

Growing Pains

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It is not uncommon for children to wake up with an aching or throbbing feeling in their legs. First-time parents are immediately compelled to trace back all the circus-like movements the monkey they like to refer to as their child carried out the previous day. Racing in uneven territories, hanging upside down in the playground monkey bars, and climbing up the slides on the wrong side (since ladders are oh-so-boring for infants) all seem likely to have taken a toll on such a small, frail body. When one looks up symptoms on Google —fumbling with the keys in panic, of course, for one has discovered imminent death and at least four new types of cancer—it is possible to determine that the discomfort a child or adolescent is suffering from is not a fatal disease, but rather, a simple case of growing pains.

Physical growing pains serve as a reminder that the process of change is often arduous and uncomfortable. A similar process can also occur with emotional growth since, as it is sometimes claimed in the field of psychology, you have to get worse, before you can get better. Many patients approach therapy expecting it to work like modern medicine: a purple pill for those heart-wrenching conversations with your mother, a miracle cream to modify negative thinking patterns, one scalpel and three stitches to mend a broken heart. In reality, talking to a therapist is like picking a scab; it resurfaces old wounds, restores unwanted memories and exposes all the scar tissue we have been carrying around on our skin. It can be overwhelming and tear-inducing to dissolve all the protective layers we form over our pain to function as normal human beings. Emotional growing pains may also appear when we decide to break up with our significant other. However sure we may be of our decision, there is an adjustment period required to grieve the relationship, to stalk the cause of our grievance on Facebook and sulk at the pictures they post with a new partner, and to rethink who we are as individuals. Life-changing events often ring on your doorbell with mental health issues as their favorite pet. They like to bring anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder on a leash and settle down in your home, uninvited. Other times, they may also invite over burdensome physical symptoms—headaches, digestive issues, and a weakened immune system are personal favourites—like tiring unsolicited guests.

Although growing pains can be endured on an individual level, there are also societal growing pains. I am rather confident that Marx would agree with my viewpoint that every society reaches a point at which inequality becomes so agonizing that revolution is unavoidable. History books are quite keen on portraying these events in the form of a few enlightened, individuals, smiling, while peacefully holding signs and flags, and asking the government, over a cup of tea, if they would be so kind as to ponder upon whether maybe—just maybe—every citizen of a country should be treated equally, thank you very much for your consideration. The truth is that the destabilization of the status quo is excruciating and we cannot glamorize these periods of social evolution.

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Unfortunately, none of these transformations are entirely peaceful. Both the oppressed and the oppressor suffer—one for every right that has been stripped away unfairly and the other for that undeserving sense of superiority that he will be stripped from—. Even after the peak of the revolution has been reached, it takes some time for a community to adapt to the new normal and to accept everything that has been lost and gained. Yet, ultimately, we can proudly acknowledge that our society has matured.

Physical growing pains often strike in the early evening and disappear by morning; although sometimes the pain awakens a child in the middle of the night. Emotional and societal growing pains are no different. The ache does not occur every day; it comes and goes in waves. This ebb and flow can sometimes feel discouraging because it means that progress is not linear. Some days we wake up and stare at the sun through our window with hopeful eyes like some sort of clichéd Disney musical; while other days, drawing the curtains entails staring wistfully at the concrete wall opposite our window, looking up at a grey sky and crawling back into bed. Then another good day comes along, and we scoff at ourselves from the last Depressive Sunday because the world does not seem so terrible anymore. Our metamorphosis is never linear but, the more often we exercise a positive mindset and behaviour, the closer we shall be to restabilizing and reaching a state of ease.

Despite the fact that if we were to draw a line graph of our growth it would likely zigzag as much as a graph of the Argentinian economy, there is always an end-sight to the pain. Much like any terrifying storm that seems to make the world quake, it will not last forever. Growing pains initially make us feel that our universe is crumbling, but eventually they only become an annoyingly itchy patch of skin you cannot quite reach and then one day, the pain will be gone. It is essential not to get trapped in a feeling of hopelessness, and rather acknowledge that if our life was boringly immutable, it would not be a life worth living. Revolutions, mental health crises, and grief all come to an end eventually. It is only a matter of being patient and compassionate with ourselves, and remembering that we will come out stronger at the other end of the dark tunnel.

For too long, I had lived a life in which pain was avoided at all costs. I was snugly cuddled in my own comfort zone, filling my lungs with what I believed to be fresh air, yet it was only the same recycled oxygen I had been breathing during my entire existence. It is easy to romanticize the process of growing in the image of a Disney princess fulfilling her dreams or by an excessively optimistic self-help book. Growing is unavoidably painful. We are like children, clutching our knees while wincing in pain because our bones are trying to become larger than they currently are. Personally, the last six months have been the period of most growth in my life, and I must admit I had never suffered so much. I have cried on an almost daily basis and used up all my therapist's tissues, had anxiety attacks that prevented me from eating or sleeping for weeks, and was filled with a sense of hopelessness that felt utterly despairing. I understand; in times of crisis, the desire to go back to our old selves is too strong to bear. It is only now, as I begin to step out of the storm, exhausted and soaking wet, but with the blazing sun in sight, that I can see the traits of my past self that needed to be changed. When our own

problems embrace us like a cosy blanket, it is difficult to let them go and expose ourselves to the bitter cold. However, we must leave behind the Peter Pan syndrome that traps us in the peacefulness of childhood, no matter our age, for remaining paralysed in time also deprives us from experiencing surprising new adventures once we have survived the hurricane. I believe it is Anais Nin who illustrates this best in one of her poems: “And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”