

SESSION 7: REBUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Which relationships do you want to improve in your life? What would help improve those relationships?



PRACTICE DEEP BREATHING

Start class by practicing the deep breathing method discussed on page 28.

INTRODUCTIONS

Last session's homework asked you to keep track of activities that help reduce anxiety and improve sleep.

- *Does anyone want to share what they learned from Handout 6.2: Choosing Healthy Living?*
- *Does anyone want to share something that helped them sleep better this week?*

BEHIND THE SCENES

Today we are going to talk about how trauma in our life can affect those around us. Trauma hurts—everyone. Loved ones often want to help, but feel helpless. Trauma survivors want to feel better but often feel guarded and alone in their suffering. With the symptoms of PTSD (emotional numbness, flashbacks, hyper-alertness, and anxiety) it is often difficult to re-establish a sense of connection with others. Simple acts of friendship like laughing, trusting, and confiding in one another can all seem out of reach. *How do you rebuild those bonds? How do you help others help you?*

MOVIE CLIP – *Play Session 7: Rebuilding Relationships*

Let's look at how trauma affected Brooks' relationship with his sister and his wife. Look for examples of how Brooks and his relationships changed as a result of the traumatic event.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

[First, write responses to the questions below (*think*), then share your responses with a partner (*pair*), then discuss the questions as a group (*share*):

- 1) How does Leslie describe Brooks and their relationship after their traumatic event?

- 2) How does Brooks' wife feel about their relationship? What does she want from Brooks?

- 3) When you heard this lesson was called "Rebuilding Relationships," who came to mind? What relationship(s) in your life do you want to make better?

- 4) Choose one person from question #3 that you want to focus most on in repairing the relationship. Name of person:_____.
[Choose someone you know you can have an ongoing relationship with (like a family member or spouse) rather than an ex-boyfriend/girlfriend.]

If you were that person, how would you feel about the relationship with you? Check the emotions below you think s/he most likely feels about his/her relationship with you.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hurt | <input type="checkbox"/> Burned Out | <input type="checkbox"/> Determined |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mad | <input type="checkbox"/> Misunderstood | <input type="checkbox"/> Compassionate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | <input type="checkbox"/> Confused | <input type="checkbox"/> Grateful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoided | <input type="checkbox"/> Loving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tired | <input type="checkbox"/> Forgotten | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Why do you think s/he would feel this way?

- 5) What was your relationship like with this person before trauma in your life? How has your relationship been strained since? (If you did not know this person before the trauma happened, how has your relationship been affected by the effects of trauma?)
- 6) Do you have any regrets in this relationship? Is there anything you wish you had said or done differently?

CLASS DISCUSSION

*"We're hardwired for connection—it's what gives us purpose and meaning to our lives.
The absence of love, belonging, and connection always leads to suffering."
- Brene Brown, author⁶*

Relationships with others are essential to trauma recovery. It is not just optimal. It is essential. Just as our bodies and brains were designed for "survival mode," we are also designed to be in relation with others. Solitary confinement (forcing someone to live in isolation) is another form of torture. Without interactions with others, our minds can begin to ruminate on past experiences and can lead to a downward spiral of negativity, self-doubt, and self-destructive patterns. To reverse this spiral, you must reach out to others and help create positive interactions.

The challenge for trauma survivors is that you can be surrounded by people, but still feel alone. *How do you let people into your inner thoughts? How could anyone possibly understand and truly empathize with what you have experienced?*

A first step toward developing healthy, rewarding relationships is this group. The fact that you have joined this group and are still here for this session says that you have made a commitment to healing, and hopefully in that process you have gotten to know others in this group who you can share your thoughts with and who truly understand and empathize with what you are thinking and feeling. Hopefully your relationships within this group last well beyond the time of these sessions and continue to be a source of support and hope.

The second step toward rebuilding relationships is to help others help you. There is a good chance that the people you know and love want to help you heal—but they don't know how.

Discuss as a class:

- ***What could the people in your life do to help you feel better and strengthen your relationship with them?*** (List at least five things then discuss as a group.)

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

- ***What could you do to help improve your relationship with others?*** (List at least five things then discuss as a group)

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

To begin to strengthen and improve your relationship with the people in your life, begin by focusing on the person you wrote about in question #4. This relationship is meaningful to you. You miss this person, and there is a good chance that person misses you. Even if you see him/her every day something has changed or is missing in that relationship, and you want it to be better. *What can you do to help repair this relationship?*

- *Make a plan. What is a next step or steps you can take to improve the relationship with the person you wrote about in question #4? (list at least five things)*

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

“FROM BROOKS” INTERVIEW:

The interview with Brooks is on the next page and for you to read on your own later.

HOMEWORK:

This week’s homework is to write a Letter of Gratitude to the person with whom you want to improve your relationship. A Letter of Gratitude focuses on what you are thankful about in that person and that relationship. Be specific about what that person has done or said to try to support you. And be forgiving—if you feel that person has not done enough to try to support you, try to understand why s/he hasn’t met your needs and give him/her grace and time to try to be more supportive. If possible, share this letter with the person in person or by mail.

It is best to not list what you need from this person in your Letter of Gratitude. The person may interpret the letter as a criticism, rather than a thank you. Hopefully, as you work toward rebuilding this relationship, you can have an honest conversation about what s/he can do to help you heal.

⁶Brown, Brene. (2012). *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. NY: Gotham Books.

How have you tried to restore relationships in your life?



FROM BROOKS: Relationships are messy and they are so because they involve people. Yet they are what make our lives worthwhile, whether it is with our family, our friends or our relationship with God.

Few people will ever go through what Leslie and I experienced together. We loved each other very much and had been very close, but everything changed after the murders of our parents. We were separated, and no one realized that we could have helped each other more than anyone else could have helped us. It ultimately

made things far more difficult because when we were together there wasn't a sense of comfort. We rarely discussed the crime, but our time together only reminded us of the guilt and pain we both carried inside us. We both wound up left to ourselves, trying to figure out how to hang on long enough to put as many good experiences and memories as we could between the crime and ourselves.

I ultimately had to deal with my own demons by facing the anger, hate, and guilt before I could begin to restore my relationship with Leslie and my first wife. With my first wife, the string of broken promises, neglect of our relationship, and my failure to move forward emotionally destroyed our marriage. We never recovered. With Leslie I apologized and asked her to forgive me for not protecting her that night. It was then that I learned of her feelings of guilt, and I began to get a glimpse of life through her eyes.

I've learned a couple of things about restoring relationships. One is that we have to learn to see things from the perspective of others. Rarely is one person entirely to blame. We may be hurting people without even realizing it. Even if we don't agree, we can still seek to understand and acknowledge their hurt.

I also learned that I have to accept human nature as it is. I place expectations on others, and they do the same with me. I let people down by not living up to their expectations, whether reasonable or not, and they do the same with me. It's even harder when hurtful behavior is repeated. Just when we begin to feel we can forgive and move on, painful wounds are reopened. I have to accept that others can't be perfect—and neither can I.

My first wife and I did not reconcile. But we were ultimately able to find the capacity to forgive each other and reach a level of friendship and respect. We have both gone on to build new, strong and loving families. Leslie and I have gone through the normal ups and downs that any brother and sister go through. But we remain very close and support each other completely. She was instrumental in writing and making The Amendment which in turn, I think and hope, has helped her gain a new perspective on the struggles she has faced and why.