

LIVE *WITHOUT STRESS*

How to Enjoy
the Journey



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*Discipline Without Stress &
Parenting Without Stress*

EPILOGUE

***Since we have the power to change our thinking,
we also have the ability to alter our emotions.***

—Marvin Marshall

Aside from pain caused by some physical condition, stress is largely a person's own creation. Most of the stress we encounter in life is prompted by challenges in relationships, challenges in other situations, and how we handle our own thinking.

Many chapters in the book have been devoted to relationships and situations. This section extends the discussion of how being mindful of our thinking can alter our emotions. We start by repeating a passage from Chapter 11, *Language*.

We all have had the experience of reading a novel and being so moved by the fate of one of its characters that we felt love, hate, or anger. Sometimes we cried—even though the individual whose fate so moved us never existed. Reflect on this for a moment. A writer took a blank slate and through words alone created a human being so real that the words—only words—prompted our emotions.

Our brains receive stimuli from two sources: (1) Our senses, as in the above example, and (2) Our self-talk. We start with the latter.

SELF-TALK

Self-talk is often a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we believe that we are not capable of doing something and we fill our minds with debilitating thoughts, chances are slim that success will follow. In contrast, when self-talk is positive, the body's chemistry engenders chemical responses that boost self-confidence to enhance success.

Hopefully, the many discussions on the prime principles of *positivity, choice, and reflection* will endure in your thinking and, thereby, actuate a positive approach and attitude in your daily living.

OUR SENSES

Let's now turn to the subject of external stimuli, their effect on emotions, and how they need not control us—if we so desire.

Stimuli come to us from our senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

We look at each in this order.

Seeing

You are watching someone in a movie, a very well liked character. You have witnessed her long life's challenges and pleasures. Now, she is on her deathbed. This final scene shows a number of episodes previously shown as she concludes her life. Don't your eyes drop a tear as you experience this sad drama? You watched and the emotion followed.

You have not seen a friend for sometime—a dear, long lost friend. You saw, and an emotion followed.

You are walking down a commercial street, see a store for children's clothes, and then notice an advertisement in the window that reads:

"For sale: Infant's shoes, never used."

Do not these words prompt an emotion? You merely saw a sign, made an inference, and an emotion followed.

The point is obvious. The act of seeing can prompt emotions.

Hearing

You are watching a television program. The scene changes and the first thing you hear is humorous music. Just hearing the music sets the mood. The same effect occurs on the brain when the music is sad or has a dancing tempo. Even before the scene starts, you are prompted to be in an emotional state.

A classic story about hearing may help make the point.

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, and where they had spent their vacations. And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window.

The man laying flat in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. Then unexpectedly, a sinister thought entered his mind. Why should the other man experience all the pleasures of seeing everything while he himself never got to see anything? It didn't seem fair.

At first thought, the man felt ashamed. But as the days passed and he missed seeing more sights, his envy eroded into resentment and soon turned him sour. He began to brood and he found himself unable to sleep. He should be by that window! That thought, and only that thought, now controlled his life.

Late one night as he lay staring at the ceiling, the man by the window began to cough. He was choking on the fluid in his lungs. The other man watched in the dimly lit room as the struggling man by the window groped for the button to call for help.

In less than five minutes, the coughing and choking stopped, along with the sound of breathing. Now there was only silence—deathly silence.

The following morning the day nurse arrived. When she found the lifeless body of the man by the window, she was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, the man propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it all himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall.

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window for the man to hear. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he wanted you to hear pleasant things in order to encourage you."

Hearing and seeing are the body's senses that are most dominant in an average person's life.

The other senses have that same possibility, as illustrated next.

Smelling

Do you drink coffee in the morning? If you are a coffee drinker and awaken to the aroma of your favorite coffee, how do you feel? That smell, my friend, engenders an emotion.

Tasting

Ever eat ice cream on a hot summer day? Ever enjoy popcorn when watching a movie? Ever taste a phenomenal dessert? Ever taste a juicy steak? Would you deny that foods prompt emotions?

Touching

Ever kiss someone you love? Ever hold an infant? Ever hold another body close to yours.

The feelings produced by touch are self-evident.

CONTROLLING EMOTIONS

As indicated throughout the book, the only way to change an emotion is to change thinking. *Emotion always follows cognition.*

With this in mind, I play a little game with myself. Before I share it, we review the *Hierarchy of Social Development* and the difference between Level C, *External Motivation*, and Level D, *Internal Motivation*, as explained in Chapter 16, *Discipline and Stress*. Just being cognizant of these two types of motivation often actuates the behavior of acting *reflectively*—rather than acting *reflexively*.

Here is my game. When I am seeing or watching something that arouses an emotion, I tell myself that I am merely seeing something. Just the mindfulness of articulating this to myself often stops the emotional affect the scene would normally prompt.

Similarly, when I am listening to music that arouses me, I tell myself that I am merely listening to a sound. The same result occurs; the music no longer has the same emotional effect.

I am merely pointing out that the mind can exercise phenomenal control over our emotions. And so it is with stress.
