

The Big War

(a story for those who believe they should be perfect and never make mistakes)

Once upon a time there was a boy who, whenever he made a mistake, hit himself over the head with a hammer. Now this was very painful, and it would leave ugly marks on him. When he went to school and someone asked, "What happened to you?" He would reply, "I hit myself over the head with a hammer." Then, with a puzzled looks on their face, they would ask, "WHY?" but he didn't know why.

Sometimes he would hit himself when he was in school. He would sit at his desk and when he made a mistake on a math test, he would hit himself in the head with the hammer. Or he would be really angry about doing something he wasn't supposed to do and, again, he got out that ole hammer. He was most unforgiving of himself when he thought he had done something "wrong" because he believed that kids should never make mistakes; they should always be perfect -- especially him. And he also decided that he couldn't like himself if he made mistakes.

Whenever he did things people told him not to do, and he knew he shouldn't do, he'd hit himself over the head with the hammer. He didn't understand that all kids frequently do things that they're not supposed to do -- that's a part of growing and learning!

He also did other things to hurt himself; he would tease his older brother until his brother punched him. Once he lost some teeth when that happened and, another time, he even got his nose broken. He began to look like a real mess, and his face was always hurting, so the day came when he decided, "I've got to do something about this."

So, he called the Child Abuse Hot Line, which is used to report abuse, and when the woman who answered asked why he was calling, he told her, "I'm being hit over the head with a hammer."

"Oh, my gosh, who is hitting you?", she asked.

"I did it to myself," he replied in a voice that seemed very sad.

Surprised at his answer, the woman asked the boy, "Now, let's get this straight - you're turning yourself in for abuse?"

"Yes' he told her, "because I'm tired of hitting myself over the head with a hammer,"

The woman thanked him for calling and told the boy that this was a very complex problem, so, she would send a special person to talk to him who understood problems with hammers. And very soon, a warm and understanding social worker arrived at his home to talk. She sat down with the boy and asked, "Let me see those bruises." So, he showed her a bruise here and a bruise there and his broken teeth and broken nose, and she observed, "Wow! You look like you've been in a war!"

The boy thought about that for a minute, and then he replied, "I think I have. I've been in a war with myself. Every time I make a mistake, I get angry at myself for being so stupid and I hit myself over the head with my hammer! And every time I feel sad or guilty and don't tell anybody, I hit myself over the head with the hammer. Sometimes, even though I know my brother will beat me up if I pick on him, I pick on him and he beats me up. I'm becoming very tired of waking up in

the morning with my face and body hurting”.

The social worker sat quietly for a minute thinking and then she explained, "I think the reason you are hurting yourself is that you don't understand the value of mistakes. I think you tell yourself that good people don't make mistakes and that good people don't talk about feelings, and that good people don't get angry. Obviously, you have learned a mistaken thing; it's like learning that $2 + 2 = 5$. You have learned an incorrect thing, so what you have to learn now is *EVERYBODY MAKES MISTAKES*, especially kids. and it's very much okay to tell people when you are angry or jealous or hurting because *FEELINGS ARE NORMAL*. The most important lesson I can teach you is to forgive yourself for making mistakes.

“That all sounds good”, the boy told her, “but how do I make myself believe what you are saying?”

“You can make yourself believe by changing the way you think and the way you accept yourself” she told him. “You learn to correct and change your thoughts when you are telling yourself that mistakes are bad. And you can learn that liking yourself is important and mistakes shouldn't be related to liking yourself.”

The boy wanted very much to stop hurting himself, so he learned to how to change his thoughts. It was hard at first, thoughts can be sneaky things and tricky to catch. But the boy was both clever and patient, and so very soon he could catch those hurtful thoughts, just like that! He also practiced new thoughts, and when he did this, he felt happy with himself. When he got angry, he didn't hit himself over the head with a hammer, he told people he was angry and why. And when he was sad, he told people he was sad. And, when he made mistakes, he forgave himself. He told himself again and again, "Everyone makes mistakes. That's OK." And when he did things, he knew he shouldn't do, he told himself, "Well, that's a good lesson. I just won't do that again, but everyone makes mistakes. That's part of growing and learning."

And in no time at all, this boy became the happiest kid around. As time passed, he felt better and better because he learned more and more about liking himself. It was really something to behold, because the boy who used to have bruises all over his head and a broken nose and broken teeth even stopped picking on his brother!

From that time on, every time he saw a hammer, he was reminded that everyone makes mistakes and that making mistakes is part of growing and learning. And he kept a hammer in his room to help him remember to be easier on himself and to remind him that not liking yourself is the biggest mistake of all.

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