



SELF-HELP EXERCISE: ANGER AND BITTERNESS RELATED TO LOSS

INTRODUCTION

Feeling bitter and thinking life is unfair are common reactions to loss. Life can be unfair. After a loss, people naturally try to search for reasons to understand why it happened. Coming up with reasons for the loss can help us make sense of it and justify our anger. Because it's hard to find reasons for an untimely death, you may get stuck with the explanation that "Life just isn't fair," and this can be destructive.



Focusing your energy on unfairness or trying to solve the question of why the death occurred is almost always unhelpful and usually destructive. In reality, part of life is influenced by random events.

Can you think of things that happened to you in the military that were due to random chance?

Events such as losses that occur in combat remind us that chance events and unfairness play a part in our lives. Even though life isn't always fair, focusing on the unfairness will only make you feel more angry and bitter over time. Anger and bitterness will destroy your relationships and damage your overall physical, mental, and spiritual health.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are ways to assert yourself that will increase your chances of getting what you need or want.

- ★ **ACKNOWLEDGE:** First, acknowledge that your loss was unfair and that feeling angry and bitter is normal.
- ★ **BECOME AWARE:** Then, try to become more aware of how your way of seeing things may be triggering your anger. It is common to blame the world, other people, God, or yourself for loss. Take a moment to consider who or what you have been blaming for combat and operational loss(es).
- ★ **ACCEPT:** Next, try to accept the loss. Accepting your loss does not mean forgetting about your friend or pretending that the death wasn't unfair. Acceptance will help you let go of your anger so that you can move forward with your life. Acceptance is a difficult process, but it is necessary in order for you to begin to reclaim a satisfying life.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

It's likely that feelings of anger and bitterness about loss will continue to come up from time to time. This isn't a sign of failure or an indication that you will never get over your grief. These feelings are there to remind you that the person you lost was important to you and that you gained a lot from knowing him or her. If your friendship didn't mean very much, your grief wouldn't be as painful. It is truly unfair that your friend died. That said, you can choose to focus on unfairness or more positive things, such as your goals for the future and what you can do right now to move towards them. The more you shift your attention to the positive, the less angry and bitter you will feel.



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