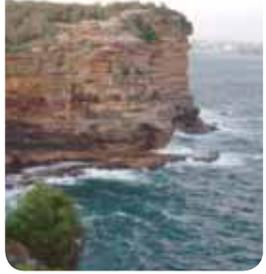




# You have a choice



One of the hardest decisions to make in life is deciding how you want to move forward. Have you ever noticed that you have similar reactions to events and circumstances that are really bringing you down? It is most likely that these reactions do not serve a positive purpose in your life and in fact result in negative consequences. A good example of this is not sticking up for yourself when you know you're in the right, or allowing other people to bully you into behaving in ways that you don't feel comfortable. The question you need to ask yourself at this point is what is more painful, the way you're living at this present time, or taking

a chance and changing the way you think and react to situations in the future.

One of the things we often fear is how other people will react to our change in behaviour. People find it difficult to deal with criticism and change, so when you stand up for yourself it's likely that the first reaction will be aggressive and uncomfortable – but is this feeling worse than the sinking feeling you get when you've allowed someone to walk all over you? I suggest – that the latter is much worse. Women in particular are guilty of this. We often think we have to be perfect and 'there' for everyone at the expense of ourselves. This also often entails allowing family members and work colleagues to criticise us. We don't say anything, instead confiding in friends about how unhappy we are and then going back into battle for more!

So how do we make a change for the better? The key is to 'stick to the opposite' of what you normally would do in this situation. The first thing is to recognise when you have these negative reactions.

## Example 1

Many people can relate to having a bully in their life (be it a child, a work colleague, a boss, a parent, a friend). Bullies work in different ways, but most are very manipulative and can significantly crush our self-esteems. Bullies can be very aggressive and intimidating. Thus, in order to keep the peace, a common reaction to bullies is to give in to their demands in order to avoid the unpleasantness of their reactions. However, remember, in this instance, the key is to 'stick to the opposite' of what you normally would do in this situation. In the workplace a bully may undermine you in a work meeting. What do you do? Your normal reaction in this situation may be to get upset, cry, tell your friends and just put up with it. However, a more positive reaction would be to either speak to the person after the meeting and say that wasn't appropriate (now this is the more 'head on' approach), or you may speak up for yourself at this meeting and make a point of informing the other members of the correct interpretation of the situation. Either way, can be unpleasant, however, at least you finish with dignity and respect, rather than feeling anxious, belittled and angry.



# You have a choice

## Example 2

Your child has a tantrum every time you go to the supermarket. Your usual reaction is to try to ignore it. Then it gets so embarrassing and uncomfortable, you end up giving in. You feel annoyed at the situation, taken advantage of and humiliated. Not a very pleasant experience and you continue to dread going shopping with the child. However, if you 'stick to the opposite', you can talk to your child before you leave the house and explain that they are only allowed 1 treat at the supermarket and if they misbehave you will simply walk out immediately with nothing.



The child may continue with the same behaviour, however, if you stick to your rule and simply walk out, eventually the child's behaviour will become extinct, because you're not giving in. Yes, this is unpleasant, but in the long run, you will feel more powerful, in control and respected by your child. This is a much better outcome for you.

## Example 3

You have a very competitive friend who finds it very difficult to hear about your successes. Every time you tell her about how well you're going she finds a way to put you down (either by questioning whether you should be nervous about an interview, telling you you'll get sick if you keep pushing yourself, asking personal questions about how much money you're making and then trying to make you feel paranoid about not being organised enough with your finances). Each time, you say nothing and simply get upset. You try to avoid seeing her, but she keeps ringing you and then you feel guilty. You agree to see her again and the same thing happens. You feel terrible every time you see her. The opposite reaction would be to say something at the time. When she asks you about how much money you made, you simply state that this is a personal question. When she tries to make you nervous about your interview, you say "I'm feeling very confident and I know I'll do a great job". Now, it's likely she will retaliate and tell you, you're rude, however, this feeling of unpleasantness is much better than what you were experiencing before.

These examples demonstrate that often we allow anxiety and fear to rule our lives. It can be quite debilitating and can stifle your ability to succeed in life. These patterns can develop over a long period of time, so they can be hard to break, but if you persist, your life will be so much more rewarding. It's your choice. Just ask yourself: "Are my current reactions serving me a good purpose?"