

Knowing What We Can and Cannot Change

by Linda Culver, Addiction & Mental Health Counselor

You might be familiar with the **Serenity Prayer**. It says, “God, grant me **Serenity** to accept the things I cannot change, **Courage** to change the things I can, and **Wisdom** to know the difference.”



Sometimes it's the little things in life you can change that make a big difference. Whether you are struggling with something about yourself you don't like, having trouble in a relationship or difficulty getting along with someone, there maybe a different way to look at the situation or something you can do to make the experience a more pleasant one.

If it is a relationship issue, our tendency is to complain about the other person and how they should change. Even if they should change, we cannot make them do it. There is almost always something we can do to improve things.

But, it can be difficult to determine what things you can change and what you should you learn to live with. We cannot control another person's actions, but we can change our actions, attitudes and perspective. This can be a difficult thing to accept. When we focus on ourselves, we are able to influence things that we can control. We don't waste energy trying to change others when ultimately we have

no control over what they will do.

So let's begin with changing what we can. For example, in terms of our own health:

- We cannot change our genetics or predispositions, but we can change our lifestyle to reduce the risk of developing a serious illness.
- There's no changing the amount of fat/calories in food, but we can decide which ones to eat.
- We cannot change our basic body build, but we can make good choices about the food we eat and exercise.

Changing the way we think about or react to a situation, can help reduce our anxiety and stress-level:

- We cannot change the way other people think or what they say, but we can change the way we respond.
- Sometimes others will be upset, disappointed or become angry with us. Keeping an open-mind, we can listen patiently and consider their side.
- We cannot determine our spouse's mood, but we can choose how to respond or react to a negative mood or behavior.
- We cannot change the fact that sometimes things will go wrong or problems will arise, but we can decide not to take our frustrations out on others. Sometimes problems are well disguised opportunities for good and growth. Being challenged to work through the difficulty instead of avoiding it can be life-changing.

In more serious circumstances, you cannot control if someone lashes out at you verbally or physically, but you can choose whether to strike back and what you need to do to protect your safety. No one can control life and protect themselves from painful experiences or difficulties. But, we can seek caring and loving support from our friends, family, pastor and/or a trusted counselor.



For more information, call

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