

Coping with College Series

Excess Baggage

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So I'm getting ready to leave for a week-long vacation and I need to decide what to bring with me and what to leave behind. What do I "need" and what can I "live without?" And I remember having to make the same choices as I packed up my room at home and prepared to leave for college. Some choices were obvious—I needed socks and underwear, but how about the beanbag chair? Did I really need to bring all of my shoes?

And I remember, very clearly, thinking that I could do the same with all of my "emotional baggage," as well---that I could bring what I wanted and leave the rest behind. You know what I mean by "emotional baggage," the invisible luggage no one ever sees, but is just as real. None of us have escaped our past into our present without our fair share of emotional scars and wounds. A lucky few may have gotten by with only minor "paper cuts" and could carry most of their "emotional baggage" in a conveniently sized "carry-on bag" that easily fits in the overhead compartment. For most of us, however, some of our "wounds" are quite deep and our luggage is oppressively heavy.

This "emotional baggage," obviously comes in many forms, but generally speaking, an emotional wound is a relationship wound. Some of us have experienced "broken relationships," "broken trust," and "broken promises." Some of us have been abused, lied to, or "cheated on." Can we ever unload this baggage or are we stuck with it forever?

Well, first of all, it's important to remember that "no matter where you go, there you are." Moving to a new school, making new friends and having a "fresh start," doesn't necessarily mean you can leave the past behind. Our past relationships and hurts always affect our current and future ones. The effect is even greater when we've been hurt and haven't taken time to begin healing those wounds.

We might be able to throw some of our emotional baggage out of the window or leave it locked up in a storage vault somewhere, but is it truly gone (out of sight, out of mind)? Has it lost its grip on our life?

So what do we do? Instead of trying to "ditch" your past, try facing it and maybe making peace with it. While we are not responsible for what others did to us or how others have treated us in the past, we are responsible for how we respond in the present and future. The past can weigh us down or it can be a gateway to healthier and more meaningful relationships in the future. Do we learn from our pain, or do we wallow in it? Through honesty, courage and perseverance, even those of us who have inherited a large trunk full of emotional wounds can maybe reduce the baggage to a conveniently sized "carry-on bag" that easily fits in the overhead compartment of our life.