

Second-hand embarrassment, and how to get over it

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We have all been there. A brazen comment from a parent during their casual conversation with another person or a friend falling face first in front of their crush — certain misfortunes of their people often make us feel ashamed on their behalf.

Aptly called “second-hand embarrassment”, this phenomenon is common in all demographics of people even though, at the end of the day, it serves no one at all. In fact, in many cases, it can be detrimental to our mental health and social lives.

Psychotherapists believe that the capability of feeling second-hand embarrassment reflects a person’s empathy, which is the ability to internalise and understand other people’s emotions. Empathy is believed to be one of the most important traits of human nature because being able to appreciate others’ feelings is what makes humans social creatures and allows us to live harmoniously in communities.

While this may sound good, too much empathy is also associated with higher risks

of depression, anxiety, anger issues, and emotional burnouts. According to Psychology Today, this is because people who are too empathetic often feel the enormous burden to relieve everyone else’s emotional wounds. In other words, their ability to compartmentalise their own feelings from others’ falters to an unhealthy level.

Feeling second-hand embarrassment too often or too intensely can make people more anxious to be around others. They can also become controlling to try and minimise the occurrence of potentially cringe-worthy incidents. Not only does assuming responsibility for other people’s mishaps add unnecessary stress to their mental health and relationships, but it can also indicate a shaky sense of self.

A good way to combat overburdening oneself needlessly with the embarrassment for others is to focus on one’s own feelings. It may sound simple but overly empathetic folks often ignore their own feelings to an extent that they forget to register their own emotional reaction to events.

Therefore, it is always a good idea to

look within when you feel too embarrassed for others. It is important to ask yourself, “How do I actually feel about this? Is there even a need to feel something?” If the shame is persistent, think about whether you can translate this useless embarrassment into pure compassion and understanding of the idea that you are not



responsible for what has happened.

Another piece of advice for getting over excessive second-hand embarrassment is to set boundaries on your emotional body. This includes silencing the boisterous voice in your head that keeps on reminding you how awful someone must be feeling for a silly mistake on their part. In fact, even if their “mistake” was fully intentional, there is no need to distress yourself by entertaining reminders of the incident.

It is a beautiful gift to be able to connect with others emotionally but, like most things in life, moderation is key for indulging in connections without unnecessarily adding burdens.

References

1. Refinery29 (May 13, 2021). *Secondhand Cringe Makes Me Want To Die Inside*
2. Psychology Today (April 15, 2017). *Can You Have Too Much Empathy?*

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satire.

Millionaire’s son buys electric car following closure of local petrol pumps

ABIR HOSSAIN

Blaring through the streets, swerving left and right, and contributing to the tri-state area’s growing noise pollution used to be just another day in the life of Tashfiq.

“Driving for me has always been a form of escape. Of course, I have had people hurl foul profanities at me. I never really understood why,” said Tashfiq. “Anyways, with my muffler roaring, it soon came to my attention that I needed to go pick up some fuel, and so there I was, at the local station, as empty and hollow as all the friendships I have managed to make over the past few years.”

With no sign of life, Tashfiq appeared bewildered. According to him, this was unacceptable because the same station failed to give him an adequate amount of fuel the day before.

“They went off on this tangent about a shortage or something. I couldn’t make head or tail out of it. After all, I was late to my economics class but without just the right amount in my fuel tank, there was no way I could make it,” Tashfiq continued.

He wondered when the station would be back open. However, with dreams in his heart and a mission to dent every other vehicle in his way, he simply could



not just sit around.

“Energy can neither be created nor destroyed but if I spend one more second not driving, I will break the laws of physics,” he asserted. He looked up at the poster of Elon Musk and took strides, with what appeared to be great intent.

“Elon Musk is a self-made man, much like myself. To support his vision and to

curb my lack of driving, there was only one solution,” he said as he marched into his father’s study. Tashfiq advised the reporters to be vigilant. They were, in his words, about to witness “a master negotiator” but instead caught sight of him pathetically begging first, for some attention and then, the funds to secure his dream car.

“I am willing to do anything for him to

not barge in here, and occupy my precious time. If that means handing him a credit card and getting the most hideous-looking car to ever exist, then so be it,” said Mr Tahsin.

Tashfiq left the room with a smirk, doing well to cover up his tear-smeared face from just minutes ago. Days passed, and Tashfiq waited patiently in his room until it arrived. What was more exciting was that he no longer had to wait for the local station to open up.

Just as he lined up to take it on a stroll, the car wouldn’t budge. “Low Battery,” said the car, painting the interior in neon red and lighting up Tashfiq’s face. As he plugged the charger in, a shocking reality was unveiled before his eyes. He had never witnessed such a thing: a power outage.

The excitement that Tashfiq had was condensed to defeat.

“A 400 PERCENT TAX!” he exclaimed “All that for nothing.”

Turns out, that years of tax evasion and negligence from your own other father have the same side effects. There is just no winning.

Abir Hossain is a failed SoundCloud Rapper. Tell him you too can’t find anything to rhyme oranges with at abir.hossain2002@gmail.com