

Why You Should Trust

People often bring issues of trust to psychotherapy. They tell me that other people are untrustworthy by nature, that they don't keep their promises, let you down, and abandon you. People who believe this tend to behave either very aggressively, and do to others what they fear others will do to them, or they avoid contact and intimacy for fear of being hurt. Of course, enacting revenge before an offence occurs is likely to make other people treat you badly, and a strategy of avoidance leads to isolation.

By adopting a belief that people are generally well disposed towards you, you can use the positive power of your expectation to help them be helpful to you.

Of course it is true that other people can do us harm, usually more out of fear and hurt than malice. Nonetheless, harm is harm and we naturally want to avoid it. However, the cost of avoiding harm by not trusting can be high: friendships, working relationships, love affairs and successful psychotherapy may never happen or may wither because our approach to them is imbued with more fear than hope.

It takes a great deal of courage to trust, especially for people whose childhood experiences taught them that adults are inconsistent, unreliable, uncaring or abusive.

I think you can either learn to trust or you can decide to trust. The experience of a good friendship, a supportive work colleague, a genuinely loving lover or even a reliable and caring therapist may help a person to learn to trust again. However, these experiences may be barred to the person who is unwilling to trust enough to be open to them. In such cases people may decide to trust because they can no longer tolerate the terrible disconnection from others caused by not trusting.

Trusting is less about how sure we are of others' good intentions, and more about our belief in our own strength to survive even if our trust is betrayed. Trusting requires a belief in one's own robustness.

By being trusting, you spare yourself from being perpetually mistrustful, suspicious, anxious and paranoid. The harm others can do to you is as nothing compared to the harm you do to yourself by closing your heart to them.

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Responses to this article are warmly welcomed.

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