

Healthy Outlook Exercise

1. Describe a situation or event that you found challenging, stressful or where you had a negative emotional reaction.

2a. Describe how you felt related to this event.

Sad anxious angry afraid abandoned confused
embarrassed rejected shame annoyed worried
tense hopeless furious depressed hurt
inadequate nervous uncertain disgusted bitter
hateful unsure wronged injustice hesitant
frustrated

2b. Describe how you responded.

Argue blame withdraw complain cry drink eat
fight escape belittle flee insult
find-fault-with give up lose sleep use drugs pity
myself procrastinate yell break something spend
money shut down gamble
run to someone else quit

3. What are you telling yourself about the event in #1? What is your self-talk? What is your belief about the event?

Does your statement include any of these words or phrases?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Should have | <input type="checkbox"/> Awful | <input type="checkbox"/> Out of control | <input type="checkbox"/> Unfair or unjust |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ought to | <input type="checkbox"/> Need | <input type="checkbox"/> Someone/something
made me feel... | <input type="checkbox"/> I deserve |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Must | <input type="checkbox"/> Perfect | <input type="checkbox"/> Horrible, terrible,
catastrophic | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm/he's/she's worthless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have to | <input type="checkbox"/> I / you can't | | <input type="checkbox"/> Can't take it any more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Awful | <input type="checkbox"/> Always or never or
everything | | |

4. Look for problems in your thinking. Challenge your belief in #3. Review the “*Common Irrational Beliefs*” information sheet for help. Write down the evidence the statement is true. Test your belief by writing down the *opposite* of your original belief.

5. Write down an alternative belief to replace your original self-talk. Avoid using the same language, words and phrases you used in #3. Review the “*Challenging Irrational Beliefs*” information sheet for help.

Examples:

- While I *wanted* that to happen, I don't *need* it to happen. Things don't always happen the way I wish.
- I am disappointed, but it isn't awful. I've been disappointed before. I can handle it.
- There is no evidence that she *should* do that. I may prefer it, but people don't always act like I'd prefer.
- Why *must* it turn out that way. Aren't there lots of other options, even some I don't like?
- Things are NOT always *perfect*. In fact, there is no such thing as perfect.

6a. How have your emotions in #2 changed now that you've softened your beliefs with a more realistic interpretation?

6b. What are some alternative behavioral reactions?

Summary

1. Name the event.
2. Name your emotional and behavioral reactions.
3. Identify your beliefs or self-talk about the event.
4. Identify the problematic beliefs by looking for evidence to prove your belief. Reverse your belief to test it out.
5. Insert a new belief.
6. Reassess your feelings.
7. Identify alternate behaviors.

It is often not what happens to us that causes our stress or negative emotions. It is our beliefs about and interpretation of events. It is the lens through which we see the world that leads to our emotions and directs our behaviors. Find the unhealthy thinking and change your outlook. **Changing your outlook will change your feelings and behavior.**

Common “Irrational Beliefs”

- **Jumping to conclusions:** Settling on a belief when there is little or no evidence to support it.
 - “If I don’t do well on this project, my leaders will think I’m incompetent.”
- **Mental filtering:** Over-focusing on the negative, while ignoring the positive.
 - “I didn’t know the answer to a question today. Maybe I’m not suited for this job.”
- **All-or-nothing:** Exaggerated “black and white” thinking.
 - “If I don’t get selected for the open position, my career is over.”
- **Perfectionism:** Very high expectations that something can only be a certain way.
 - “The hotel isn’t as good as the reviews said. Our vacation is ruined.”
- **Rigid, inflexible thinking:** Leaving no room for a realistic, alternative outcome.
 - “People shouldn’t act that way.” “I must get a high rating every year.” Or, “Society should be just and fair.”
- **Overgeneralization:** Maintaining global beliefs based on one factor or a single situation.
 - “My coworker just got a new position. Everyone else has gotten promoted but me.”
- **Personalization:** The tendency to automatically blame yourself.
 - “I wasn’t selected for the open position. I always interview very poorly.”
- **Externalization:** The tendency to automatically blame others.
 - “I wasn’t selected for the project. The project leader is threatened by my skills.”
- **Mind-Reading:** Assuming you know what others are thinking, or expecting others to know what you are thinking.
 - “My supervisor hasn’t responded to my email. She must be upset about what I said.”
- **Catastrophizing:** Worst-case-scenario thinking. Exaggerating the impact of a negative event.
 - “I was rated “meets” even though I performed better. My boss is looking for an excuse to fire me.”
- **Future or past orientation:** Spending too much time focused on the past or future. Assuming you can predict the future or the past is destined to repeat itself.
 - “This date is not going to go well. First dates never work for me.”
- **Emotional reasoning:** Interpreting our experience, fact, and reality based on how we feeling in the moment.
 - “I feel stressed and overworked. Our leaders don’t know how to manage people.” or “I feel bad when you say that. You must be a horrible person.”

Challenging “Irrational Beliefs”

- **Jumping to conclusions:** Settling on a belief when there is little or no evidence to support it.
 - Slow down and ask yourself, “What evidence do I have for this way of perceiving the situation?”
- **Mental filtering:** Over-focusing on the negative, while ignoring the positive
 - Make a pro/con list about event outlining positives and negatives. Balance every negative with a positive.
- **All-or-nothing:** Exaggerated “black and white” thinking.
 - Ask yourself, “Are those the only two options?” or “Does something have to be all good or all bad?”
- **Perfectionism:** Very high expectations that something can only be a certain way.
 - Remind yourself, there is no such thing as perfect. What seems perfect for you may not be for me. Things rarely turn out *exactly* how we want them to, and when they don’t, we cope just fine.
- **Rigid, inflexible thinking:** Leaving no room for a realistic, alternative outcomes.
 - Look out for words like “should, must, need, ought and have to.” They offer no alternative outcome. And life demands flexibility.
- **Overgeneralization:** Maintaining global beliefs based on one factor or a single situation.
 - Ask, “Do things *always* work out this way? Where is my evidence for that belief?”
- **Personalization:** The tendency to automatically blame yourself.
 - No one is perfect. We all make mistakes. But ask yourself what factors other than YOU may be involved?
- **Externalization:** The tendency to automatically blame others.
 - Ask, “Even if 99% of the blame is on others or outside influences, what is the 1% that maybe I can control?”
- **Mind-Reading:** Assuming you know what others are thinking, or expecting others to know what you are thinking.
 - Look for objective evidence of your belief. How do you *know* what another person is thinking? Gather data. When in doubt, ask the other person what s/he really thinks.
- **Catastrophizing:** Worst-case-scenario thinking. Exaggerating the impact of a negative event.
 - Look for words like “horrible, terrible, and awful.” Things are never as bad as they seem at first. And we generally cope just fine. Ask, “what’s the worst that can really happen, and how will I respond?”
- **Future or past orientation:** Spending too much time focused on the past or future. Assuming you can predict the future or the past is destined to repeat itself.
 - Be where your feet are. Focus on the here and now. Identify what you *can* and *cannot* control.
- **Emotional reasoning:** Interpreting our experience, fact, and reality based on how we feeling in the moment
 - Identify and separate how you feel about the situation versus the facts. Is your perception driven by emotion?