

**We** all have thoughts that invoke emotions and actions. There really are no idle thoughts. They all have a consequence resulting in our attitude, which is positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy. Positive or negative does not necessarily mean good or bad; it is just what is. Since we are all individuals, each of us reacts in our own unique way.

A diagnosis of cancer can bring about a range of emotions, from disbelief, anger, fear, hope, and depression to acceptance and moving forward in life. This is referred to as a cycle of change.

The cycle of change begins when a life-changing event occurs. It is characterized by abrupt and extreme changes, ups and downs, twists and turns. Each stage has thoughts, emotions, and actions associated with it. And they are not necessarily experienced in a predetermined order. It is different for each person, and this is normal. Emotional traps exist within this cycle, and we can become stuck in them. These include anger, depression, apathy, and fear.

This leads us to the following questions: How do we gain control of our thoughts? How can we better manage our feelings? How can we let go of fear and anger? How can we take control of this ride?

The key is awareness. Becoming conscious of the shifting emotions helps you recognize how you react and whether your attitude is positive or negative.



Sharon Roth-Lichtenfeld

Acknowledging, validating, and accepting your experience as normal is very important to the process. Practicing awareness helps you develop the ability to see that you have choices

and that you are empowered to take control at any given time.

Begin by listening to your thoughts and thought patterns. Observe how you react, and pay attention to your emotions and feelings. Some people like to journal, meditate, draw, take walks in nature, or just plain talk in order to become more self-aware. There is no right or wrong way; whatever works for you is the



by Sharon Roth-Lichtenfeld, BFA, CPC, ELI-MP

correct way. Here are a few tips to help you get started:

✿ **Pay attention to your breathing.**

Take 30 seconds and observe your breathing. How fast are you breathing? Are you holding your breath? For instance, some people when they are angry, start to breathe very fast, while others stop breathing. Noticing how

body reacts to your emotions. When you are ready, close your eyes, begin to relax the area of your body that is responding to your emotions, and bring it back into harmony.

✿ **Take note of your thoughts.** Take a mental step back for a moment and observe your thoughts. What are the messages? How are you reacting to

### *Tuning into your emotions helps you to distinguish their subtle differences.*

you breathe is an important detail to see how you respond to a situation. Now, change your breathing. Slowly take ten big, deep breathes. This helps you begin to become calmer and more clear-headed.

✿ **Identify your emotions.** Stop and think for a minute. What are you experiencing? Is it anger? Fear? Excitement? Tuning into your emotions helps you to distinguish their subtle differences, for example, between emotions like fear and excitement. At a second glance, you can see and feel them clearly. After you tune in, ask yourself what you are truly feeling. Then you will have a clearer understanding of the slight differences.

✿ **Feel and describe the sensations in your body.** How quick is your heart beating? How tense are your shoulders and neck? What is that feeling in your stomach? Recognizing the physical signs creates insights into how your

a thought? What happens when you think that thought? Our thoughts create our emotions. Looking at your thought patterns gives you awareness of your reactions and actions. Become an observer of your thoughts. Step out of your emotions and pick out your perceptions or beliefs. Then, begin to see how they are creating your thoughts. Notice if they are positive or negative.

With patience and practice, you can gain awareness and skill at understanding yourself, discover the power of choice, gain control, and be better equipped to deal with the experience.

**Editor's Note:** Sharon Roth-Lichtenfeld is a certified professional life coach. She specializes in helping people adapt to change and thrive in the face of adversity. She brings caring, passion, and compassion to her clients through workshops, one-on-one coaching, and teleclasses. Sharon can be reached by e-mail at Sharon@goodgriefcoaching.com or through her website, www.goodgriefcoaching.com. ■