

Twenty Non-Medical Ways to Help You Cope With Pain and Suffering

The Difference Between Pain and Suffering

There is a difference between physical pain, which is a physiological process, and suffering, which is our mental and emotional response to the pain. In general, in addition to physical pain, there is mental pain, from a mind agitated and disturbed by negative thoughts.

If you can, test the ideas below, and try to find one or more that appeal to you, that seem to help you cope with the pain. Then, for best results, practise that method every day.

Twenty Non-Medical Ways to Help You Cope With Pain and Suffering

1. Come to the realization that you are not alone: everyone, without exception, faces pain, loss and suffering sooner or later. Feel the burden you thought you were bearing alone lift a little.
2. Realize that there may be others who are experiencing similar or even greater pain than you. Generate the wish that they may be freed from their pain.
3. Realize that pain and suffering are a natural part of life – in fact suffering is in the very nature of our existence. It is being truly happy that is unusual. Familiarize yourself with the inevitable sufferings – old age, illness and death.
4. Realize that reacting to your pain with anger, frustration or despair will not help ease the pain.
5. Given that your pain is not over yet, decide that you will tolerate and accept it. Then you will no longer be its victim.
6. Recognize the impermanence of all things – no matter how painful or pleasurable your experience may be, it will not last. “This too shall pass.”
7. Visualize, for instance, a soothing, luminous nectar that soaks into the centre of pain and gradually dissolves it into a feeling of well-being. The nectar then permeates your entire body and the pain fades away. Alternatively, visualize a scene that is a source of peace for you.
8. Directly confront your suffering, don't find ways to avoid it.
9. When we feel severe physical or emotional pain, we may simply look at the experience. Even when it is crippling, we must ponder whether it has any colour, shape, or any other immutable characteristic. We find that the more we try to bring it into focus, the more the pain's definition becomes blurred.
10. Objectively analyze the situation, take an holistic view. Are there any positives in your life at present?
11. Nothing is 100% bad or 100% good. Has your suffering led to anything useful or positive in your life? Sometimes out of the deepest crisis comes understanding and spiritual progress.
12. Don't replay your hurts over and over again in your mind.
13. Don't blow up small things out of proportion.
14. Don't remain indifferent to the really important things.
15. Don't take things too personally.
16. Don't think that your suffering is unfair – it is in fact the result of your previous actions (karma). The Buddha observed that there is a natural Law of Cause and Effect: virtuous actions lead to happiness, non-virtuous actions lead to suffering.

17. Your pain is not a punishment by God or Buddha for previous wrongdoings; it's just what happens according to the Law of Cause and Effect. You have the power to choose not to create the actions that may lead to further pain and suffering, and to purify accumulated negativities.
18. Don't allow regret to degenerate into guilt (self-blame, self-hatred).
19. Dedicate your suffering. This means to have the thought "May I experience my suffering instead of others who are suffering. May they now experience peace and contentment."
20. If it is possible, try to help others who are in greater trouble. At least send them your love through prayer.

Contents of this page prepared by Len Warren for The Pure Land of the Indestructible Buddha, November 2018. Content assembled by Wheel of Life, Hayagriva Buddhist Centre, 64 Banksia Terrace, Kensington 6151, Western Australia, 2008-1012.