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It's Not About You

By M.J. Clark

Have you ever had someone say to you, “It’s not about *you*”? How does that make you feel? It happened to me recently, when I expressed my feelings to someone I considered a very good friend.

It was hard for me, but I built up the courage to tell my friend that I felt hurt by a specific, ongoing behavior of hers. Her response was, “It’s not about *you*. I’m going through some tough times right now. Can’t you just give me a break?!” When she said that, I felt that she was negating my feelings. Her remark made me feel selfish, as though I didn’t care about her and had no right to make demands of her when she was struggling. I started to think that maybe I shouldn’t feel the way I did. That maybe it *wasn’t* about me.

But do you know what? It *is* about me. It’s about me as much as it is about her. It’s about communication; and that involves two people, not one. And it’s about our friendship, which I valued and wanted to keep intact. And it’s about sharing feelings with someone you care about.

You have a right to the feelings you have. No one should tell you that you “shouldn’t feel that way.” You *do* feel that way, and it’s better to accept those feelings, even if you can’t initially understand why you are having them.

Events and thoughts typically influence our feelings. If you will take the time to begin to understand what triggers the emotions you are experiencing, especially the negative ones that may produce behavior you wish to change, you can take the first steps toward developing new thoughts and behaviors to address what’s going on around you.

The first step is to acknowledge the feelings you have and accept them. They are the way you feel, and denying them doesn’t make them go away. Next, take a good look at them. Ask yourself, “What happens in my environment that makes me feel this way, and how can I change the way I react to that trigger?” Then act upon your assessment.

Journaling can be very helpful in this process. Write about the thoughts you had or the events that took place right before you began to have that feeling. We often don’t take the time to process our feelings, and journaling allows us to look closely at how we are feeling and why. It reduces anxiety, just as talking to a close friend might. And your journal is entirely about *you*.