

Chapter One Time to Get Out of BED

Are you having trouble in your relationships? Do you feel anxious or depressed? Have you ever felt like your life was missing direction or purpose? My experience as a psychotherapist has shown me that your discontentment stems from three core issues. You feel

broken,
empty, or
disconnected.

That is, you are “in BED.” Think about it. If, for example, you were abused as a child, you may feel broken. If you are depressed, a part of you feels empty. If you struggle with loneliness, you feel disconnected.

As difficult as it is, being in BED is a part of being human. Cartoonist Jennifer Berman created a well-known cartoon that pictures a huge auditorium at the *Adult Children of Normal Parents Annual Convention*.¹ One guy is sitting there all alone.

It’s such a cliché to say you come from a dysfunctional family. You can’t raise a child without doing something that will break him or her emotionally. It’s not about blaming your parents. No matter who your parents are, you will experience these things to one degree or another in childhood and into adulthood.

Some of us get broken more than others. For different reasons, we may end up feeling empty or disconnected. But, in time, these feelings subside, and you will get out of BED.

If that’s true, then how do people end up BED-ridden and stuck in a painful, emotional rut? The very things you do to try to get out of BED or protect yourself from being hurt in the first place don’t work. They actually make you feel even worse. Your failed solutions perpetuate your pain and cause you to suffer.

What does suffering look like? The following characteristics will help you recognize suffering:

- It is out of proportion to the initial event.
- It lingers long after the initial event.
- It is usually triggered automatically and outside of conscious awareness.
- It is always based on wrong thinking, distorted ideas, and/or false assumptions about what is happening.

Sad things happen in life. Bad things occur. You can’t always do something about it. Because you can’t change what has already happened to you, obviously and thankfully, your hope for relieving your suffering rests in what you are or are not doing now. Antoinette’s story illustrates the connection between suffering and a failed solution to being in BED.

I-Witness Testimony: Antoinette’s All Alone

I’ve been surviving alone for as long as I can remember. I was alone with my family, alone with my friends, and alone in a room full of people. Worst of all, I was alone in my heart and in my mind. I hated having no one to talk to, no one to hold my

¹ Jennifer Berman, *Adult Children of Normal Parents: Annual Convention and Other Cartoons* (Pocket Books, 1994).

hand or hug me, and no one to tell me that everything's going to be okay. I hated throwing tantrums with no one to stop me or help me learn how to stop. All I've ever wanted was to be close with someone and feel as if I wasn't alone.

Antoinette² suffered from the eating disorder of bulimia for almost twenty years. She would frantically binge on large quantities of fast food, pizza, ice cream, cookies, and cake. She would then drink a gallon of water to stimulate vomiting and soften the rough edges of the food as it came up. From the age of sixteen to thirty-five she did this up to six times a day. She often didn't even need to use her finger to vomit. She would just bend over the toilet and will herself to do so. The two times she was pregnant slowed her down a bit, but she still did not stop.

Antoinette will tell you that her bulimia had nothing to do with food or weight. She just as easily could have gotten into drugs or promiscuous sex as a teenager. She came to realize that she was bingeing and purging to take control of the desperate feelings of loneliness she experienced all of her life. She felt empty and disconnected.

Her solution was to focus her attention on her body and weight. She believed that if she were skinny enough, she would be accepted and would not feel alone anymore. This failed solution—that is, what she did in response to being in BED—actually caused her to suffer from a painful, life-long struggle with bulimia and prolonged her feelings of emptiness and disconnectedness. Granted, Antoinette's story is extreme, but the principle is clear. When your attempts to address being in BED fail, you will add new problems on top of your already existing pain.

So how do you get out of BED? How do you avoid suffering? How do you get unstuck? You have to do something different. It might be painful at times, but that is exactly what you must do if you want to experience lasting change in your life. I'm sure you'll agree that you can't keep doing things the same way and have anything change. How can you have something different if you fail to do something different?

If you are like most people, one thing will get in your way. You won't want to do what you know you ought to do. Why? Doing something different is hard. It's scary, and it comes at a cost. Be encouraged. Despite these barriers, you can do something different for a change. Keep reading. I'll show you how.

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² A pseudonym