



Are you facing adversity? Here's how to ride out life's tough times: *Hang Loose in the Washing Machine!*

“This is overwhelming! What can I do when my emotions overpower me like this?” my client Tom (not his real name) asked me several years ago in a counseling session. He was a CASIGY™. That's an acronym that describes people who are “Creative, Acutely Aware, Super-Sensitive, Intense and/or Gifted You-s”. Tom had tried many methods for coping with his emotions, to no avail. I mentally searched for new and better ways to help him stay afloat emotionally.

A picture with an idea popped into my head: emotions are much like ocean waves. Ocean waves show up without asking our permission. *So do emotions.* Ocean waves come in many shapes, sizes, speeds and intensities. *So do emotions.* Ocean waves are influenced by many things including the weather, the gravitational pull of the moon, the tides, the shape and movement of the ocean floor. *Our emotions are likewise influenced* by the “weather” of the events in our lives; the gravitational pull of our relationships, the ebb and flow of our health and energy.



It doesn't usually work well to fight an ocean wave, but in a panic, we may. It also doesn't work well to fight our emotions. Most of us have been taught to fight them, almost from the moment we were born, so it can be an automatic response. As I shared this word picture with Tom, his eyes lit up and his body visibly relaxed. He had experienced ocean waves; THIS was something he could remember and USE! When he met with me the next time, Tom had good news: he 'rode the waves' of his emotions and stayed afloat. He had even been making a game of it. What a difference this simple analogy had made for Tom in just a short time. So we dove deep and took it even further.

Sometimes life's waves of emotion can seem like the experience of a swimmer caught in what surfers call the “washing machine”. That's where you get caught in wave after wave and can have trouble coming up for air. My brother Glenn (www.GlennSackett.com) learned to surf when he lived in Hawaii. One day when he and I were at Waikiki, I shared with him my comparison of ocean waves and emotions. He then told me about the Surfers' Washing Machine.

“When you are caught in the washing machine,” Glenn told me, “surfers learn (because this can literally save their lives) to consciously relax, take a big breath when the wave brings them up, and not to fight it when the wave takes them down – again and again.” He went on to say that there's no way to know how many waves there will be in the set. You CAN know that there will be enough time to get one or two breaths each time you come up. If you relax and don't panic and don't dissipate

your energy unnecessarily, you can hang in there until the wave set is done, and you will come out of the washing machine okay. A bit beat up, exhausted, but okay. My husband Gary (www.GaryBarnesInternational.com) adds that you'll also come out of the washing machine with a great story to tell. You've got to love his sense of humor!

Adversity can be Life's "Washing Machine". Being a CASIGY™ can also sometimes be like living inside of Life's Washing Machine. Coping with Life's Washing Machine can be like coping with the ocean's washing machine. **Here's what I shared with Tom about how to Hang Loose in Life's Washing Machine:**

1. **Hold your breath when you get pulled under-don't breathe in the seawater!** Life's seawater can look like school or work stress, holiday stress, anxiety, ADD or AD/HD, financial reversals, relationship concerns, parenting challenges; you name it. You may be immersed in Life's Seawater, but don't breathe it in – don't let it permeate your whole life and your SELF.
2. **Relax and ride *with* the waves,** even when they take you down. Hang loose – loosen up your mind & muscles; stretch out to release the tension in your body and your mind.
3. **Stay alert and don't shut down.** Remember that the waves WILL bring you back up again, no matter how deep they take you, even if they slam you on the ocean floor. Pay attention to what's happening so you will be ready when the waves bring you up again.
4. **Take some quick, deep breathes of air** when a wave brings you back up.
5. **Don't give in to panic when life's wave takes you down again.** Panic will only dissipate your energy and shut down your ability to think and act when it's time to act.
6. **Hang loose until life's 'set' of waves is done.** Waves in the ocean *always* come in sets. Life's waves often do too. Count the waves in the set if that helps.
7. **Stay alert for subtle changes in the waves that indicate when this set is over.** That's when you may be able to roll out of the Washing Machine and swim for shore, whatever that shore might be in your life. Until then, keep repeating # 1-6 each time a new set of waves comes through. Remember (and DO) this and you will come out of Life's washing machine okay, just like you can in the ocean's washing machine.
8. **One final thing to remember:** This is a mind-body skill that feels awkward at first and takes some practice to learn. **Once you've got some muscle-memory built through repeated skill building, it gets easier each time you Hang Loose in the Washing Machine.**



When the crisis is over, catch your breath, rest, and do damage control as needed. Once you've got your feet under you again, I encourage you to capture your story and record it, just like I did with my client Tom. You can write it, sing it, paint it, photograph it, weave it, make music with it, draw it, collage it, speak it-use whatever media suits you. Recording your story creatively can be a great way to acknowledge and honor what you've been through. ***By sharing our stories, we can also encourage each other to ride out life's tough times by hanging loose in the washing machine.***

When you're ready to share your story, one great place to do it is here on my Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/academyofcreativeliving/> Sharon M. Barnes, MSSW, LCSW