

**COPING**

# Understanding and coping with a nervous breakdown

By Dr. Charles W. Faulkner  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Dear Dr. Faulkner:

I read your recent column about the horrors of a nervous breakdown. I am having some major emotional problems. I don't know if I am having a nervous breakdown because I am not sure what it is. Could you provide more information please. Ms. J., Daytona Beach, FL.

Here is the information that you requested.

**What is a nervous breakdown?**

A nervous breakdown is an abnormal response of the mind and body to the circumstances in one's life. For instance, nearly everyone goes through a period of grief and unhappiness in regard to the passing of a relative, or the loss of a job.

Crying, loss of appetite, the inability to sleep, memory lapses, temper explosions, even thoughts of suicide are common, normal responses to specific crisis events. These behaviors are usually short-term. They eventually come to an end and the individual is able to resume a normal life.

The nervous breakdown may be defined as having the opposite characteristics such as:

- Unpleasant symptoms, like those mentioned above, for no apparent reason, or such symptoms continuing and recurring when they should have ended or a long-term presence of the depressing symptoms.

- Inability to resume a normal life, even after the crisis event has passed.

The nervous breakdown may contain some or all of the symptoms that I have mentioned. It is a general physical-emotional breakdown that may differ from person to person.

**What causes a nervous breakdown?**

There are two primary causal categories of the nervous breakdown.

A life that is characterized by multiply traumatic events which overtax the individual's ability to cope. For instance, the average person may have the wherewithal to meet and conquer the effects of a divorce, a family member's loss of life, the death of a pet, a financial crisis and the loss of a job.

However, a person may be overwhelmed by a 10-year marriage that is characterized by constant spousal abuse, multiple loss of family members or friends in an automobile accident, a financial collapse which results in the loss of possessions such as automobile and house, the inability to find a compatible mate, the inability to get a decent job, and flunking out of school.

These or similar events may push some

people into a condition whereby they feel that life is not worth living and they contemplate suicide.

The second major cause of a nervous breakdown is a chemical imbalance in the victim's body or brain which causes a physiological disturbance.

**How can one obtain professional help?**

Get a recommendation from a friend who is presently involved in therapy; consult your physician; talk with your priest, pastor, school guidance counselor; or contact your state psychological association.

**What methods of treatment are available?**

If you are diagnosed as having a nervous breakdown, medicines are sometimes recommended. Your therapist may use any of several modalities or treatment to help you. They include:

A. Behavioral therapy. The therapist attempts to change your behavior (not your personality).

B. Teaching coping skills. So that you may take immediate measures to counter the symptoms of a nervous breakdown.

C. Teaching interpersonal skills as a means

of elimination tensions between you and others; and

D. Teaching cognitive/behavioral procedures designed to eliminate negative thinking patterns. Some therapies may involve group counseling.

**Other Facts About a Nervous Breakdown**

Women tend to be more prone to nervous breakdowns than men (consult the American Medical Association for verification). Women generally endure more marital stress such as sexual and physical abuse, and poverty. They also face pressures associated with raising children, demanding husbands and a tendency to dwell on personal problems.

You may determine the capability of your therapist by evaluating his or her credentials. Be sure to ask questions. You must feel comfortable in discussing your private life with your therapist. If you are uncomfortable, quickly find a new therapist.

Therapy will normally last for a few weeks during which time you should notice your ailments decreasing.

Some tips: Acknowledge and try to overcome negative thinking, don't blame others for your ailments, admit responsibility and try to maintain normal relations with others.

For a copy of my self-evaluating test to see if you are having a nervous breakdown, send a legal size, self-addressed, stamped envelope to: 5722 Green St, Ste 302, Philadelphia, PA, 19144.

*A nervous breakdown is an abnormal response of the mind and body to the circumstances in one's life.*

— Dr. Charles W. Faulkner



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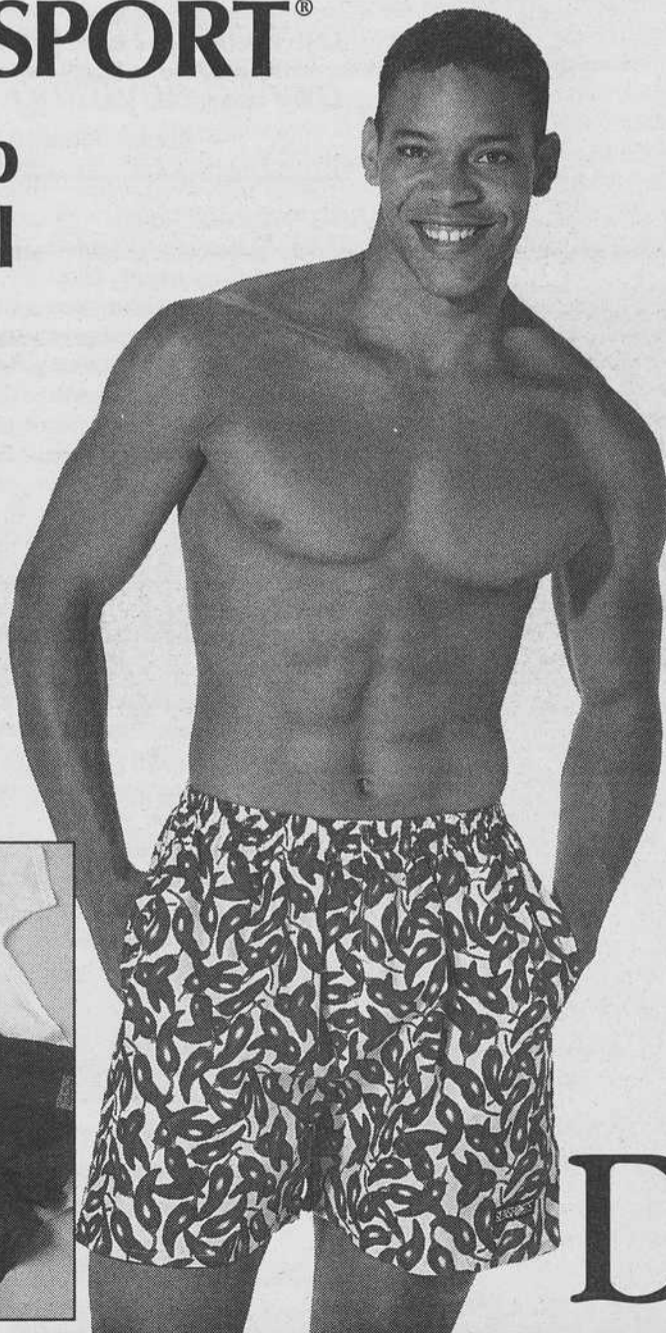
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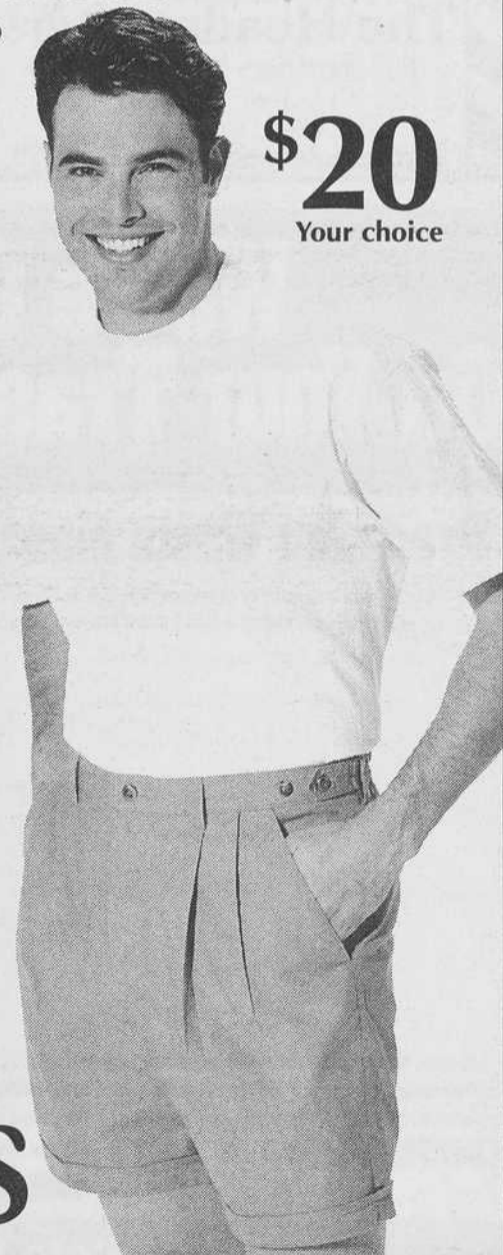
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