



# *Affective Center for Therapy*

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## **IT IS JUST A STORY IT IS NOT REALITY**

*IT'S NOT THE TRUTH; IT'S JUST YOUR STORY.* So often we tell ourselves stories, not realizing that they are just stories, not reality.

One early Thursday morning, I needed to be at the prison at 8:00 am to run my workshop. On this particular morning, I was running late so I dashed through the drive-in window at McDonald's, got my breakfast, and hit the freeway. As I glanced down at my food, I noticed that the guy had given me change for a \$5.00 bill, and not the \$10.00 bill that I was almost sure that I had given him. As I drove towards the prison, I became more and more angry. "That no good so and so just cheated me out of \$5.00." He probably knew that people at that time of the morning were in a rush and wouldn't have time to come back and confront him with his evil deed. I probably wasn't the only one he was doing this to. I bet he was making a fortune cheating people. I could just see him rubbing his hands in glee thinking of how stupid the rest of us were! Why, if someone did challenge him, he would put on this big act "Oh, I am so sorry! I didn't mean to do that," and wouldn't get into trouble at all.

Reality is what you believe it to be. There are no stressful jobs, there are only stressful people. By this time, my face was flushed, my blood pressure was up and I was becoming very, very tense. I figured I had better calm down before I arrived at the prison, or I wouldn't be much good. I began doing some of the anger management techniques there in the car to regain control of my feelings. Count to ten....by the time I got to ten, I was boiling.

My breathing techniques....inhale slowly, hold it, hold it, exhale through the mouth slowly, slowly...my shoulders became more and more tense. "That no good so and so, if he's doing it to me, he's doing it to someone else. When I get back there I am going to tell his manager. He stole \$5.00 from me! (At least I think he did.) I think I gave him \$10.00, but maybe I did only give him \$5.00. Suddenly, I realized that this whole affair was only a story! And if I can make up one story, I can make up a different story. You know that young man was probably going to City College and

was working at McDonald's to put himself through school. When his mother got sick, he had to drop out of school to take care of her, so now he is working two jobs: one at McDonald's and one taking care of his mother. This morning, her doctor had told him that she needed \$40 worth of medicine and he didn't have the money. He could have taken money from the till, but he would probably get caught doing that. So, he came up with the idea that he could hit the drivers at the drive-up window until he could come up with enough money to pay for the medicine. It was then that I had driven up to the window. Being a very honest kid, he said to himself "I really can't do this." I am a very sensitive person and I could see the pain and anguish in his face. So I slipped him an extra \$5.00 to help pay for his mother's medicine.

As I drove towards the prison, my body was returning to a state of relaxation and I started to feel a warm glow of peace. I thought "I really think I had better go by McDonald's this evening and make sure he has that other \$35.00 for his mother's medicine."

Which story is true? Maybe neither is true. Does it matter? Yes, it matters if I want to feel relaxed and able to concentrate on what is coming. The story I choose to believe will depend on me not forgetting that it is just a story, it is not reality. **And I create my stories.**

The problem is that you get used to telling yourself stories and forget that they are just stories. Reality is what you get used to. If the story is that the world is not a safe place and you are not able to take care of yourself in this unsafe world, then you will probably experience panic attacks and may be suffering from PTSD.

If your story is, **the ones I love will sooner or later abandon me and emotional pain is very bad and should be avoided at all cost**, then, you will find yourself afraid to have close relationships or you will reject/abandon the person before they have a chance to reject you. In fact, emotional pain proves how strong you are "I can hurt so much emotionally that I hurt physically and still be OK then, I must be a strong person."

**Exercise:** Take an event in which you felt put down, rejected or angry and put another story to it. Could you have misjudged what they said or did? What pain, stress or fear must the other person been in? If you had said/done what was done to you, what would you be feeling?

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