

Why People Sometimes Just Seem To Mentally Collapse

Most of us find life an effort some of the time. It's commonly said that there is something about modern life that makes this so, but I tend to think we just sometimes tend to make life hard for ourselves regardless of our situation. At such times it can all just seem too much. We are able to run on our emergency reserves for a period, often quite a long period, but when plans go awry and one bad event follows another there comes a point when even the strongest person begins to feel the heat.

Psychologically strong people have a number of strategies which keep them going longer than the rest of us. They are people who know their limits. They take note of the warning signs - feeling tired all the time, feeling irritable, making more mistakes than normal - and take a rest. They are good at saying "no" when they need to. They set realistic demands upon themselves and others rather than demanding perfection. They aspire to perfection but accept that good enough is good enough.

People who set unremittingly high standards for themselves, who are unable to adjust their standards in times of overload, are disasters waiting to happen. Sooner or later circumstances will conspire against them and, no matter how hard they try, planning, order and punctuality will fall by the wayside. Unfortunately, these people then compound their distress by blaming themselves and feeling guilty for not coping.

From the moment we are conceived, we have a responsibility to look after ourselves so far as we are able. When people suffer a psychological crisis their bodies have endured tension for so long that rest and recuperation is essential. The collapse is sometimes a way of the person saying "no" to their duty to be responsible for themselves, and covertly demanding that others take care of them. The feedback I hear most commonly from people who have had a period of psychological collapse is that, yes, they really needed the care and support of friends and family, but they might have got better more quickly if people had been a bit firmer and required them to cope a bit more, a bit earlier. In these circumstances my job is often to set a kindly but firm requirement that the person get a grip!

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