

Envy a green-eyed stress monster

**Advice
Line**

by Dr. Betty Phillips



Envy and jealousy are difficult emotions that arise in stressful circumstances, but themselves cause increased stress. Let's examine these concepts and look at methods to cope with and dissipate them. Rooted in insecurity and feelings of loss, envy and jealousy increase in times of economic and social turmoil.

What are envy and jealousy? They are often called feelings but are actually different from basic emotions such as depression and anger which have a physiological basis. Envy and jealousy are complex experiences with a clear cognitive component. Envy and jealousy are basically thoughts which cause negative feelings. Thus they must be examined and deconstructed cognitively, since they will not dissipate with the passage of time.

While popular culture uses the words envy and jealousy interchangeably, theorists define these words differently. Jealousy is defined as fear of losing someone or something already possessed whereas envy is defined as wanting something belonging to another. I am not a linguist and actually see no reason to uphold this distinction. However you define these words, they are in fact often interrelated.

Envy and jealousy are extremely uncomfortable, based upon negative experiences such as insecurity, low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, loneliness, distrust, fears of loss, suspiciousness, ill will, resentment, bitterness or anger, often accompanied by shame and guilt. Allowing these negative experiences certainly puts you in the power of the stress monster.

Where do these experiences

originate? Deep within the human experience. They harken back to the child's need for attention and security and children's problems such as sibling rivalry and competition with peers. When filled with happiness, confidence and feelings of security, there is obviously no need for envy and jealousy toward others.

Parents: pay attention here. When you help your children deal with these issues you will be fortifying them against envy and jealousy.

What should you do if you are stressed by envy and jealousy? Start by dealing directly with the guilt and shame. Since envy and jealousy are almost universal, understand that you are not bad or evil when you suffer with these experiences. Thoughts of envy and jealousy are simply that, thoughts to be dealt with without the gloom and doom of shame and guilt.

In envy and jealousy we focus on what we want that we don't possess now, we fear we are losing, or we fear that we never will have. More intense feelings of envy and jealousy will include the desire for someone else to lose and even may include pleasure in the suffering of others when they lose possessions. When you continue to focus upon these perceived deficiencies or losses you guarantee the continuation of these dark feelings. Therefore the most basic and long lasting remedy is to learn to develop feelings of gratitude and appreciation for what you do have, instead of what you don't have. I've written before about gratitude and will continue to discuss this concept which is basic to a positive life experience. If you had in your possession all the things you envy in other people, would you really be happy? No. Happiness does not come from having possessions. True happiness is state of being, not a state of having.

A key concept is the difference between "upward" and "downward"



comparisons. Envy and jealousy are based upon upward comparisons, a focus on what other people have that you don't have. Continued thoughts about deficits reinforce envy and jealousy. A downward comparison, however, will focus on the things you have that others do not. While you may not have the shiny new car of your neighbor, you can be grateful that you do have a car when others do not. Using downward comparisons may help you switch from envy to gratitude. Also consider the "grass is always greener" phenomenon. The individuals you

envy likely experience problems you don't know about. You might not want to trade your problems for theirs in order to have that shiny new car.

To get rid of envy and jealousy, you can simply decide to suppress all comparisons to others. Obviously the best long-term solution is to improve your life directly. Habits of jealous thinking are just that, habits, and can be changed with constant attention. Remember the lesson of the complaint-free world in the last article. When you can squash thoughts of envy and jealousy for 21 days, you'll be home free and this particular stress monster will be defeated.

Need advice?

Send Dr. Betty Phillips questions about individual, relationship, marriage or family issues to BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. Betty looks forward to hearing from you!

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