The word resentment is best understood as having bitter indignation at being treated unfairly or unkindly. Resentment can come when you are misunderstood, neglected, rejected, slighted, and mistreated. This treatment is followed by bitterness, discontentment, and dissatisfaction. It can bring about ill will, animosity toward others, and feelings of envy and jealousy. Failure to let go of resentment will further disintegrate connections with others and damage intimate relationships. This skill builder walks you through a ten-step process to resolve resentment and let go of the past.

This mental health e-lesson is available at journeytorecovery.com

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GETTING RID OF RESENTMENTS

DEFINING RESENTMENT

The word resentment is best understood as having bitter indignation at being treated unfairly or unkindly. Resentment can come when you are misunderstood, neglected, rejected, slighted, and mistreated. This treatment is followed by bitterness, discontentment, and dissatisfaction. It can bring about ill will, animosity toward others, and feelings of envy and jealousy.

When we are resentful, we are not merely reviewing the facts of a slight or an argument. Instead, we re-experience and relive them in a way that affects us emotionally, physiologically, and spiritually in very destructive ways. Failure to let go of resentment will further disintegrate connections with others and damage intimate relationships.

“Resentment is the ‘number one’ offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry.”

(Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001)

THE INFECTION

Years ago I had a finger that began to throb; it turned pink and ugly and was highly sensitive to even the slightest bump. This extreme sensitivity did not occur because I was weak or unable to handle pain. I was not distorting or faking the pain and intense feelings. This reaction occurred because the finger was infected. I believe people who have been wounded in the past often carry emotional infections. These are not external wounds, but internal, emotional wounds that
have gone unhealed and have been allowed to fester. Once that has occurred, it may result in an over-sensitivity to even the slightest bump. Mistakes, hurts, and slights are filtered through the painful experiences of the past. The current pain we feel is added to the pain of the past, resulting in increased resentment. The original wound and the original offender get mixed up with present-day events and present-day people. These inaccuracies and distortions cause further relational heartache.

**CHANGING THE WAY YOU THINK**

While we cannot change the past, we can change the way we think about the past. It is our perceptions that can be altered. Rather than being bitter, angry, and resentful about what happened, we can change the way we think about it. Although we cannot change the past, we can change the way we see ourselves because of what happened in the past. We do not need to see ourselves as inadequate, inferior, or incompetent. Resentment is fueled by continually reviewing and thinking over what happened, which only encourages bitterness and resentment to grow.

**COMMON THOUGHTS BEHIND RESENTMENT**

Examine the thoughts below. Check those that apply to you.

- I don’t deserve this kind of treatment
- They didn’t consider my disability
- No one really understands the seriousness of my mental health problems
- I was discriminated against because of my race, gender, culture, creed, or color
- More was expected of me by my parents than should have been
- I had to be more responsible than other people did
- I did the work and they got the credit
- The words and actions of others were disrespectful and made me feel inadequate
- They broke their promises
- I expected them to act like adults
- I expected them to act like professionals
- I could never please them, no matter how hard I tried
- Even though I made my feelings known they persisted in hurting me
- I treated them fairly, but they betrayed, lied to, and humiliated me anyway
- My parents didn’t treat me fairly
- They didn’t get caught, but I did
- My life did not have to be this hard
- I was teased, mocked, ridiculed, bullied, and made fun of
- My sentence was unfair
- I grew up underprivileged, poor, and deprived
☐ My life was difficult, unfair, complicated, and unjust
☐ I was often misunderstood in my feelings and my actions
☐ The system owes me and I deserve better or more
☐ Others got a promotion and advancement, even though I deserved it more than they did
☐ I was often overlooked and ignored
☐ Other people didn’t do enough for me
☐ I trusted them and they lied, deceived, and betrayed me
☐ I was singled out, targeted, and profiled
☐ Other people did not do for me what they should’ve done
☐ They had no time for me
☐ That person was selfish, self-centered, and self-absorbed, with no time for me
☐ That really wasn’t my fault; they are the ones to blame
☐ They didn’t acknowledge or appreciate my experience, knowledge, strength, or contribution
☐ Others treated me in an unnecessarily mean, hurtful, and thoughtless way

What thoughts and feelings were evoked when you read the list above?

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

HOW IT WORKS

Resentment often remains because we justify our right to be offended. Letting go of resentment grates against our sense of justice. We were wronged and therefore feel we have a right to be hurt, angry, and offended. With that attitude, resentment lingers and bitterness develops. The person filled with resentment is often reluctant to admit responsibility or fault, and is resistant to being held accountable for future actions. If you carry bitterness and resentment, you may be quick to blame others for the problems that arise.

When we are injured by someone we are close to, or intimately involved with, the wound will often have lasting effects. Injuries resulting in resentful feelings are often caused by those closest to us. We feel betrayed and resentful because we expected better treatment and more love and affection from those closest to us.

EFFECTS OF HOLDING RESENTMENT

When resentment goes unresolved, it can have a variety of negative effects. You may feel easily irritated, touchy, or have a sense of edginess when you think about the person who has hurt you. There may be denial of anger on the surface, but inwardly, hidden damage is increasing. Focusing on past hurts may cause you to feel like a
victim in every difficult situation. This will alter your perception of reality and make it difficult to have gratifying, rewarding, and positive interpersonal experiences. You will see what you are looking for. If you expect to be mistreated, slighted, and offended, you will surely find that you are.

**IT GETS WORSE**

Long-term effects of bitterness may include the development of a hostile, cynical, and sarcastic attitude. This may further damage relationships and thwart your own personal and emotional growth. It may become increasingly more difficult to communicate your emotions to others, trust other people, and may result in a loss of self-confidence. Future miscommunication may result, which only increases resentful feelings and makes reconciliation more difficult and unlikely.

Read the following list. Write names or identifiers on the lines of those against whom you may hold resentment. Feel free to add to the list.

**PEOPLE**

- ☐ Father or step-father(s) __________
- ☐ Women with whom my father was involved __________
- ☐ Mother or step-mother(s) __________
- ☐ Men with whom my mother was involved __________
- ☐ Sister(s) or step-sister(s) __________
- ☐ Brother(s) or step-brother(s) __________
- ☐ Relatives __________
- ☐ Clergy __________
- ☐ Police __________
- ☐ Lawyers __________
- ☐ Judges __________
- ☐ Doctors __________
- ☐ Psychiatrists __________
- ☐ Counselors __________
- ☐ Employers __________
- ☐ Employees __________
- ☐ Co-Workers __________
- ☐ In-Laws __________
- ☐ Spouse __________
- ☐ Former spouse __________
- ☐ Intimate partners __________
- ☐ Creditors __________
- ☐ Childhood friends __________
- ☐ School friends __________
- ☐ Teachers __________
- ☐ Lifelong friends __________
- ☐ Best friends __________
- ☐ Acquaintances __________
- ☐ Using friends __________
- ☐ Drug dealers __________
- ☐ Intimate partners __________
- ☐ Parole Officers __________
- ☐ Probation Officers __________
- ☐ A.A. or N.A. members __________
- ☐ __________
- ☐ __________
- ☐ __________
- ☐ __________
- ☐ __________
- ☐ __________
RESOLVING RESENTMENT

Consider the following suggestions to reduce anger, bitterness, and resentment:

1. Gain awareness of the emotions you experience regarding your past hurt.
2. Acknowledge how the past hurt or action affected you when it happened.
3. Reflect on what you began to think and believe about yourself because of what you endured.
4. Begin to alter what you think and believe in the present, rather than mentally repeating the offending behavior or focusing on the offender.
5. Forgive the original wounder. This enables you to react to the current offense with less intensity.
6. Examine how your resentment may come from confusing people in your present life with people from your past.
7. Put a thought between your feelings of resentment and your indulgence in spending time thinking about them, such as "I'm able to forgive," or "Pain from the past no longer shapes my present or future."
8. Think like a forgiving person, "I'm able to forgive faults, cover over mistakes, and overlook offenses."
9. Focus on things you can control. You cannot control the past, but you can make better choices today, such as letting go of hurt feelings.
10. Accept that people make mistakes and are imperfect. Choose to let go of their past mistakes and live your life filled with kindness, compassion, and understanding. Increasing your compassion for others will allow you to accept the imperfect actions and unfairness of the past, and stop seeing yourself as a victim. Accepting will help you grow stronger.
NOTES

LET IT GO

Carrying past resentment can make us thin-skinned. You may find yourself often and easily offended. Think for a minute about the game of hockey. The players on each team often get bumped, even by teammates. They do not resent the other players, but instead see it as part of the sport. Life is a lot like hockey. You are going to get bumped. Don’t be surprised or shaken when difficulties arise, you do not get treated with respect, or you get bumped in life. Let it go, overlook it, and cover it over; become a master at forgiveness.

CHANGE YOUR THINKING

☐ I am choosing to forgive
☐ My thoughts about the past may be inaccurate
☐ I can respect others, even though I have been mistreated
☐ Commitment to my character drives my actions, not someone else’s treatment of me
☐ I can overcome
☐ I am valuable and lovable
☐ I am adequate
☐ I can be accountable
☐ I can have positive relationships

☐ I can choose to trust
☐ I can be responsible
☐ I can communicate
☐ I can quit repeating past mistreatment
☐ I can make better choices today
☐ I can be intentional, not reactive
☐ I can choose to love others for who they are, not hate them for what they have done
☐ I can _______________________

Using some of the choices above, or writing your own phrases, put some words to what you will think about, practice, and declare to others.

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

What changes can you make in the way you think and believe?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

SOURCE