



Letting Go of Regrets

- **Regret** - a feeling of sadness or disappointment over something that has happened or been done.

Discussion – Read, consider and discuss the following points about **Letting Go of Regrets**

Letting go of regrets can involve the following aspects:

- Forgiving yourself – Forgiveness is about letting go of feelings of resentment and releasing yourself from the shame or excessive guilt that we may carry or hold onto after making a mistake or doing something wrong. Sometimes what happened was not even our fault but we still may need to forgive and let go
- Acceptance – This can be a hard concept to define, yet it is so very important. One way to look at acceptance is to say that acceptance is the ability to internally look at a situation, circumstance or experience and honestly say to oneself **“it is, what it is”** or **“the past is the past”** and thereby allow oneself to learn to escape negative emotions such as anger, hate, disappointment, injustice, or fear.

Another way to conceptualize acceptance, is to achieve a point mentally where we believe in our heart that:

- **“There is nothing I can do to change this circumstance (or situation)**
- **I can only change how I adapt and cope and try to make productive choices going forward (Therefore I will do my best to move forward in as positive a way as possible)”**

Some more points for discussion about letting go of regrets

- ✚ When you let go of regrets you can rechannel your energy- Think of the energy wasted on regret. Imagine rechanneling that wasted energy and emotion into your present life and future in a positive way.
- ✚ Letting go of regret can enhance and fuel motivation - Rather than hold on to regret, you can allow your experiences to make you work harder to be better today and tomorrow
- ✚ You are allowed to move on from regret – Others may continue to judge you, stigmatize, blame, shame, etc. but you don't have to continue to do that to yourself. It is your choice. Your only responsibility is to make your best effort to learn from the past and make better choices in the future
- ✚ There can be positive lessons learned even after regretful experiences - We are all products of our experiences and sometimes we “grow” past negative trials. Sometimes there are gains that come out of past bad experiences, even when those experiences fuel feelings of regret.
 - **“We grow through what we go through” – Author Unknown**
- ✚ There is no guarantee that if you had made a difference choice, your life would have been better – Perhaps you feel like you regret a past decision and you feel like your life would have been better had you chosen a different path. That may be true. However, you will never know for sure. There is always a chance that had you taken another path in life, that may not have had the good outcome that you expected. It is better to accept what has happened and learn from it than persevere on **“what if’s”** which just led to more frustration and often more regret – **“What ifs” are a waste of time (Refer back to acceptance which is about letting go of “what if” scenarios.**



Coping with Regret – Regret can be likened to an anchor to a ship, holding you back, keeping you from moving forward as you should be. Regret can be that weight slowing down your journey. If you can “cut the anchor” of regret, you will likely soon find that you are “sailing forward” toward growth and positive change

Thoughts that can “cut the anchor” of regret - As a group, discuss which of these examples stand out to you the most as helpful and explain why:

- A. I did what I thought was right at the time
- B. I was a different person then, I've learned and moved on
- C. I honestly did not know better
- D. Other people were influencing me in a negative way, so my judgment was not clear
- E. I was using substances at that time, so my judgement was impacted, and I clearly wasn't thinking straight
 - a. *Did you know that science shows that addiction adversely impacts the parts of the brain that are needed to make decisions? (The prefrontal cortex and hippocampus)*
- F. I was not appropriately caring for my mental health at that time which affected and impacted my judgement
- G. I didn't know then what I know now
- H. I'm human, I messed up, but I am entitled to another chance
- I. I am not the first, not the last person in this situation: Others have been forgiven and I deserve the same
- J. I have done some bad things, but I am not a bad person
- K. I was desperate, hopeless and afraid and I am not like that any more
- L. I'm truly sorry for what I've done so I am entitled to move on
- M. I've grown and I am simply not that person any more
- N. I've paid for my mistakes
- O. I deserve forgiveness
- P. My past does not define me
- Q. No more “what if's” for me, I am done thinking about “what if” scenarios
- R. Other – **Can anyone in the group think of a statement of your own that you find helpful?**

Process – Discussing Regrets

First make sure that the group is comfortable with this sensitive topic – **Is everyone ready?**

- If so, it is important that there is a “no judgement” rule in place. Group members need to feel safe sharing their regrets without being shamed or criticized by others

If everyone is prepared and agrees to a healthy discussion of regrets, this is a suggested format for processing regrets (optional)

Start - What is something that you regret? (You feel sadness or disappointment about. Hard to let go of)

- **Digging deeper: Why do you suppose you feel that way?** – What messages might you be telling yourself that sustain feelings of regret (For example, messages of shame, self-judgement, humiliation, embarrassment, stigma, bitterness, disappointment, etc.)
 - **How can you reframe those negative thoughts?** – If it helps, use one of the thoughts listed above: **A through P from list**
 - **Finally, allow group to share support and encouragement** - The power of the group! We all can help one another get through this!

“Of all the words of mice and men, the saddest are, “It might have been.” — Kurt Vonnegut



MOVING FORWARD FROM REGRETS SELF- CONTRACT

Name:

I _____ hereby promise to do my best to let go of regrets and instead focus my energy on making better decisions going forward. I am human and imperfect, therefore I will still make mistakes from time to time, and that's okay. However, as of today, I am making a commitment to work harder to be more self-aware and to do what I can to think things through so that I can make better choices and live a better life today and into the future. My primary requirement to get started is to make an effort, which is something I am capable of and motivated to work on today.

My plan for improved decision making and for living a better life for myself and those I love:

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Signed:

Date: