

## RELATIONSHIPS

## THE LIBERATION OF LETTING GO

Relationship coach **Vicky van Praag** looks at how holding onto the past can stop you from making a better future

**C**an you remember the last time you looked at your partner and got an unpleasant sensation of relationship déjà vu? It could have been something they said to you, a look, or a particular tone of voice. Suddenly, memories of past relationships come flooding into your mind, and behind them are memories of childhood. What your partner said or did is exactly what your father or mother once said or did, and suddenly you feel six years old again.

**"The past cannot be resolved. It can be learned from, but it can never be changed."**

When we find ourselves in the midst of recurring patterns in our relationships, we often feel drawn to the past to try and find the root of the problem – and with it, the solution. Unfortunately, focusing on the hurts of the past to resolve those of the present will never bring peace. When we look at the past this way, it is very hard for us to let it go. Instead of learning from our experiences, we fall into the trap of desperately wishing the past hadn't happened the way it did. This blocks us from being able to learn, and we become trapped in a time warp. From here we are doomed to keep repeating the past rather than moving forward into a different future.

It is necessary to accept that the past cannot be resolved. It can be let go, it can be learned from, but it can never be changed. Once we accept this, it is much easier to start again, without blame and guilt weighing us down, and be the person we want to be.



Letting go of the past is especially important during difficult times in relationships. When we bring up the past during disagreements, it is usually to emphasise the pain we are feeling. In the face of our partners letting us down again, we say, "...and you've done it a million times." Unfortunately, since the criticism is directed at them, they don't hear our pain – they only hear blame. And when anyone hears blame, they fight and deny it, and the argument escalates.

Bringing up the past in an argument never has the desired effect. When a difficult situation comes up, even when you feel hurt or let down, aim to resolve the problem without any reference to the past. Address the small, specific things that are troubling you right now. Take it one step at a time. If you don't refer to past events, you're less likely to render the problem huge. And it will then be much easier to work difficulties out as partners – rather than as two people in opposition – together committed to making your relationship better. Now.

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## BEING HAPPY

Counsellor **Ian Woodroffe** considers bereavement in young adults



**E**vidence-based practice is a concept that helps us to explore the efficacy of what we do. In nursing and medicine, for example, the potential for advances has to be improved as a result of evidence rather than tradition.

I will declare that I am a fan of evidence-based practice. Sometimes, however, the evidence is all too clear. The Rowntree Foundation has just published research that young people who are bereaved often exhibit disruptive behaviour. Part of me wants to say, "What else can they do?" Self-thinking folks on the edge of adult life have feelings following death as much as any other person. Often their feelings are powerful – teenage suicide and accidents happen all too often as a result of unresolved feelings of grief.

We do not prepare our youngsters for this aspect of life, although we can guarantee that they will be confronted with it. There are not many places where young people can access bereavement counselling, and disruptive behaviour is sometimes dealt with in firm ways without exploring what is going on in the young person's world. Teachers who have had little training in grief counselling are asked to teach bereavement in the classroom, an almost-impossible task in a large class with the strong possibility that there will be raw feelings of grief in some of the pupils.

We need to help the next generation manage one of the certainties of life – how to navigate and express painful feelings. If we were to do this in a way that makes sense to them, then perhaps they would be less disruptive.

Well done the Rowntree Foundation for evidencing what we knew. The world of education and others now need to sit up, take notice, and train folk to manage hurting young people. This will not only be for the good of the young – it might even be cost effective.

Thanks to those who have asked the next one-day bereavement workshop is on September 17. Details on the Web site, or please phone me.

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