

Unload Your Childhood Baggage

Man's mind stretched to a new idea never
 goes back to its original dimensions."
 Oliver Wendell Holmes

People's emotions and childhood experiences can influence their health and personal finance behaviors. Adults develop beliefs about health, eating, and money from their family of origin and surrounding culture (e.g., media advertising). They may eat the same foods, for example, or tithe the same amount to their church that their parents did. Even if an individual's behavior is exactly the opposite of their parents' (e.g., not smoking in a family of smokers), the parents probably still had an influence. Once people understand the origins of their beliefs about health and money and unload the "baggage" that has been holding them back, it is often easier to make behavior changes. Insights into underlying emotions can be a very important resource for improving health and increasing wealth.

What is "baggage"? "Baggage" is the false, and often irrational, set of feelings and beliefs, which distort people's thinking and affect their health and financial behaviors. An example of "health baggage" is "sick and unhealthy people get more attention than healthy people." Other examples are:

- "diets don't work,"
- "good people die young,"
- "you can't change bad health genes,"
- "outward appearance = inner quality,"
- "eating a meal with your family is stressful,"
- "disciplining is done at the dinner table,"
- "skipping meals is a shortcut to becoming thin,"
- "all snacks and desserts are bad,"
- "food is used to punish or reward,"
- "children should eat differently from their parents,"
- "alcohol and cigarettes are associated with pleasurable social experiences," and
- "exercise is painful and/or unnecessary."

An example of “financial baggage” is that some people believe that their bank account or possessions determine their value to others (i.e., net worth = self worth). Other examples of “financial baggage” are:

- “money is a tool to use for power and control,”
- “money is an end, not a means to an end,”
- “hard work is always rewarded,”
- “I’m not smart/capable enough to earn a lot of money,”
- “live for today- the future doesn’t matter,”
- “high debt is normal,”
- “the man should make all the financial decisions,”
- “you must work long hours and neglect your family in order to earn a good income,”
- “you’re not supposed to talk about money,”
- “buying expensive gifts proves that you love someone,”
- “you will never have enough,”
- “the government (Social Security) and my employer will take care of me in later life,” and
- “the more money you make, the happier you’ll be.”

Once you recognize and understand your health and personal finance “baggage,” how do you unload it? By turning your negative “baggage” into positive and motivating health and financial messages. Does this sound hokey? It’s not. In her 2004 book, *Secrets of Six-Figure Women*, author Barbara Stanny, wrote about the power of mental imaging, noting “our state of mind, more than anything else out there, determines our level of success.” Health and wealth messages can also be turned into affirmations, which are short statements, repeated daily, about a goal expressed as if it has already been achieved (e.g., “I have a healthy body mass index” and “I am a millionaire in the making”). Affirmations are discussed in detail in the *Make Progress Every Day* fact sheet.

Here is an example of negative “health baggage” turned into a positive health message:

Health Baggage: “You can’t control your bad health genes”

Health Message: “While I can’t control heredity, I can control many aspects of my health such as diet, exercise, and regular checkups”

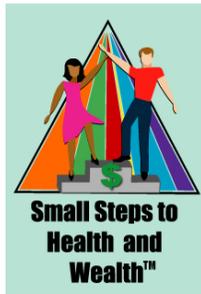
Here is an example of negative “financial baggage” turned into a positive financial message:

Financial Baggage: “You have to work real hard for money and, even when you do, you may not be rewarded for your effort”

Financial Message: “Money is a resource for health and wealth and can be used to create my own rewards.”

Your current health and financial decisions are influenced by what you’ve seen and heard since childhood. Ready to break free of negative thought patterns that have been weighing you down emotionally, physically, and financially? Put them in writing and you can start to address them. Understanding your “baggage” is a critical first step on the path to health and wealth. It helps explain why you do what you do.

My "Health Baggage" is:
My Positive Health Message is:



Action Steps
Health

- Make a list of your "health baggage" and reflect about why you came to adopt certain false and/or negative beliefs about health behaviors.
- Convert each example of health baggage into a positive health message.
- Share a positive health message with a friend.

Wealth

- Make a list of your "financial baggage" and reflect about why you came to adopt certain false and/or negative beliefs about financial behaviors.
- Convert each example of financial baggage into a positive financial message.
- Share a positive wealth message with a friend.

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