

THE CONCEPT OF A TOOLBOX

A toolbox contains an array of resources to help us cope with those moments when we feel discouraged, tired, sad, anxious or bored. These uncomfortable moments will happen whether we are single or not, but often if we are “single” we may blame the bad feelings associated with the ups and downs of life on “being single.” (See “If only...” in MySingleSpace).

Some of our feelings are a reaction to some of the disappointments and challenges that can accompany being single. For example, sometimes we may not like going home alone or having to pay a single supplement. Sometimes we may wish we didn't have to plan so much. These are feelings we may need to accept, understand and work with. When we can talk about these moments, feel understood and less alone, the negative feelings and thoughts often lose their power. We may find through a discussion with a friend that while we don't like to go home alone, at the same time, we may appreciate our ability to go home, when we want!

HOW DO WE BEGIN TO STOCK OUR TOOLBOX?

We can start by taking the following steps:

- 1. Create your “dreaded” list** that includes situations that are the most difficult for you. Then construct a set of actions (see below) to follow and resources to use when you encounter each of these situations. Begin to apply your tools for each “dreaded” situation.
- 2. Acceptance is the most important tool** that belongs in your toolbox, no matter who you are or what you are dealing with; in other words, accepting any feelings and experience as **your** feelings and experience (not necessarily as reality). In order to be accepting of yourself, you need to remove the judgment and shame (e.g. I'm stupid to feel this way), and identify the meaning or interpretation you are giving to the experience. Judgments and interpretations amplify the pain rather than help us get through it. Acceptance neutralizes shame and allows us to take actions that are more grounded, and not just “reactive” or “band-aid” solutions to get away from our upset.
- 3. Create a list of actions** that allow you to:
 - **Feel prepared to face the situation.**

If you dread the baby shower that you know you need to attend, think through a plan that will help you feel that you are taking care of yourself and your needs. The plan might include: a way to escape if you feel bad; a way of “framing” the situation that allows you to feel more engaged and productive (e.g. I want to make some contacts for my new business); or enlisting a good friend to be available for a phone call.

- **Pamper, replenish or soothe yourself.**

Writing in a journal helps many people soothe themselves and gain perspective. (See Journaler’s Clearinghouse in MySingleSpace.) Others feel better and soothed after a long walk or other form of exercise. Write down what works for you.

- **Get outside of your thinking and into the present.**

You can ruminate and go ‘round and ‘round endlessly if you don’t get outside of your own thoughts. Some people can do this by connecting with others (e.g. talking with a friend, reading about a similar experience someone else has had, praying). Others feel better about themselves when they get in action and take charge (e.g. working out, cleaning the back room, volunteering). Write down the list of things that help you get out of the cycle of negative feelings and thoughts.

- **Stay in communication.**

Keep a list of people you can call and talk to. Others may find it helpful to pray or connect with their “spiritual partner.”(See “Creative Connections” and “Solo and Spiritual” In MySingleSpace)

- **Connect with the future that you are creating.**

Create a list of your goals and the experiences you would like to have in your life. Write down the top ten. When you hit a rough patch, you want to take out your list and, being as specific as possible, write down the next steps that you can take right now that will get you closer to one of your goals. Then, commit to taking the next step. For example, if you ultimately want to join a reading group, just doing the research can help you feel better.

- **Finally, think of other strategies that have worked in the past.**

List what has been helpful to you the past when you felt down. Such tools might include a list of sayings or slogans, a favorite place you go to feel restored, a special coffee shop you like to sit in.

MAKING USE OF YOUR TOOLBOX

Once you have gone through the steps above, you will have already thought through the possible bumps in the road and rehearsed how to handle them. When the time comes to use your tools, you will have them available and ready. To further explore strategies for Resilience and Coping, see **Resources and Links** as well as **Journalers' Clearinghouse in My Single Space**.