

## **Perspective: Reframing Thoughts, Rationalizing and Cognitive Reappraisal**

Our perspective is the driving force of how we feel and how we react. By simply shifting our perspective—how we see a situation—we can change our emotional state and how we react to it. Below we will discuss four ways to shift your perspective.

### **Reframing Thoughts:**

In any situation, when we focus on what we appreciate about it, are grateful for, or love about it, then we enjoy the situation. It's that simple. Gratitude is a powerful force for shifting our perspective because you cannot be in a state of gratitude and have negative emotions at the same time. Of course, there will always be disappointing situations in life, however, gratitude can help us shift it. The next time you are feeling frustrated, disappointed, angry, sad, or anxious about a situation, challenge yourself to find something about it to appreciate—make a list of everything good about it—doing so can help shift your mood about it.

Ask yourself:

What can I be grateful for in this situation or about this person?

What can I love about this situation or person? What positive aspects are there?

If you cannot think of anything to be grateful for about it, try comparing it to the worst-case scenario. Think about in what ways it could have been (or be) worse, and then feel grateful that it isn't THAT bad! When you realize that it could have been worse, it can help put things into perspective.

Ask yourself:

How could it have been worse?

In what areas are you grateful for that it was not as bad as it could have been?

### **Rationalizing:**

This is something we do naturally since our brain is always trying to identify the meaning of what happens to us—a “rational explanation”, a reason or an excuse. When it doesn't know for sure, it makes assumptions. For example, the brain looks to rationalize why someone reacted the way they did, why something happened to us, or why we reacted the way we did. This can be good, but often our minds rationalize in a negative way. For example, the rational can be, “he did this to me because he doesn't love me” or “I didn't get the job because I'm not worthy.” But, by

rationalizing intentionally, you can direct your mind to select a positive rationalization. For example, you may have heard the phrases “everything happens for a reason.” When something “bad” happens, if you rationalize that it happened for a reason, you will find meaning and purpose in the experience. So, next time you get into a challenging situation, try on a new way of rationalizing why it’s happening.

For example, use statements such as:

- This is a life lesson. I wonder what I will learn from this.
- This must be what I need in order to help me grow and develop and be able to reach my dreams.
- Learning from this will help me help others in the long run.
- Maybe he/she reacted that way because he/she is going through something challenging in his/her life.

### **Cognitive Reappraisal:**

Another effective strategy for changing our perspective and strengthening the part of our brain that is responsible for emotional resilience is through cognitive reappraisal training. Cognitive reappraisal training is when you challenge the accuracy of your thoughts, specifically catastrophizing thoughts. Our mind tends to over exaggerate what something means and the impact that it can have on us.

For example:

“I am behind on my work; I am going to get fired.”

“I forgot to call them; they will hate me.”

When you become aware that you are exaggerating the situation and call our brain out on it, you actually directly engage your prefrontal lobe (reasoning center) and tell it to tell your amygdala (emotional center) to calm down. The prefrontal lobe does this by sending inhibitory signals. The more you do this the more you work out the prefrontal cortex and the better you will be able to manage emotions long term. Therefore, instead of letting your mind dictate how you should view the situation, show curiosity and see how factual your perspective truly is. Will they *really* hate you? Will you *really* get fired?

### **Contrasting Emotions:**

In many situations, the feelings we’re experiencing could be interpreted as two different, contrasting emotions—and we can even feel like we’re experiencing them at the same time. If we become aware of this, we can choose which emotion we want to experience. Many emotions have similar symptoms, so it is our perception that determines which emotion we believe we are experiencing—and that perception makes all the difference.

For example:

- Anger can also feel like confidence.
- Nostalgia can be interpreted as sadness *or* happiness.
- Excitement can be interpreted as fear.

One of the best ways to choose to flip to the positive side of the emotion is to repeatedly tell yourself which emotion you want to experience so that your brain knows what it should be looking for. For example, when if you're experiencing something exciting but you find yourself feeling more "afraid", tell yourself "I am excited" "I am excited" and repeat it as many times as you have to until the brain believes you.

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