

Creating meaning

◆————◆
**Developing healing
meanings**



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***What do you mean by
developing healing
meanings?***

- ◆ People make sense of the world, life and relationships based on their past experiences.
- ◆ The way you interpreted those events, the “stories” you have told yourself about the world and people and yourself, may have made sense at the time but do not always continue to serve your best interests.



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So there are good and bad meanings?

- More like meanings that improve and heal your life, and other ideas and meanings that make your life worse.
- Here's a chance to consider new ways of looking at events that may help you be more effective in meeting your goals and reaching your dreams.



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***Tell me a little more
about this***

- We'll list and describe some of the ideas people commonly have that tend to make their lives worse.
- Think about how much you believe them or operate out of them.
- We'll offer an alternate way of viewing things you might want to "try on" for yourself.



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“Feelings are reality”

- If I feel hopeless, then my situation is hopeless.
- How much do you believe this?
- Consider the times you’ve had feelings like this about situations and you’ve later found your situation wasn’t hopeless.
- Feelings are simply feelings. You don’t need to ignore them, but it helps to consider other information as well.

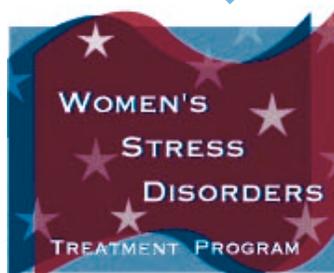


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“Feelings cause behavior”

- This is the belief that, for example, if I feel angry, it means I will hit someone or throw something.
- Instead, consider that you can choose whether or not to act on your feelings. Think of the times you’ve made the choice to not act on your feelings.

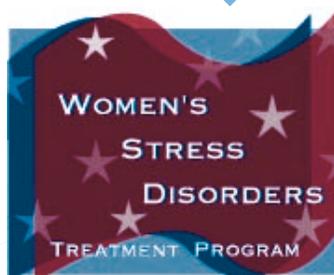


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“Thoughts are reality”

- ◆ For example, “I think I’m worthless, so I must be worthless.”
- ◆ Or, “I think my boss doesn’t like me, so she must not like me”.
- ◆ Thoughts are actually just your interpretation of events, not the actual truth. Consider all the information.



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“There is one right way to feel”

- This is when you think, “What’s wrong with me that I’m so upset (hurt, sad) about this?” or, “How come I’m not over this yet?”
- Actually, people respond very differently to situations. Even uncommon responses are not “wrong”.
- Feelings are neither right nor wrong.



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***“Thinking things are
all or nothing”***

◆ **Some examples:**

- “I’ll never get another job since I was fired from this one”.
- “If I can’t be with her, I won’t ever find anyone I can love”.
- “Unless everyone likes and respects me, I’m no good”.

◆ **Very little in life is black and white. You can choose to allow yourself to be less than perfect and to trust that there is more than one route to happiness.**

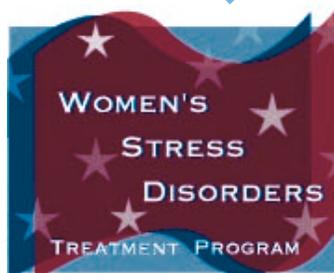


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“Strong and urgent feelings are always the truth.”

- ◆ For example, “I need to talk to my counselor this instant or I’ll fall apart.” Or, “If I can never have a drink again I’ll die”.
- ◆ At times, feelings can be so dramatic that a paper cut feels as urgent as a heart attack.
- ◆ Sit mindfully with your feelings awhile until they settle down. Then you can wisely evaluate the situation and decide what is the next right thing to do.



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***“Wants = needs or
shoulds”***

- This is when you confuse what you wish for with what you actually need to survive
- For example, thinking you need a spouse to be happy, need marijuana to relax, or need to talk to your counselor this instant
- While it would be nice to have what you want, you will be more effective if you can sort out actual needs from wants. You will survive even if not all of your wants are met.

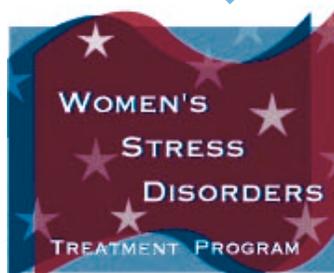


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“I am so unique, no one can understand me”

- This is when you say things like, “if you’d gone through what I did, you’d lash out at people too”. Or, “no one will ever understand how this is for me”.
- Because humans are social creatures, it is important to risk connection with others. It can be helpful to work on changing your belief to something like, “no one will know exactly how it was for me, but I can get some understanding and comfort anyway”.

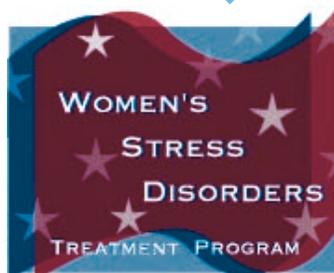


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Minimizing or ignoring positives

- ◆ For example, focusing angrily on wealthy people versus appreciating having the money to occasionally eat out. Or only noticing your faults without also noticing your strengths.
- ◆ “Count your blessings” or “look for the silver lining” is a more helpful approach.

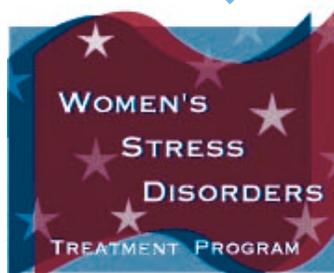


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Catastrophizing

- This is when you assume that living through some bad, or even horrible events means your life is ruined.
- It can be helpful to remind yourself that, even if you have been hurt, you have choices about what you do now.
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving is a good example of how you take a catastrophic event (the death of a child), and make meaning out of it.



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***“Assuming the present
or future will be the
same as the past”***

- ◆ You may think, “You can’t trust people. I know because I’ve been betrayed by people in the past”.
- ◆ Or, “The people in charge will screw me over - they always have”.
- ◆ Instead, try noticing what is *actually* happening *right now* without filtering it so much through the past. Change is possible. You can remind yourself that today is a new day.

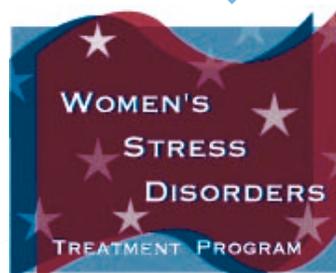


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Feeling owed

- ◆ “This (bad thing) happened to me, so now I get to...”
- ◆ Or, “This happened to me so now I don’t have to...”
- ◆ While you don’t have to ignore what happened, you can get more from life by choosing to move on and take responsibility for how you will live your life from now on.
- ◆ Focus on how to reach your goals now, rather than trying to even out past scores.

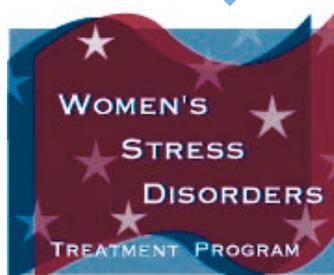


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Idealizing the past

- ◆ “Back when I was high all the time, everything was great”.
- ◆ Or, “My life was perfect until this trauma”.
- ◆ Take a look at both sides, both the pros and cons of the past. Chances are there were negatives as well as positives.

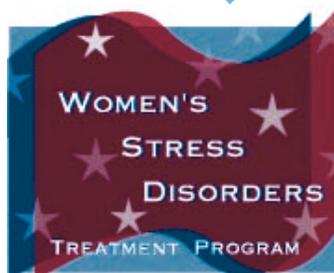


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Believing feelings don't change

- For example, thinking the craving for alcohol won't go away, or that if you start crying you will never stop.
- Instead, notice how long it really takes to stop crying or craving, or whatever feels endless. Actually time it. Notice the changes in feelings. For example, "enraged" might change to "mad" to "irritable". Remind yourself that everything changes.

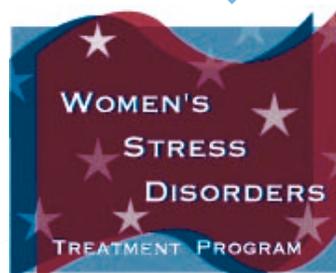


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“I deserve to be treated badly”

- This one often comes out of two mistaken beliefs, first that because you have experienced bad treatment you deserve to be treated badly and, second, that punishing and hateful behavior makes you likely to change.
- In fact, no one deserves to be treated badly, AND positive reinforcement is more likely to create change.

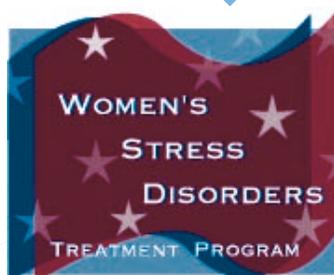


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“I must escape from my feelings”

- ◆ If you believe this you say things to yourself like, “I can’t stand this feeling, so I have to.....”
- ◆ Actually, it is possible to feel miserable or scared and tolerate it. Practicing tolerating your feelings is a necessary first step in reducing suffering.

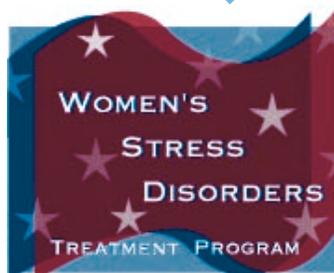


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“If I don’t pay attention to it, it will go away”

- ➔ If this is your third drunk driving ticket, it’s past time to pay attention to that and look at your drinking. If your partner keeps hitting you, it’s time to look closely at your relationship.
- ➔ Although things occasionally go away if you ignore them, taking care of the business at hand not only reduces the number of messes in your life, but also builds your self-esteem.

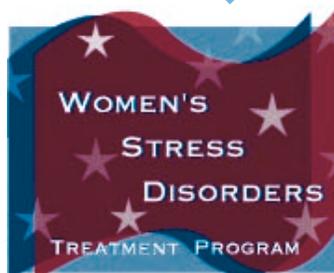


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***“Why even try?
Nothing I do matters
anyway”***

- ◆ This belief often operates in people who grew up in a chaotic or confusing household. You might believe that working hard at saving money to buy a car is pointless because “fate” will block you from your goals.
- ◆ Keep track of times you’ve been effective, even in small ways, at coming closer to your goals. Remind yourself that the best way to meet your goals is to keep working towards them.

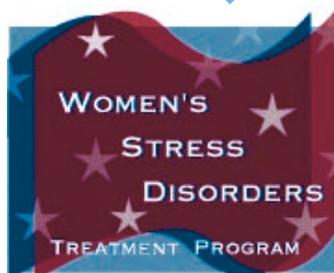


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“There’s no harm in indulging myself”

- ◆ Sometimes this may be true, but overuse of self-indulgence, or indulging yourself in bad habits (for example, an alcoholic who says to herself, “just one drink won’t hurt”) creates problems.
- ◆ It is more helpful to remind yourself that even small decisions towards your healing are helpful when added together, and there can be *too* much of a “good” thing.

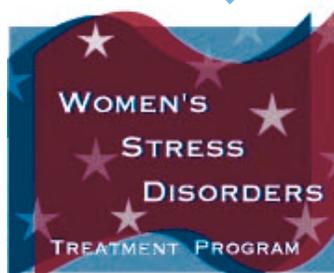


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“Living well is the best revenge”

- This one we *agree* with.
- Remind yourself that a happy, functional life will make up for your suffering more than hurting yourself or focusing backwards in time will.
- Try “acting as if” you believe some of these new meanings and beliefs are true.



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