree with them? When you have been hurt (rejected, ridiculed, etc.) how do you feel about yourself?
- How do you view God? Why?

\*\*Video clip examples: Luann saw herself as a failure; Caitlyn saw herself as ugly, never thin enough, disappointment to God. John defined God as critical and uncaring and later began to heal as he changed this view.

### **A-Accusations/projection/transference:**

- Notice if clients display emotional reactions to situations or others that seem to outweigh what would be expected. Example: Expressing much anger or hurt over a comment that seems innocent or slight.
- Notice if they interpreting a situation in ways that appear inaccurate: Ann read a letter that did not seem offensive, yet she read it as critical.
- Notice if they accuse others of behavior/attitudes that actually seem to describe them. Example: Husband accused wife of being sneaky, critical, and controlling when he actually displayed these behaviors.
- Do they stay focused on others' wrongs?

### **Questions we may ask to identify (A) hurt responses**

- Who do you feel has hurt you the most in the past, especially when you were a kid? Is there anyone in your life today who reminds you of the person who hurt you most?
- What does he or she do that bothers you?
- When a client is expressing hurt, anger, or other negative emotions, ask, "When do you remember feeling like this before?"
- Example: Client was venting about her hurt and anger toward her husband. When asked if he reminded her of anyone, she quickly responded, "He is so much like my dad. He gets so angry that I walk on eggshells."

**\*\*Video Example:** Becky's hurt tended to influence her perceptions. She would mentally accuse others of rejecting her—like her dad did. In turn, she transferred her feelings of self-disgust onto others, thinking they felt and saw her as she saw herself. John projected his views on others: Since he felt he deserved punishment and didn't meet God's standards, he transferred such views and feelings of anger on others.

## **M-Medicare:**

- Notice if clients describe behaviors that are known to be ways people tend to use to minimize pain or discomfort.
- Watch for excessive patterns in behaviors in general (they may be ways to numb or distract from negative emotions)
- Examples: drinking, excessive cleaning, excessive eating or dieting, cutting and other self-harm, seems overly involved in exercise and working out, takes lots of pain medication, overly obsessed with a relationship, excessive religious acts (i.e. had a client who never said no when asked to play piano for revivals, etc.
- Example: In counseling, client recognized how much she used eating as a way to deal with her negative emotions and hurt. When she began trying to stop emotional eating, she indicated that she began using fantasy as a way to escape and avoid unwanted emotions and hurt.

## **Questions used to identify (M) hurt response patterns:**

- What do you do to try to make yourself feel better? Give examples: What do you do when you are sad? What do you do when you are fearful?
- What do you think or have others said that you tend to do in extremes: drink, shop, diet, exercise or do any other activity to extreme?
- How do you feel if you imagine not doing those activities: dieting, not drinking alcohol, or whatever you do excessively?

**\*\*Video example:** Becky found that she felt much anger, hurt, jealousy, and other emotions when she stopped running to food. Caitlin tried to medicate with unhealthy relationships.

## **A-Anger:**

- Notice signs of anger (voice, body language, actions, attitude), ask yourself, "What hurt or fear might he or she be feeling that is being expressed and

even felt as anger?" Example: Angry client who later realized he was usually afraid when expressing anger.

**Questions to identify (A) hurt responses:**

- Who are you close to that make you the angriest? Why do they make you angry?
- Can you picture any other feeling under the anger, like hurt or fear?
- What do you do when you are angry?

\*\*Video clips: Becky, John, Susanne, and Chris all had hurt under their anger.

**G-Guilt:**

- Listen for expressions of guilt. Does client describe feeling guilty about past or present situations?
- Do they continue to feel guilty about sins for which they have already repented?
- Does their guilt appear to be about their feelings? (Example: Becky felt guilty about her anger towards others who hurt her).
- Does their guilt seem to be inappropriate?—such as feeling guilty about not pleasing everyone, not being able to fix others, or met some rigid standards.
- Do they blame themselves for events that were not their fault (sexual abuse, overly critical mother)

**Questions used to identify (G) hurt responses:**

- What do you tend to feel most guilty about? Why? Do you feel guilty about sins that you have already confessed and repented?
- When you are hurt, do you tend to blame yourself or feel guilty?

\*\*Video clips: Caitlin struggled with guilt over actions for which she already repented and was forgiven and Becky struggled with guilt over feelings she had from having been victimized and hurt.

**E-Entertaining Fear:**

- Notice if clients express excessive fear and worry.
- What do they do that feeds the fear: Do they engage in excessive **What if** thinking, excessively seeking information about medical issues that they fear might exist (Angela)

- Do they engage in excessive activities to protect themselves or control others?

### **Questions to identify (E) hurt responses:**

- Do you worry excessively?
- Do you think you are more fearful than most people?
- Do you feel that your fear significantly hinders your life?
- Do you have any guesses about what might have fueled your fear?
- Have there been any events in your life that were so hurtful that it made you afraid of something like that happening again?

**\*\*Video clip:** Angela found that the hurt of her cousin's tragic death fueled much of her fear; She entertained fear with "what if thinking". John felt that his hurt from childhood had fueled panic and anxiety.

## **Healthy Hurt Response Patterns: M.E.R.C.I.F.U.L.**

### **M-Minister and share with others:**

- Do you notice that client talks about his or her hurt and struggles in healthy ways?
- Do they admit that they keep it to themselves?
- Is it difficult to get them to talk about their hurt in counseling?
- Do they tell of how they have used their story to help others?
- Are they open and want to use their struggles to help others?

### **Questions to identify and promote (M) hurt response patterns:**

- Have you talked with others about the hurt or struggles you have experienced or are continuing to experience?
- Do you share with others in ways that might help them with their similar hurt and struggles? Are you willing to explore doing this?

**\*\*Video Clips:** Becky, Suzanne, and Angela all told about ministering to others. This greatly promoted their healing. All shown in videos shared about their hurt in counseling.

## **E-Encourage yourself:**

- Listen for ways that they encourage and comfort themselves.
- Do they encourage and comfort others? Do they do the same for themselves?

## **Questions to identify and establish (E) hurt response patterns:**

- What do you do to encourage yourself or comfort yourself when you are hurting?
- What ways are you willing to use to encourage and comfort yourself: i.e. Self-talk, the Word, prayer, praise.

\*\*Video clips: All clients shown grew in encouraging themselves.

## **R-Restorative grieving:**

- Look for signs that clients are grieving.
- What are they grieving about? How are they grieving?
- Do you hear statements that display that they have accepted the loss or situation that they are grieving about?
- Do they express hope in light of their grief? Example: I can still love my dad, accept that he is not going to love me the way I want, that I can still love myself and have a healthy life without getting the love from him I want, etc. I can have joy in life again, even after my divorce, death of loved one, or other loss.
- Do they have realistic expectations? Example: Even if I have healing, I may always have some pain in this life about the divorce, loss of my child, or whatever has caused the grief.

\*\*Video clips: Luann accepted that she could not please dad. Becky accepted that she likely would never have the kind of relationship she would like to have with her father until Heaven.

## **Questions to identify and establish (R) hurt response patterns:**

- Do you grieve about some hurtful situations, events or losses?
- How would you describe your grief?
- Do you accept the situations you have no control over that sadden you?
- Do you grieve with hope? Would you tell me about your hope?

\*\*Suzanne's grief became restorative as she accepted her daughter's physical death and embraced hope.

## **C-Confrontation:**

- Notice whether the client ever talks about confronting others?
- Does he or she confront when such would likely be a healthy response?
- How comfortable does she seem with healthy confrontation?
- How well is he or she able to discern when confrontation is likely a healthy response and when it isn't?

## **Questions to identify and establish (C) hurt response patterns:**

- Do you confront others when they have hurt you?
- How uncomfortable are you with confronting others when you have been hurt?
- Think of what has hurt you the most in life. Did you feel that you should have confronted someone involved? Did you?
- Does confronting ever help with hurt?
- When do you think confronting is not the healthy or appropriate action to take?

\*\*Video clip: Chris's confrontation with his mother helped promote his healing.

## **I-Installing Boundaries:**

- Look for how client protects herself.
- Does he or she keep allowing or putting themselves in situations or relationships that provoke repeated hurt, stress, or hinder their emotional health?

## **Questions to identify and establish (B) hurt response patterns:**

- What do you do when someone persistently hurts you? How do you respond? How do you protect yourself?
- Think of who has hurt you the most or who hurt you frequently. What do you do to keep them from hurting you now?

\*\*Video clips: Chris learned to set boundaries with his mother and abusive father. This helped not only promote his healing, but also helped maintain it.

## **F-Forgiveness:**

- Do you detect resentment or grace toward those who have caused the hurt?
- Does she or he express grudges and a desire for revenge?
- Do you detect compassion and mercy felt or shown toward whoever hurt the client?
- Does client display mercy and grace toward himself or herself?

## **Questions to identify and establish (F) hurt responses:**

- What are some of your hurts that still hinder you?
- Do you still feel resentment or bitterness to someone you blame for the hurt (God, yourself, and others)
- Do you feel that you still need to forgive someone?
- Have you forgiven those who hurt you?
- How did you forgive?
- What do you do to try to forgive?
- What does forgiveness mean to you? How do you know that you have forgiven?

\*\*Video clips: When Suzanne forgave the man who had caused the accident that killed her daughter and when she began forgiving herself, her healing began and was propelled the more she embraced forgiveness.

## **U-Understand: your emotions/hurt and strive to understand those who have hurt you**

- How do you recognize when you are sad, fearful, angry, ashamed, guilty, or uncomfortable?
- When you are angry, do you recognize fear or hurt also?
- Do people frequently tell you that you look like you feel something that you aren't aware of feeling? Example, "You look angry" or do they make comments such as, "Are you upset?" Were you not aware of feeling as they questioned?
- Is it difficult to recognize what you are feeling?
- When someone has hurt you, do you tend to wonder about what might have influenced the person to act as he or she did?
- Think of someone who has significantly hurt you. What do you think might have damaged the person to act so hurtfully?

**\*\*Video clips:** Becky's understanding and facing her feelings was necessary to heal. Actually, all those shown on the videos had to face and learn to understand their feelings, hurt, and while not shown on the videos, they each tried to gain understanding into who had hurt them.

### **Love yourself:**

- Do you love yourself? What does that mean to you?
- Are you as merciful and encouraging to yourself as you are to others?
- Do you take care of yourself: physically, emotionally, and spiritually?
- Do you hold yourself accountable for unhealthy behavior? Do you correct yourself?
- Do you take responsibility for going after your healing and getting your needs met in healthy ways?

**\*\*Video clips:** All those shown began loving themselves more as they dealt with their hurt in healthy ways. They learned to take care of themselves, to walk in truth, and to embrace the love of Jesus. This also led to loving others in ways to promote their healing.

**NO DAMAGE & BE MERCIFUL**

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