

# hitched

January 2011

life advice

## Break Free from Self-Pity!

Self-pity is a seductive drug. Make it a point to squash it in 2011.

BY DR. NOELLE NELSON



DepositPhotos

Self-pity gives power to those you blame for your own situation.

You're five years old. Your mother sends you to your room because you pulled the cat's tail. "It's not fair," you cry out. "Johnny pulled the cat's tail too and he didn't have to go to his room!" Your mother pays no attention to your protestations and off you go, teary and miserable. You curl up in a ball on your bed and feel horrible, sad and sorry for yourself.

You're 15 years old. The principal gives you detention for smoking in the bathroom. "It's not fair," you cry out. "John was smoking too, you just didn't see it and he didn't get detention!" The principal pays no attention to your protestations, and off you go feeling wronged. You curl up, huddled over your desk and feel horrible, sad and sorry for yourself.

You're 25-plus years old. You've just found out your husband had an affair. You're shocked, horrified and appalled. You've been such a good spouse! And amidst the tears, you yell a rageful "It's not fair!" and you curl up in a ball on your bed and feel horrible, sad and sorry for yourself.

It's a new year and now is a good time to take a look at how self-pity is affecting your life. Self-pity is a balm that soothes the troubled heart when we've been hurt and feel we can do nothing about it. Self-pity is the emotional equivalent of taking a drink—alcohol numbs pain and takes the edge off things, so too does self-pity.

When you're five, self-pity is often the only recourse you have. Let's face it, you can't duke it out physically or intellectually at that age. What the big people say, goes. Even at 15, you may have little recourse. Oh, you may be able to duke it out, but the bottom line still is whatever the grown-ups say is what will happen to you.

But by the time you hit 25, 35 and on, you have lots of recourse. The only problem is, by that age, self-pity may have become such a habit that you use it as your main recourse, forgetting all the other more effective ones you have available to you.

A habit is something we do repetitively. Habits are neither good nor bad in and of themselves. But habits, like anything else, at some point get outdated, lose their effectiveness and cease to be useful to us. Habits need to be re-examined ever so often to make sure they are indeed serving us in the best way possible.

Self-pity is the licking of wounds. "Poor me, poor me, poor me" does make us feel temporarily better, and that's important. You need some soothing when things go bad. But that's all it does. Self-pity doesn't do anything towards

healing the hurt, fixing the problem or bettering our lives. If anything, self-pity continued over any period of time makes the problem worse, the hurt worse and causes your life and your marriage to go downhill. In time, self-pity wraps a protective layer around you. You only allow those thoughts and feelings that are in agreement with your self-evaluation of "poor me" to seep through that protective layering. So, from "poor me" we often go to "it's all their fault." Any time you place responsibility for a situation entirely outside yourself, you also place the ability to remedy the situation entirely outside yourself. That's a very dis-empowering thing to do—and past childhood, an un-necessary one.

You are a strong and worthy person! Take back your power and take notice when you go into "poor me" mode. Don't let "poor me" be the whole of how you take care of yourself when you've felt wronged. Lick your wounds for a few minutes or longer if you need, but set a time limit on how long you'll indulge in wound-licking and then take charge. Drop the self-pity, close that door and proclaim to yourself, "I'm not doing self-pity anymore!"

Figure out how *you* contributed to the unhappy situation in which you find yourself, or how you allowed it to come to pass and then do what it takes either to transform the present situation, or make sure things turn out differently in the future.

*Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D., is a relationship expert, popular speaker in the U.S. and abroad, and author of nine best-selling books, including her most recent, "Your Man is Wonderful" and "Dangerous Relationships." Dr. Nelson focuses on how we can all enjoy happy, fulfilling lives while accomplishing great things in love, at home and at work, as we appreciate ourselves, our world and all others. For more, visit [www.drnoellenelson.com](http://www.drnoellenelson.com) and [www.yourmaniswonderful.com/blog](http://www.yourmaniswonderful.com/blog).*