

Let Them

A modern take on an ancient approach to stress management



Have you heard of the *Let Them* theory for reducing stress and anxiety? It goes something like this:

- If someone doesn't like you for no apparent reason, *let them*.
- If life is going to rain on your parade today, *let it*.

It's a contemporary interpretation of the old Stoic principle of not wasting energy stressing over things (or people) you can't control. Other relatively recent interpretations include the *Serenity Prayer* and the *Do Not Take Things Personally* agreement from *The Four Agreements*.

It's a classic because it's a simple-sounding tool for building resilience and reducing stress. But there's a danger in making it too simple.

If It Feels Personal, It Probably Is

Emotions are an organic and healthy way of responding to the world around us. It's natural to feel angry when someone is insulting, sad when confronted with loss, or scared in response to an unknown or threatening circumstance.

In those instances, simply saying, "I don't care," "Let them," or "It's not personal," and ignoring natural emotional responses is an oversimplification that can set us up for trouble later. Unaddressed emotions have a way of resurfacing at inappropriate times

and can lead to resentment, [rumination](#), and a negative impact on our physical, mental, and emotional health.

Instead, it's important to acknowledge our feelings first and then figure out how to deal with them. Stoic principles can help with that process.

Being Stoic with a Capital "S"

Unlike our modern idea of being stoic, classical Stoicism isn't about being cold or unemotional. It's about being mindful of our emotions in a way that avoids extreme or unhelpful reactions.

Adapting the Stoic Stages of Emotion



STAGE 1: INVOLUNTARY EXPERIENCE

Something happens that triggers a feeling like fear, excitement, or shock.



STAGE 2: CONSCIOUS EXAMINATION

We experience these feelings and view the situation mindfully.



STAGE 3: EMOTIONAL REACTION

- With mindfulness, we can respond proportionally and with intent.
- Without mindfulness, we're at the mercy of the emotion.

Stoicism recognizes that the first stage is natural and out of our control. See a small snake in the grass and jump = involuntary. Get a door slammed in your face and feel a flush of anger = involuntary.

How we progress after that initial, involuntary experience makes a difference.

Consider the snake scenario:

With Stage 2: See the snake, jump, take a deep breath, back slowly away from it, chuckle at the jump scare, and move on with our day = well done, us!

Without Stage 2: See the snake, jump, act like it's a Titanoboa, and run screaming into the street where we might get hit by a truck = overreact much?

Now the door scenario:

With Stage 2: Door slams, quick surge of shock and anger, recognize that we're angry but unharmed, take a deep breath, let the anger go, and move on = very mature!

Without Stage 2: Door slams, quick surge of shock and anger, think "it doesn't matter" ignoring the anger so it simmers and later causes us to be rude or unkind to someone else = human, but not ideal.

How to Feel and Think at the Same Time

Clearly, emotional reactions without conscious awareness can be detrimental to wellbeing. Here's a framework to help learn to better process emotions and respond with intent.



Pay Attention to It – When a feeling comes up, notice it. That may seem obvious, but focusing outside ourselves can be such a habit that it's easy to brush past initial internal reactions, leaving them to become problems later. Practice this [simple mindfulness meditation](#) to learn to be more aware of internal signs and feelings.



Identify It

– Name the feeling without judgment. Try to experience the feeling with a little bit of distance. Instead of "I'm WOUNDED!" think "That was a hurtful thing to hear," or "Wow. That hurt." Instead of "I'm ANGRY!", try, "I feel angry," or "Hello, anger."



Trace and Measure It

– Identify the trigger and consider if the size of the feeling matches. Like, if you send a text using their when it should have been there, and you immediately feel like throwing your phone across the room, that's probably about more than autocorrect irritation. Think about where that extra anger might be coming from. Check out [this article](#) for ways to gain perspective on particularly strong feelings or moods.



Respond to It

– Decide how to proceed with intent. Is it within your power to change the trigger or situation? Get to know what's in your [circle of influence](#) to constructively approach the things you can control and let go of the things you can't.



Let It Be

– Here's the part where you get to say, "Let them," accept the things you can't control, or decide not to take something personally. Because you've intentionally processed your emotions, those statements will now have real power, and you'll be better able to move on without lingering resentment or unresolved feelings.

Service Tie-in: Visit Concern's guided mindfulness partner, eM Life (accessible through the digital platform), and enter *Difficult Emotions Collection* or *The Power of Awareness* in the search bar for curated lists of on-demand programs that help build self-awareness and approach emotions with intent.

For customized tools and resources, visit Concern's Digital Platform by logging in to employees.concernhealth.com, and selecting the "Get Services" button in the upper right menu.

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice.

If you find your level of stress is impacting your wellbeing, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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