



## ***It's Not Bigger Than You*** ***(Lesson 1)***

I don't have one particular approach I use in my therapy sessions. I'm flexible and draw from my years of experience to find what will work. I do, however, hear myself saying certain things over and over again. These "magic words" are worth sharing. "*It's not bigger than you.*" I say these words to the client who:

- fears they will never stop grieving
- wonders if the depression and anxiety will ever lift
- is suddenly laid off with little money in savings
- has lost a child
- discovers her partner's long- standing affair
- I say them to myself

I relate to all these people. Many times my life's situations have seemed bigger than me. When my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, I felt like I was under an avalanche. I hoped someone would find me and dig me out. Before the visit to her doctor I knew without a doubt what was coming. Still, hearing the actual words caused my breath to catch. I wanted to run, but I felt trapped. No one was coming to dig me out. I had to find my own way out from under the fear.

When life seems bigger than you, the first thing to do is *just breathe*.

Breathing is highly underrated. We can't go for more than a few minutes without oxygen. While we don't actually stop breathing for very long when we get scared, there is comfort in knowing we can breathe. It's simple. You inhale oxygen and then you blow out carbon dioxide. That's all there is to it. You don't have to understand the biological process to use it!

Lindsey found herself in a terrifying situation. Her sixteen year old daughter died quietly in the middle of the night. Lindsey found her in bed. She later told me in the moments and days that followed she would hear my voice saying "*Lindsey, all you have to do is breathe.*" Those words gave her a place to start. *Just breathing* helped her through the worst time of her life. Lindsey survived. Today she even smiles.

You don't have to wait until tragedy hits to practice this lesson. Use it the next time fear bites at your ankles. It can be big fear or little fear. Knowing what to do about the situation comes later. Forget making a to-do list. You don't need a plan! Actually, it is not time to make a plan when you are buried in the avalanche. Remind yourself it's not bigger than you. All you have to do in any given second is take the next breath. As your deepest emotions rise out of your breath, you'll find a way out - I promise.

*Hope is the feeling you have  
that the feeling you have isn't permanent.*  
- Jean Kerr