



## Chapter 12: Methods for Changing Emotions

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## Introduction

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Understanding your emotions--behavior, feelings, physiology, and thoughts--will help you plan ways to change them. Use the steps in chapter 2. If an unwanted emotion is your main concern, read the appropriate chapter (5 to 8) and then refer back to this chapter for basic methods to change the emotional parts of the problem.

The above index lists the emotion-control methods described below. Read the first section, the general idea, for each method and select 2 or 3 methods to try with your emotions.

### The nature of emotions

Our feelings or emotions are a major part of our inner lives. Our emotions are sometimes rapid primitive reflexes independent of our thoughts, but at other times, our feelings reflect our cognitive assessment of our current situation. Our feelings involve both our emotions *and* our urges to act certain ways. Thus, emotions determine if we are happy or unhappy, if we want to approach something or run away from it, if we are exuberant or frozen, etc.

Emotions are frequently unrealistic and irrational, i.e. unreasonable, unthinking automatic physiological reactions or based on faulty ideas distorted by our past experiences, misperceptions, exaggerated fears or hopes or needs. Examples: Reason usually doesn't over-ride subjective experience, i.e. telling a person afraid of spiders that this specific spider right here is completely harmless, doesn't completely reduce his/her fear. The intensity of an emotion is not so much determined by the current situation as it is by the amount of actual or expected change (Frijda, 1988). Thus, a small spider seen 15 feet away (a small change) is not as scary as a large one suddenly only 6 inches away. Likewise, if economic conditions in the 1990's changed radically and returned to 1935 standards, our national feelings of crisis would be much greater than they were during the middle of the Great Depression. Where the change is greatest, the

feelings are most intense. It was the wealthy and ambitious who committed suicide in 1929, not the poor. The college graduate who always wanted and expected to become a doctor is more crushed by rejection letters from Medical School than the graduate who rather expected the rejections.

Since emotions seem to be designed by nature to help us adapt --to solve problems--we tend to get "used to" positive conditions (a loving, giving spouse) but our fears and hostilities continue on and on upsetting and urging us to "do something." As Frijda observes, the human mind was apparently not made for happiness, but for survival. Happiness is possible, but it may take intentional thought and effort; it is not always an automatic process. But anger, grief, insecurity, and jealousy are automatic, sometimes even unstoppable.

The desire to remove serious emotional hurts from our life can become so primary that our strong feelings over-ride reason, close our minds to other viewpoints, and dominate our actions. Suicide is a way to escape pain and hurts. Likewise, the enraged ex-spouse can hardly think of anything else, certainly not any explanations for the former spouse's wrongdoings. The badness of the ex-spouse becomes an obsession, an unshakeable conviction which will often last forever, regardless of other peoples' opinions. This single-minded view is a characteristic of emotions: the fearful flyer can not consider the high probability of his/her flight arriving safely; the jealous person is absolutely certain the lover is interested in someone else; the insecure spouse feels sure his/her partner doesn't really care for him/her. Yet, there sometimes seems to be a consideration of the probable consequences at some semi-conscious level because the fearful passenger usually doesn't get off the plane and we don't always immediately dump the "unfaithful" lover or "indifferent" spouse. Indeed, many "healthy" people tend to distort their view of a situation in such a way that their negative feelings and dangers are minimized and/or their positive feelings are maximized. Fortunately, under favorable conditions, reason can help us see other possibilities, see the likely long-term consequences of an action, see the implications of a code of ethics, etc. Reason (cognition) can modify the impulsive actions of the more rigidly mechanistic emotions.

One of Frijda's points is that emotions, as well as behavior and reason, are lawful and understandable (but not logical). The more you know about those laws, the better your chances of controlling your unwanted emotions.

## **Learning to control our emotions**

We are probably always feeling emotions; they seem to impose themselves on us; we ordinarily don't "will" to feel certain ways. The range of emotions is extensive. We can feel terrible, as in horror,

suicidal depression, rage, and self-depreciation. Even in milder forms, such as tension or boredom or irritation or subordination, emotions may make us miserable. Yet, we can feel happy, proud, loving, or fascinated, which makes life great. At this point in time, psychologists know more about reducing unwanted feelings than about increasing the desired emotions. In this chapter, we focus on methods for controlling our four major emotions, primarily anxiety, depression, anger, and passive-dependency.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 explain how the major emotions are learned and developed. Of course, many basic emotional reactions may not be learned; they may be inborn physiological responses, like pain, fear, crying, hunger, sensual and sexual pleasure, frustration, pleasure, etc. These and other emotions, like ecstasy, sadness, irritability, rebelliousness, fears, or sudden episodes of agoraphobia, may be genetic, physiological, hormonal or drug-induced (Adler, 1985) and responsive to medication (Sheehan, 1984). As we grow out of early childhood, however, certain emotions become associated with certain situations and events; that is a learning process. Many of these associations are not rational. We fear situations that are not dangerous (like meeting someone or speaking up in class). We get upset about things that couldn't be avoided. We may briefly distrust the entire opposite male or female sex after we have been dumped by one of them.

Some emotional reactions, like anger or dependency, also seem to be operants (yield some payoff); other emotions seem classically conditioned to certain situations, like anger in response to a defiant, smart-mouthed teenager. Most often, both operant and classical conditioning are involved in developing an emotion, e.g. the fear of public speaking increases (1) as fear is experienced while speaking (classical) and (2) as public speaking is avoided for fear of fear (operant). Of course, telling ourselves how stupid we will look if we forget what to say also increases our speech anxiety.

Indeed, many emotional reactions seem to be largely generated by our thought processes, rather than by operant or classical conditioning. Lazarus (1984) contends that cognition is always involved in our emotions because emotions reflect our cognitive evaluation of how well things are going for us, namely, if our situation is seen as getting better or worse. The question is: What thoughts (meanings or inferences or expectations) arouse which emotions? For many years, Ellis & Harper (1975) have been reminding us of the 2000-year-old idea that our intensely sad or hostile feelings are a result of our own thinking, our irrational ideas. For example, we assume that situations (failing an exam) and people (someone lied to you) cause our emotions, but Ellis says most emotions result from our insisting that the world and others should be unfolding differently. And, like a child, we get upset--we "awfulize"--when things don't go the way we want them to go: "It was a stupid exam!" and "It's terrible that he/she lied to me!" Cognitive methods for reducing emotions are described in chapter 14.

Still other emotions may arise from unconscious forces within us. Suppose a part inside of us wants a very close relationship with one parent. Our efforts to get attention from that parent, to be cute and clever, to excel, to be attentive to that parent may arouse some anxiety, but we are not aware of the source. We may even marry someone similar to the admired parent without realizing it. Likewise, suppose your boss unconsciously reminds you of a cruel older brother; thus, the intensity of your fear and anger at the boss may surprise you and others.

In short, human feelings are complexly caused, i.e. the learned aspects of emotions may be (1) operantly conditioned, (2) classically conditioned, (3) socially learned, (4) a result of our thoughts, and (5) a result of unconscious processes. This chapter deals mostly with (1) and (2). For (3) see chapters 13 and 14, for (4) see chapter 14 and for (5) see chapter 15. However, in reality these five learning processes are often all mixed up together (along with reflexes, hormones, genetic predispositions) in the development of an emotion.

Understanding the way we acquired a certain complex emotional reaction might help us figure out how to change the feeling. On the other hand, knowing the etiology of each emotion may not be necessary. It seems quite likely that several treatment methods will work regardless of the causes. Example: suppose you feel inadequate. Thus, you could take an "insight" approach (see chapter 15) in which you explore your childhood and eventually say to yourself, "It is silly to feel inadequate because my parents were critical and put me down; I'm OK, I don't have to be superior and I don't have to continue feeling inferior." Or you could challenge the irrational (unproven) idea that you are inadequate and set about demonstrating that you are quite capable; thus, reducing the self-doubts. Or you could counter-condition or over-ride the anxiety you feel in threatening situations, using desensitization or relaxation. All these methods might be effective, regardless of the origin of the feelings of inadequacy. When the self-help method you first selected doesn't work, however, then a re-analysis of the causes of the problem might help you select a more appropriate self-help method.

Emotional behavior, feelings, physiological responses, and attributions

## **Emotional reactions: Behavior, feelings, physiological responses, and attributions**

Emotions involve (a) behavior, (b) subjective feelings, and (c) physiological responses. And, to make matters more complicated, each of these three aspects is often only slightly correlated with the other two, i.e. you may (subjectively) feel very tense but not show it overtly (behaviorally) and not respond internally (physiologically). A person can feel quite relaxed but have an upset stomach or low back pain and appear to others as either very laid back or very nervous. All the combinations are possible.

Some clever experiments have shown that subjective feelings are often a function of both (1) the level of physiological arousal and (2) our interpretation of the causes of the arousal (Schachter & Singer, 1962). The sequence is this: there is a physiological arousal which we notice, then we look at the situation for a reason for this internal reaction, and this cognitive process (attempting to understand the situation) enables us to label or identify the emotion we are feeling. Thus, in some experiments exactly the same arousal (from a drug) has been interpreted as anger in some cases and as happiness in others, depending on the social situation. Actual physiological arousal may not even be necessary; if you believe your heart is beating faster (but it isn't), that may be enough to cause you to believe you are angry or afraid or sexually aroused, depending on the circumstances (Valins, 1966). The emotional labels we put on our feelings are partly a function of our interpretation of the situation. More recent research suggests our past experience and our current life situation (beyond the immediate circumstances) also play a role in how we label our feelings.

There are some interesting implications from all this. First, perhaps we shouldn't be so certain about what we are feeling (especially considering the closed-mindedness discussed above). We can't sense physiological changes accurately. Moreover, the "feelings" I seem to be having are more like guesses about why I am upset (if I am) based on my past, my tendency to favor certain emotions, and on circumstantial evidence. Secondly, given these conditions, if someone could offer me a different interpretation of the upsetting situation, I should be able to change my feelings rather easily. But we know that often isn't true. Example: instead of feeling terrible about breaking up, one could see new opportunities for better relationships. But usually we can't see the situation differently, at least not easily, being dumped remains a crisis. See chapter 14. Many therapists take such a "reframing" approach, however, and it seems to work, sometimes. Folk wisdom tells us to "look for the silver lining" or to "accentuate the positive."

Although drugs can be useful (witness the millions of tranquilizer and anti-depression prescriptions written), it is also possible that using drugs before or during therapy or self-help might hinder improvement. How? If the person attributed all improvement to drugs, he/she might start relying entirely on drugs for help rather than on therapy or self-help. Also, if the problems don't get better after taking drugs, the person might falsely conclude they are getting worse rather than that the drugs aren't working. Naturally, false assumptions about therapy or self-help can be misleading too.

The consequences of certain attributions are not always easily understood. For instance, insomniacs given a placebo (a fake medicine that has no pharmacological effect) which they were told would produce alertness went to sleep *faster* than those given a placebo "relaxation" pill. They presumably took some comfort in blaming the pill for their awakeness and then fell asleep (Storms & Nisbett, 1970).

Storms and McCaul (1976) have proposed that concluding you are responsible for some unwanted behavior is anxiety arousing. And, increased anxiety may increase the unwanted behavior. Example: thinking "I'm responsible for my speech problems" increased stammering; thinking "my speech problems are due to the experimental conditions" did not increase stammering. Yet, concluding you are *not* responsible for unwanted behavior may very likely decrease your anxiety *and* decrease your self-improvement efforts. So, it's complex because the "I'm responsible" attribution is helpful in many circumstances but not all.

## **Are feelings good or bad?**

A common saying is "you are responsible for your feelings." (For the moment, let's forget about reflexive and unconscious feelings.) Fortunately, all feelings can be viewed as natural, as neither good nor bad. This is how: many people believe that feelings and thoughts can not be bad because they hurt no one. Acts can be bad (because they can hurt). From this viewpoint, there would be no need to hide our feelings (unless disclosing the feelings hurt someone) and no need to feel guilty about any thoughts or feelings.

However, it is easy to see how we come to believe that thoughts and feelings are bad. Suppose as a child you hit your little brother and were spanked and told, "don't do that." As a 5-year-old you aren't likely to figure out that the parent who hit you meant "your hitting is bad but feeling angry is OK," so you grow up thinking "feeling angry is bad." Many of our feelings are suppressed by being told "don't be a scaredy cat," "big kids don't cry," "touching yourself down there is naughty," etc. So, we learn to deny or dislike or feel guilty about many feelings. We even hide many positive feelings: "I don't want him/her to know I like him/her because he/she might not like me."

In the guilt section of chapter 6 we discuss further the question of whether thoughts (temptations to do something bad) are bad in the sense that they may increase the probability that we will actually do something bad.

## **Feelings usually leak out**

Feelings usually find a way to express themselves, however. There are several ways subjective feelings get expressed:

1. You may act on feelings: shout at someone when angry, cry when sad, communicate (in body language) your interest when attracted to someone. (These same behaviors--shouting, crying and attracting--surely influence our feelings too.)

2. You may have physiological reactions when feeling something: you blush when embarrassed, have high blood pressure when anxious, sexual arousal when attracted. Actually psychologists do not yet know whether arousal precedes, accompanies, or follows an emotional reaction (Weiner, 1980).
3. You may try to suppress the feelings and deny being upset or angry. Quite often people who deny their emotions think they are healthy and well adjusted, but they tend to have high blood pressure, high heart rate, an immune deficiency, high incidence of cancer (Temoshok, 1992), difficulty sleeping, and lots of aches and pains.
4. You may try to change the situation: shout out orders like a drill sergeant when things go wrong or become charming to attract and influence someone. Note: yelling "shut up" at someone implies but doesn't directly express your feeling, "I'm angry at you."
5. You may have one feeling to deny or conceal another: criticism may hide attraction, crying may occur when you are mad, love may hide scared dependency. Or, you may have one feeling in response to another feeling: disgust to your own homosexual interests, frustration to your shyness.
6. You may blame others rather than assuming responsibility for your own feelings: "You are a selfish, mean person" instead of "I feel very hurt," "You are a lazy slob" instead of "I feel furious when you are so sloppy," "You are arrogant" instead of "I'm afraid you won't like me." Remember: you are more responsible than anyone else for your feelings. In general, no one can *make* you feel any way; it is usually your choice (although some emotions are impossible to control--like a startle reaction or grief following the loss of a loved one). See the discussion of "I" statements in chapter 13 and "psychologizing" in chapter 7.
7. You may not be aware of the true nature of your emotions but they can still have an effect on your life. Dramatic examples are people with multiple personalities; an unconscious personality may have feelings which are not known to the person until that personality becomes conscious and "in control" later. Another rare example is a woman who has spontaneous orgasms. One possible explanation is that sexually arousing fantasies were occurring unconsciously. More common examples that have been well documented recently are the "sleeping effects" in children of divorce. Example: children may be unaware of emotions (fears, anger) during their parents' divorce but suffer ill effects from the divorce years later, often when they become intimate with someone. There are lots of things, especially feelings, going on inside of us that we don't know about. Haven't you felt upset after talking to someone without knowing why? Don't you sometimes respond to events and behaviors very differently than others do, and can't see why you have such a different reaction?
8. You may openly share your feelings with others. This involves many skills: self-disclosure, "I" statements, social skills, assertiveness, self-confidence etc. Telling your story, as in



therapy, self-help groups, or with friends, is usually healthy (as long as you share your emotions and don't just stick to the objective facts, and as long as the listeners are supportive).

9. You may use your feelings as a barometer of your relationships with others and your self-acceptance. Negative, unwanted feelings are a sign that something needs to be changed, that self-help is needed.

Now we will look at ways to take control of your emotions.

## Methods for Changing Your Emotions

Understanding your emotions--behavior, feelings, physiology, and thoughts--will help you plan ways to change them. Use the steps in chapter 2. If an unwanted emotion is your main concern, read the appropriate chapter (5 to 8) and then refer back to this chapter for basic methods to change the emotional parts of the problem.

First, don't forget that methods focusing on the behavior or changing the environment (chapter 11) can also reduce an unpleasant emotion, e.g. reduce your fear by putting better locks on the doors or by avoiding someone you are mad at. Fears can also be reduced by modeling someone who is less afraid than you are (see method #2 in chapter 11). You can develop other behaviors that will counteract the unwanted emotions, e.g. activity counteracts depression, assertion counteracts anger, facing the fear counteracts it, relaxation counteracts the hyperactivity of the workaholic, etc. Contrary to the notion that "time heals," there is evidence, as discussed in chapter 5, that fears, grief, memory of a trauma, etc. don't just fade away. These feelings do decline //we repeatedly expose ourselves to the upsetting situation or memory over and over again while relaxed or under less stressful conditions (yet, becoming very distraught while talking to friends about the "awful" situation doesn't usually help). However, changing the consequences of a behavior can alter emotions also, e.g. ask your friends to praise your healthy assertiveness and challenge your mousy conformity.

Second, don't forget that our thoughts strongly influence our emotions. And, since we can sometimes change our thoughts and since psychology is in a "cognitive" era, there is great emphasis on cognitive methods at this time. See chapter 14.

The methods here deal with basic raw emotions: anxiety or fears, anger, and sadness. Of course, these same methods can be used on the emotional part (level II) of any other problem. Passive-dependent problems tend to be handled with cognitive-behavioral methods and new skills.

Emotions are a crucial part of our lives and they are fascinating. Several recent books will help you understand. Lazarus & Lazarus (1996) explain how emotions are aroused and their effects, including the impact on our health (see chapter 5). Goleman (1995) argues that we overemphasize academic IQ and neglect emotional IQ (knowing and handling our gut feelings and impulses, self-motivation, people skills). You might gain further insight into your feelings from several other books: Averill & Nunley (1992) for being more creative in your emotional life, Keen (1992a) for just exploring your emotions, Felder (1988) for getting rid of your "emotional baggage," Preston (1993) for working through emotional distress, and Kinder (1993) for understanding why (a biological or brain chemistry orientation) you feel the way you do and then for changing those feelings.

## Learning to produce desired emotions

### Relaxation Training

Being able to relax at will is a handy skill. Most people can learn to do so. There are many methods but they all have much in common. No one relaxation technique is best for everyone. Madders (1997) provides a practical, detailed guide to many relaxation exercises. Your first task, then, is to find a method that works well for you. Three methods will be described here: (1) deep muscle relaxation, (2) recorded relaxation instructions, and (3) Benson's method. In addition, relaxation via suggestion is provided in method #2, meditation is described in method #5, self-hypnosis in chapter 14, and many other approaches are possible: progressive relaxation (more complicated than deep-muscle relaxation), taking a nap, taking a warm bath, getting a massage, daydreaming, praying, gardening, reading, simple work or hobbies. After learning a good method for you, the major problem is taking the time to relax when you need to.

The Anxiety Panic Internet Resources Web site describes various disorders and provides suggestions about how to [Relax](http://www.algy.com/anxiety/) (<http://www.algy.com/anxiety/>). Many descriptions of "How to Relax" are on the Web. Here are two: [Guided Relaxation](http://www.dstress.com/guided.htm) ( <http://www.dstress.com/guided.htm>) and [Relaxation & Meditation](http://www.selfhelpmagazine.com/articles/stress/index.shtml) ( <http://www.selfhelpmagazine.com/articles/stress/index.shtml>) . Be sure to see desensitization and meditation later.

### Purposes

- To reduce tension and overcome general feelings of anxiety.
- To counter-condition fears and phobic reactions, as in desensitization (method #6).
- To counteract panic reactions and to counteract the constant activity of a workaholic or social addict.

- To aid other purposes, such as concentrating and increasing learning efficiency, overcoming insomnia and improving sleep, and improving one's general health.

## Steps

**STEP ONE: Select a relaxation method to try; decide how to give yourself the instructions.**

Consider these three ways of relaxing and pick one to try:

1. Deep-muscle relaxation is easy to learn. It is a simple routine: first tense the muscles, then relax them. This procedure is used with many small muscle groups all over the body. Most of the anxiety and tension you feel is in your muscles. So, by focusing on relaxing your muscles, you can calm and comfort your entire body (and mind) by excluding distressing thoughts (since you are concentrating on groups of muscles). This method is based on the simple principle that muscles relax after being tensed, especially if suggestions to relax are also being given. So, mind and body can be calmed by starting with the muscles. The detailed steps are given below.
2. There are a large number of commercial cassettes that provide relaxation instructions. Usually it is better to make your own tape. In this case you start with the mind and send relaxing messages to the muscles. Detailed instructions are given below but you need a cassette recorder readily available to use this method.
3. The Benson (1975) method is basically meditation (see method #5) used as a relaxation procedure. The idea is to free the mind from external stimulation, which slows physiological functions and reduces muscle tension...and that reduces impulses to the brain...and so on in a beneficial cycle. Like meditation, the calming effects of all these methods last beyond the time doing relaxation.

**STEP TWO: Learn how to do the relaxation method you have chosen.**

Below are detailed instructions for the three relaxation methods:

1. Deep-muscle relaxation involves focusing on a small group of muscles at a time, e.g. "make a fist" or "make a muscle in both arms." With each set of muscles you go through the same three-step procedure: (a) tense the muscles. Notice each muscle. Tighten the muscles until they strain but not hurt. The muscles may tremble which is okay but be careful with your feet and other muscles that tend to cramp. It does not need to be rigorous exercise. Hold the muscles tense for 5 to 10 seconds. (b) Suddenly, say relax to your self and let the muscles relax completely. (c) Focus your attention on the marked change in the muscles from when they are tense to

when they are relaxed. Enjoy the pleasure and relief that comes with relaxation. Give yourself instructions to relax more and more, to feel more and more comfortable all over. Relish the peaceful, refreshing, rejuvenating calm for 20 to 30 seconds, then repeat the process with the same muscles or with a new group. In this way you replace muscle tension with soothing relaxation all over your body.

At first, this three-step procedure may need to be repeated two or three times for each set of muscles. With practice, however, you can relax in a few minutes. Use groups of muscles something like the following (don't get overly precise about this, any group of muscles will do fine):

#### Arms

- Hands and forearms--"make a tight fist" and bend it down towards the elbow. Start with one arm, move to both arms.
- Biceps--"make a muscle." Both arms.
- Triceps--stretch the arm out straight, tensing the muscle in the back of the arm. Both arms.

#### Upper body

- Forehead--raise eyebrows and "wrinkle forehead"
- Eyes--close eyes tightly (careful if wearing contacts)
- Jaws--clinch teeth
- Tongue--press against roof of mouth
- Lips--press lips together
- Neck--roll head right, back, left, down (chin on chest)
- Shoulders--shrug up, move forward and back
- Chest--inhale and hold it, relax as you exhale
- Stomach--"suck it in," push it out
- Back--arch it

#### Legs

- Thighs--make legs stiff and bend toes and feet up towards knees
- Calves--make legs stiff and straight, bending toes and feet down away from head
- Toes--curl toes

#### Total body

- Occasionally give self-instructions for the muscles recently relaxed to continue relaxing more and more. Check to see if all are comfortable; if not, move them or go through the tense-relax routine again.
- Give general instructions to feel good and warm and heavy, to smooth out the muscles, to feel calm and rested, to enjoy the relaxation, etc.
- Imagine you are floating down a mountain side on a soft cloud, enjoying the view and counting down slowly from 10 (top) to 1 (bottom), and feeling more and more deeply relaxed as you float to the bottom of the mountain.

When you want to come out of the relaxed state, say to yourself: "To wake up I'm going to count from 1 to 10. When I reach 10 I will be awake and refreshed. 1...2...3...4...5...you're half way there...6...7...8...begin to stretch...9...10, wide awake and feeling good.

2. Recorded relaxation instructions should, of course, be done in a soft, soothing voice, using a good recorder. Speak slowly and draw out the words like a hypnotist: "de-e-e-e-ely relaxed." The self-instructions suggested below are adapted from a script by Dorothy Suskind (Cheek, 1976). Make whatever changes you like, perhaps using some of the deep-muscle relaxation instructions.

"Get comfortable. Close your eyes. Listen carefully and try to relax as fully as you can. Now, stretch your legs out as far as they can go. Turn your toes under and tighten the muscles in your feet very, very tight. Hold it. And now also tighten the muscles in your calves and those in your thighs. Make your entire leg--both of them--straight and tight as a drum, very tense, and hold it, hold it (about 6 to 8 seconds). And now, relax all the muscles in your toes, all the muscles in your calves, all the muscles in your thighs. Notice the relaxation. Let your legs go completely limp. And now, feel that wonderful relaxation coming up from your toes, up your calves, up your thighs. Feeling wonderfully relaxed, very comfortable, warm and limp, very calm, very relaxed. Feeling beautiful, just beautiful, wonderfully relaxed.

Now stretch out your arms. Make tight fists with your hands. Feel the tightness, and now make it tighter, tighter, tighter. Hold it. And now bend both fists down toward your forearm, tense the muscles in your wrist, in your forearm, in your upper arm. Tense it until it trembles. Hold it. Hold it. And now, let go, just let go, and let that wonderful feeling of relaxation flow right through your fingers, your hands, your

forearm, and your upper arm. Let your arms go completely limp. Feeling wonderfully relaxed, completely relaxed, very calm, warm, limp, comfortable and beautiful, just beautiful.

Now, with your eyes still closed, imagine yourself relaxing all over...(you can tense and relax each part if you like)...relax your face, your neck, your shoulders, your back, your stomach, all over.

I will now count down from 10 to 1. I am going to find myself deeper and deeper relaxed and I will have a feeling of well-being, as I count down to 1. Calm and relaxed, and wonderfully well, just relaxed.

I'm going to count, 10...9...8...7...6...5, very, very relaxed, 4...3, very deeply relaxed, 2...and 1. I am very calm, very relaxed, and getting more and more deeply relaxed all the time.

Think of nothing now but relaxation, feeling wonderfully relaxed, calm, feeling well all over, just relaxed, calm, relaxed, feeling wonderfully well.

I will now enjoy some quiet time just relaxing. Then when I'm ready to wake up, I'll start the player again. I'll stop the tape player at this time so I can enjoy quiet relaxation as long as I want" ..... (leave a 15-20 second pause on the tape)

"I am now ready to wake up and come back to the real world. When I count to 10, I will open my eyes and feel calm, I'll feel refreshed and wonderfully well, 1...2...3...4...5...6, more and more alert, 7...8, beginning to move, 9...10, feeling wonderfully relaxed but awake and eager to get on with the day."

3. Herbert Benson's method of relaxation is as easy as the above methods but may take more practice. In his second book, Benson (1984) recommends using a short meaningful phrase or religious saying for meditating, instead of the word "one" which was his 1975 suggestion. For the religious or values-conscious person, a moral phrase helps involve the relaxing power of faith--and you may be less likely to forget to meditate. What words to use? Any phrase of 6 or 8 words or less that has special meaning for you. Examples:
  - o "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).
  - o "Thy will be done."
  - o "My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27).
  - o "You shall love thy neighbor" (Lev. 19:18).
  - o "Joy is inward" (Hindu).
  - o "Life is a journey" (Buddhist).
  - o "Allah" (Moslem) or "Shalom" (Jewish) or "Peace."
  - o "Fear brings more pain than the pain it fears."

- "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
- "I can not do everything at once but I can do something."
- "God, give me serenity, courage and wisdom."
- "Life's greatest gift is to love and be loved."
- "It takes both rain and sunshine to make a rainbow."
- "To understand is to pardon."
- "The smallest good deed is better than the grandest intention."

After selecting or making up a phrase (a mantra), follow this procedure:

(a) Sit in a comfortable position in private.

(b) Close your eyes gently.

(c) Relax. Search your body for tension; relax the tense spots by moving or stretching or tensing the muscles and then relaxing deeper and deeper.

(d) Notice your breathing but let it be natural, don't control it. Start saying your selected phrase as you exhale. Say it silently, say it mentally to yourself. Say the special phrase each time you exhale (that's why it needs to be short). After you have found a phrase that works well for you, continue to use it every time. (This is relaxation, not a time to learn sayings.)

(e) Your mind may wander. That's OK, don't worry about it. Passively observe the mind's thoughts and accept whatever happens. Just lazily bring your mind back to your special word or phrase. Just relax. Focusing on your special phrase is simply a way of relinquishing your control over your mind. Let your mind relax or do its own thing. When you become aware that the mind has wandered and has now finished its thought, bring it back to repeating the special phrase every time you exhale. Enjoy the peace. (See method #5 for more information about meditating.)

### STEP THREE: Arrange a private place and schedule a specific time for relaxing

A private place is crucial: a bedroom, a private office at work, even a bathroom might be the best place. You should take 10-15 minutes twice a day. Ideally, it should be a comfortable place with no interruptions. A bed or a chair with arms and a high, soft back is good (as long as you don't go to sleep). Many people get sleepy if they meditate after a meal. Drown out distracting noise with a neutral sound: a fan, air conditioner, or soft instrumental music. Turning off the lights helps. Perhaps you had better tell your roommate, co-

workers, family, etc., what you are doing, if there is any chance they will walk into the room.

#### STEP FOUR: Relaxing on command

Most people can relax easily in comfortable, familiar, quiet surroundings. But, that isn't where we have the stress. It is harder to relax when called on to speak to a group or when taking a test. What can you do then? One possibility: pair a silently spoken word, like "relax," with actually relaxing. Do this thousands of times, as in the relaxation exercises above or by mentally thinking "relax" as you exhale. In this way the internal command--"relax"--becomes not only a self-instruction but also a conditioned stimulus, an automatic prompter of a relaxation response (like a cigarette, see chapter 4). So, when you get uptight, you can silently say "relax" and feel better. It is no cure all but it helps.

#### STEP FIVE: Relaxation--a routine or as needed

Many people would say that relaxation should be practiced faithfully twice a day, seven days a week. That is certainly necessary if you hope to establish a more relaxed level of physiological functioning on a continuous basis. Other people use a relaxation technique anytime they have a few minutes to rest. Still others use relaxation only when tension is getting excessive and/or they need to slow down, such as at bed time. Any of these uses are fine; however, they all require practice in advance, i.e. you can't wait until a crisis hits and then decide you want instant relaxation.

#### Time involved

It may take 4 or 5 hours to learn the method, practice it, make the recording, or whatever is involved. Thereafter, the technique may be used 15 to 30 minutes a day or only occasionally.

#### Common problems with the method

Many can't find the time to relax twice a day, especially the people who need it the most. Although 10 to 15% of students are reluctant to try a relaxation technique in class, almost everyone can become deeply relaxed with practice. A few people fall asleep while relaxing. If you do, you may need to set an alarm.

#### Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

All the above methods, if used faithfully, seem to be effective during the relaxation session. Some research has suggested that meditation works a little better than the other methods, at least for reducing general anxiety (Eppley, Abrams, & Shear, 1989). How much the relaxation continues beyond the session is questionable, however, regardless of the method used. Seeking calm in a storm is a difficult



task. In many of us, the stress reaction is just too strong to be easily overridden; we may need to withdraw from the stressful situation for a while (and consider using method #6, desensitization).

One would think that relaxing would be the safest thing in the world for a self-helper to do. It probably is, but several therapists have reported panic attacks in patients when relaxation is tried in therapy (Lazarus & Mayne, 1990). This negative reaction has been observed primarily in persons suffering from very high anxiety. For most people, this shouldn't be a concern. In a class setting, I have found that 5-10% of the students do not fully participate in a relaxing exercise in class. Some don't like closing their eyes; others are reluctant to publicly "make a muscle," "suck in your stomach," "arch your back" (thus, throwing out your chest), etc. But almost everyone can learn to relax. Imaging relaxing visual scenes (a warm sunny day on the beach) works best for some people; repeating calming sayings and self-instructions works better for others; sitting in a warm bath reading a magazine works wonderfully for some. Madders (1997), Cautela & Groden (1993), and Sutcliffe (1995) describe several self-relaxation methods.

### Additional readings

Davis, M., Eshelman, E. R., & McKay, M. (1995). *The relaxation & stress reduction workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Louden, J. (1992). *The woman's comfort book*. San Francisco: Harper.

Jacobson, E. (1964). *Self operations control: A manual of tension control*. Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Co.

Curtis, J. D. & Detert, R. A. (1981). *How to relax: A holistic approach to stress management*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co.

Rosen, G. M. (1976). *Don't be afraid: A program for overcoming your fears and phobias*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Rosen, G. M. (1977). *The relaxation book*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Smith, J. C. (1985). *Relaxation Dynamics*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

**Moods by suggestion: calm scene, relaxation, elation**

In the Western world we are preoccupied with the external world--the world of work or TV or interpersonal relations. In Eastern cultures they are more concerned with the inner world--fantasy and thoughts. They use meditation and seek an inner serenity, partly as a way of coping with harsh external realities and partly for the benefits an inner life offers. There is a stigma against daydreaming in our culture. It can be a way of avoiding reality or a way of rehearsing for the future. Fortunately, there is a connection between thoughts and feelings, so emotions can be influenced via fantasies. Harry Truman said, "I have a foxhole in my mind," meaning he had a place in his mind where he could escape the explosive issues bombarding him from the external world.

### Purpose

- To produce a desired feeling or mood: relaxation, elation, nostalgia, greater awareness and concentration, and increased motivation (see fantasies for achievement in chapter 14).

### STEP ONE: Prepare the instructions for whatever feelings you want to produce

Four methods of changing feelings are illustrated below: (1) a calm scene, (2) self-monitoring for relaxation, (3) positive affirmation statements for a positive mental attitude, and (4) elation and expanded consciousness.

**A calm scene.** All of us have memories of being somewhere and feeling carefree, calm and happy. Imagining such a relaxed or pleasant moment in your life can arouse calm or happy feelings. For relaxation, it should be a scene in which you are inactive (it's hard to relax while thinking of climbing a mountain or swimming a river). Examples: lying in the warm sun on a beach or a boat, resting in front of a fireplace and watching the flames, walking leisurely in a woods on a beautiful fall day, sitting on a mountain top and looking at the lush, peaceful valley below, or sitting in your room, looking out the window and resting, just watching the world go by. Select a comfortable, peaceful, pleasant scene that has special meaning for you.

My calm scene is walking alone by a small stream that winds through a meadow in front of my boyhood home. I remember minute details: the clearness of the spring-fed water, the softness of the grass, the rolling hills, the warmth of the sun, the minnows and water spiders, the big sycamore trees, building a dam with a buddy, mud-crawling, dreaming about the future, being alone but not lonely, perhaps because of the beckoning warmth of my house nearby.

**Self-monitoring.** It is simple. Use the senses of the body as a biofeedback machine. Sit down or lie down. Get relaxed and close your eyes. Pay attention to every sensation, everything that goes on in your body. Don't try to understand or explain what is happening, just observe. Express in words what is happening. Scan the body and

report everything you notice. An example: Eye lids grow heavier, shoulders slump and back bends, breathing deep, stomach growls, throat swallows, ringing in ears, muscles in face seem quiet and heavy, etc.

This is an old technique (Curtis, 1986). It is good for general nervousness. Somehow the stressful sensations decline and peace follows.

**Positive affirmations.** Many people believe that imagining doing something well increases actual ability and self-confidence. So athletes imagine hitting a home run, divers imagine a perfect dive, a speaker imagines an excellent delivery. Supposedly, the unconscious mind doesn't know the difference between a real experience and an imagined one. So, your self-esteem grows. Likewise, if you say, with feeling, positive things to yourself, a positive mental attitude will develop. Picture in your mind exactly what you want to do or be. Feel positive and confident as you imagine the desired behavior.

The statements should be repeated several times each session and during 3 or 4 sessions each day. Examples of positive affirmations (notice they describe in the present tense what you *will be doing* -- "I am calm" or "slim," not "I want to be calm" nor "I am not tense" or "I am not fat"):

#### For a better self-concept and positive mental attitude--

- Every day in every way, I am getting better and better.
- I succeed because I believe I can.
- I am filled with loving kindness.
- I am happy and content.

#### To encourage some achievement--

- I am proud of my body (visualize how you will look at your ideal weight).
- I am an excellent student; I love to learn.
- I can play \_\_\_\_\_ unusually well.

#### To relax and be healthy--

- I am healthy, happy and relaxed.
- Pain free, happy me.

#### To reduce worry--

- forget the past and the future--I'm in the here and now.
- I accept any challenge; I can handle it.

**Expanded consciousness.** This fantasy method was described by Gibbon (1973) for increased awareness, greater concentration, better

problem-solving ability, and feelings of competence. Have a problem in mind to work on before you start the exercise. It's not a good fantasy for people with a fear of heights or of flying. You can have the experience more fully if all you have to do is listen, so record these abbreviated instructions:

"Get comfortable and close your eyes. Imagine you are in the gondola of a large hot air balloon. You are resting and watching what is happening with interest. Let your imagination go free, have vivid images of the things I suggest to you. It is a beautiful day. The balloon is filling. See the meadow around you. You have nothing to do but relax and experience the thrill of the ride.

The balloon is nearly full. Soon you will take off and as you go higher, your awareness and concentration and thinking will also become higher. I'm going to count from 1 to 10. With each count the balloon will go higher and your mind will expand greater until it is able to be aware of everything. You will become much more aware of reality and have a greater appreciation of truth and beauty. Now, the balloon gently and quietly takes off, I begin to count and your consciousness starts to expand.

One. As you float higher, you will have a new experience...pleasant, exciting feelings of increased awareness and sensitivity.

Two. A little higher. You are entering a higher level of consciousness. You are comfortable. You are feeling good about using your full mental capacity.

Three. You enjoy the quiet, smooth ride, the fantastic view, the excitement.

Four Your range of awareness is continually expanding. Your perception is keener. Your attention and concentration is even more under your control.

Five Rising higher and higher. Your confidence increases and you feel better and better.

Six Your consciousness increases but your awareness is not overloaded. You feel joy as your senses reach their highest level.

Seven You experience a release, a new freedom as your intuitive and intellectual potentials reach their peak. As you go still higher, your heightened abilities will enable you to see causes and relationships you never realized before.

Eight You are very high now. Soon you will enter a new dimension, where your insight is especially keen and innovative.

Nine All the way up to the edge of space. You are ready to experience and concentrate and reason better than ever before.

Ten Now you are at the top. Your abilities, awareness and understanding are ready to disclose new meaning and new solutions. You are eager to use these skills to solve your concerns. Take as long as you want. As you focus on real problems, take time to understand the causes. Don't skip over or run away from any cause--consider it carefully. Can you see things differently now? Can you discover new feelings you had not been aware of before? Can you understand the feelings of others better?

Next, take time to invent new and better solutions to your problems. Imagine how each course of action might work out. Consider unusual solutions and combinations of solutions. Decide on the best approach. If other insights come to you, accept them but go back to solving the main problem.

Now, turn off the tape player until you are ready to 'come down' and wake up." (Leave short pause on tape.)

Start tape again when you are ready to stop:

"OK, we are ready to descend. I'll count from 10 to 1. When I get to 1 you will be back in a normal, everyday state of consciousness. You will feel good and refreshed and grateful for the special time to think. You will remember everything that has happened and all your insights.

Ten. Starting to drift downward and back to a normal state of awareness.

Nine. Coming down. You will remember everything.

Eight. Gently floating down. You are feeling wonderful.

Seven. Enjoying the experience.

Six. Continuing down.

Five. Down. At the count of 1 your eyes will open.

Four. You see the ground slowly approaching.

Three. Soon you'll be back relaxed and refreshed.

Two. Almost down. A grassy meadow below. It will be a gentle landing. You feel great.

One. You are down. Open your eyes. You feel wonderful."

## STEP TWO: Find a quiet place and get prepared

Use a quiet, comfortable, private place, like a bedroom. Make your recording if needed. Place the player near your hand so you can easily turn it on and off.

## STEP THREE: Have the fantasy as vividly as possible

Have the experience. Get into it as deeply as possible; have detailed and vivid imagery, using all your senses, and put your feelings into it. It may be helpful to record each experience and compare your reactions over time.

## Time involved

Preparation time may take from 15 minutes to an hour. However, most of these mood-altering exercises must be repeated for 10-15 minutes, two or more times a day to be effective.

## Common problems with the methods

In general, they promise too much, especially expanded consciousness. Take a "try-it-and-see" attitude. Another problem is that some people have poor visualization abilities. If you don't visualize well, try another modality, i.e. have your fantasies more in words and feelings. Through practice you can develop a more vivid fantasy.

## Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Fantasies do generate feelings. There are few experiments in this area but many clinical reports of distress brought on by unpleasant memories and thoughts about possible disasters. Some actors create tears by thinking of a sad event. It is reasonable that positive emotions can be created in the same way. As mentioned in method #1, a few people are reluctant to relax or close their eyes in class. The advantage is that these methods are simple, straightforward, and done on your own. There are no known dangers.

## Additional readings

Maltz, M. (1960). *Psycho-Cybernetics*

## How to be happy--determinism

Many people would say, "I just want to be happy." It is a worthy goal but few people know how to find happiness. Some would say they want to have a good education and an interesting career. Others would say they want a loving spouse and a nice family. Others want a career, a family, good health, good friends, a nice house, two sharp cars, good relationships with both families, and enough money to take an extended vacation each year and to be comfortable. What would you say you need to be happy?

In our culture, almost everyone has a list of needs or wants. We want pleasures--good looks, a good sexual relationship, friendships, fun experiences, etc., etc. We want possessions--a good sound system, a sporty car, nice clothes, etc., etc. We all need some pleasure in life. But, the problem is when we start to believe that pleasures and possessions are the way to be happy. Once we begin to think that way, we start to say "if I just had *\_(an education, a boyfriend, a good job, a happy marriage, enough money to retire, a good relationship with my family...)\_*, I'd be happy." Our achievements and acquisitions have become the source of our happiness. We are soon in trouble: we don't get all that we want; we always want more, no matter how much we have. Old pleasures lose their thrill; possessions quickly become an old inferior model. There is always something excitingly newer, better, faster, bigger, and more expensive.

Once you say "I need \_\_\_\_\_ to be happy," you have created a self-destructive mind game. Happiness can not be based on having possessions; cars break down, houses deteriorate, clothes quickly go out of style, etc. Happiness can not be based on pleasures; marriages fall apart, friends drift away, power fades, eating and drinking make us fat, etc. OK, what can happiness be based on? An accepting frame of mind; a tolerance of whatever is because whatever is, is right. Whatever happens in life is lawful (see method #4 in chapter 14). It takes time to understand this viewpoint. Look into it carefully.

A belief in determinism is not a helpless-hopeless position; it is not being without goals, preferences, opinions, or values. In fact, it is important to have a respected mission in life and to have high values; they are great sources of pleasure. It is important that you use the laws of behavior to do your best, that you help others, and that you try to make the world better. But after you have done your best, you must accept the outcome, regardless of what it is (Mikulas, 1983). Do your best on a job or in a relationship, but accept being dismissed or rejected, if that is what happens. Accept reality. Unconditional positive regard of others and of yourself is a major factor in finding happiness.

Other factors contributing to happiness include learning to have some influence over your world, to be able to make your situation better, and to have confidence in your self-control. To become happy it

is necessary to be able to handle unhappy feelings when they come along (see chapter 6). You can't be happy and unhappy (or angry) at the same time about the same specific issue. You can, of course, be happy about certain aspects of an issue and unhappy about other aspects.

This section helps me make the point that the development of a particular emotional state, such as happiness, is sometimes very complex and involves many self-help methods. Obviously, all the methods for reducing depression might apply to generating happiness, but happiness is much more than the absence of sadness. You see the point. (If you are thinking that this method is very cognitive, I agree that it is closely related to the methods in chapter 14.)

### Purposes

- To understand how to achieve happiness.
- To avoid futile attempts to achieve happiness via pleasures, possessions, or indifferent and irresponsible behaviors.

### Steps

**STEP ONE: Read method #4 in chapter 14 about determinism and learn to accept reality and the lawfulness of life.**

This is not an easy task. It takes time to shake off our consumption ("Gimme") orientation towards happiness. Mikulas (1983) has an interesting analogy: Suppose you lived 1000 years ago and were asked if you would like to live in 2000 with warm houses, cars, airplanes, TV, free education, good medical care, etc. Of course, if you were living in 1000 A.D. in a dirt floored hut, with little education, with many children dying from diseases, with starvation everywhere, and with no entertainment, etc., you would think 2000 would be wonderful. You would assume that everyone in 2000 would be gleefully happy! But all of our advantages, knowledge, possessions and pleasures have not made us happy. Hopefully, in 3000, we will know much more about being productive, moral, and happy.

Read about determinism (method #4 in chapter 14) and try to give up your frustrations with the way that things are at this moment in your life. You can start making realistic plans for changing some things you don't like, but accept and "understand" the way things are. Most importantly, this accepting, tolerant attitude reduces resentment and frustration with others and with your self. Carl Rogers called it "unconditional positive regard."

**STEP TWO: Learn to have some control over your life.**

Even if you are well cared for at this time, no one can be entirely comfortable realizing that they are unable to support themselves, should the need arise. A personal or interpersonal problem is always



possible; the person who feels unable to cope with independent survival must feel uneasy. Learning more about handling ordinary problems for people like you provides a basis for greater happiness. Self-help reading should help.

**STEP THREE: Work on reducing the emotions, mostly sadness and anger, that are incompatible with happiness.**

Of the four major emotions, depression and anger are the most inconsistent with happiness. They have to be kept at a fairly low level. See chapters 6 and 7 for the steps to take. The other emotions are not as crucial, i.e. we can be moderately stressed and still be happy; we can be quite passive-dependent and be happy.

**STEP FOUR: There needs to be some pleasures in every life.**

The pleasures may be few and simple, but we need some. There are an infinite number of options. Develop some, if you don't have any. But, keep it perfectly clear in your mind that these pleasures are not the source of happiness in your life. If a pleasure becomes unavailable, you can find another.

**STEP FIVE: Your life should have a purpose, it should have important meaning to you.**

As chapter 3 in the beginning of this book argues, we all need a philosophy of life that we are proud of and willing to follow day by day. That chapter will help you plan a more worthwhile life.

### Time involved

Finding happiness is a major undertaking taking many, many hours, maybe years. The effort is truly unending, because most lives experience a series of great losses which are not easily accepted, e.g. death, failure, mental illness, etc.

### Common problems

My experience is that people resist the deterministic notion. The American belief that there is a quick solution to every problem is very strong. It transforms into the idea that we don't have to tolerate anything we don't like, we can just get rid of the problem. Thus, the idea that we should accept our circumstances-of-the-moment becomes viewed as a weak, incompetent, fatalistic position. But the truth is that many of life's downers are unavoidable--and irreversible once they have happened. Sad events are inevitable. So, in these instances, we have only two choices: accept it as lawful or hate what has happened. In no way, should determinism lead to a fatalistic, pessimistic view of tomorrow, however.

### Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Seeking to be happy is such a complex process that science is decades away from objectively assessing the effectiveness of all the steps involved. Being happy is a worthy goal (if it involves facing life as it really is), however. Shared experiences and science will help us. I don't know of any dangers from trying to be happy, as long as we face reality and are responsible.

### Suggested reading

Mikulas, W. L. (1983). *Skills of living*. New York: University Press of America.

## Gaining peace of mind; centering

Many people believe there is a peaceful place inside us, called "the center." From that place, you can see things clearly without distortions; you can think straight without confusion; you can relax without tension.

The crux of this idea is to think of "the center" as being an internal place from which you are aware of all the other parts but you can remain detached or apart from all the other parts of yourself. Examples: from the center, you are aware of your body and its feelings, but you are not your body. You (the centered observer) recognize your emotions, but you are not your emotions. You are not your behaviors or your thoughts; you are an objective observer. Indeed, the centered self may decide to change any of these parts-- your body, feelings, actions, and mind. But, when you are "centered," you can not be hurt, you are not vulnerable. You can observe your behavior and see that you are messing up, but the centered self does not emotionally react. You observe the agitation of the mind, the pain of the body, and the hurt emotions, but the centered self remains calm and at peace, just observing in a clear, calm way. This method could clearly be placed in chapter 14, also.

### Purposes

- To develop a safe "observation station" from which you can see all your conscious parts.
- To become able to escape the stress of external pressures or intense emotions.

### Steps

#### STEP ONE: Gradually develop the capacity to be "centered."

The "center" or the "centered self" has to be built through conscious effort. We have to learn to go there and "center" or calm ourselves. How can we do this? Through efforts to relax and detach

yourself from a constantly active mind and from demanding emotions, you can find some peace. With practice, you can get better at withdrawing from the stress (while becoming an even keener observer). Several other steps will help you do this.

**STEP TWO: Meditation will also help you detach yourself from the mind. Periods of relaxation will help.**

Meditation is very effective in quieting the mind (see method #5). This is good training for centering.

**STEP THREE: Use determinism to increase your acceptance of what is happening (see method #3 and chapter 14).**

By understanding that there are causes for everything that happens, we can start to focus more on observing the true causes and less on some emotional reaction, such as "ain't it awful," "that should never have happened," etc. We can relax because we know the outcome was lawful (unless we witnessed a miracle).

As Mikulas (1983) points out, this accepting attitude gives us a certain freedom--a toleration of whatever happens. We may, of course, have a preference about what happens, and if the desired behavior occurs, we are happy, but if something else happens, we can be equally happy, because we accept reality (laws) and we learned some important information about the laws of behavior. The freedom from being right or winning and just focusing on observing and learning is a great relief.

**STEP FOUR: Give up trying to control everything, loosen up.**

As it is said in Desiderata, whether you understand it or not, the world is unfolding as it should. Eastern philosophies advocate acceptance or "going with the flow of the river." Going upstream is very hard and probably isn't the right direction anyway. Focus on learning to control your own life within a little bubble, don't worry much about changing the course of great rivers.

**STEP FIVE: With practice you can learn to have a detached, calm, accepting attitude. That is peace of mind.**

Peace of mind includes more than inner calm, it is accepting oneself, others, and the world. It is being sensitive to being off center, i.e. things beginning to go wrong, and doing something about the problems right away. It is a wonderful mental state, but no one can achieve it all the time.

### Time involved

These changes require major revisions in the way we think, that will take a lot of time and effort.

### Common problems

The difficulty many people have accepting determinism is discussed in the last method. Likewise, most people believe they are their actions, beliefs, feelings, etc. Becoming detached from what has been the "essence of ourselves" is very difficult. That is why it takes so long to learn.

### Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Several major therapies, as well as Eastern philosophies, advocate "centering" and have great faith in it. Aside from personal testimony, there is little research of its effectiveness (research mostly consists of assessing the influence of something that can be carried out in 30 minutes or so). The advantages of being calm and an astute observer are obvious, if they are true. There are no known dangers, although anything that might reduce our vigilance and sensitivity to problems could be a problem.

My greatest reservation is centered on the promises implied about peace of mind, much like the promises associated with meditation and hypnosis. The promises of "clear, accurate perceptions," "effective minds free of confusion," and "a real self that can't be hurt," are bothersome.

### Recommended reading

Mikulas, W. L. (1983). *Skills of living*. New York: University Press of America.

## Reducing Unwanted Emotions

### Meditation

Meditation is, in its simplest form, an unguided, unintentional, sustained fantasy or mental state of reflection and contemplation. It is a relaxing experience, and adult "quiet time," a self-paced desensitization process. But insight is often hoped for as well as relaxation. Indeed, the Tibetan meditates to commune with the "cosmic mind," not to relax. But why might some insight occur even if you don't believe in a cosmic mind? Meditation involves shutting out the complex and confusing external world and, at the same time, making no demands on the mind. Some theorists assume that the mind, unburdened with pressing everyday demands and monumental problems to solve, is automatically clear and creative in providing for our growth and inner harmony. Thus, when the mind is free to focus where it will (not where we direct), it explores important topics and gains deeper understanding for us. Other theorists make different

assumptions, namely, that during meditation the person focuses all their attention on one activity--breathing or a candle or a sound--which diverts energy away from holding down repressed thoughts and feelings. Thus, the unconscious thoughts and emotions can, in theory, escape or slip out, leading to new insights and awareness.

Meditation is commonly associated with religion, both eastern religions and Christianity, as we saw in method #1, Benson's method of relaxing. Many people meditate seeking greater religious faith or communion with God. Meditation is an ancient art. About 500 B.C. Buddha said that (1) life is suffering, (2) suffering is caused by desires, and (3) reduce your suffering by giving up desires. Thus, Zen meditation became an accepting way of life in the East, not a way, like self-help, to actively solve and remove immediate personal problems but a passive-acceptance way.

### Purposes

- To provide relaxation and, consequently, better health. (Be skeptical, see cautions below.)
- To achieve the state of "restful awakeness" in which the body slows down (breathing rate, heart rate, and EEG waves have been demonstrated to be reduced) and the mind supposedly becomes more capable (not proven) and one becomes more confident of self-control.

There are many more benefits claimed for meditation but they are unproven:

- Solutions to pressing personal problems.
- The recall of early repressed experiences.
- By recognizing the constancy of change, you become better prepared for and more accepting of change.
- By sensing your oneness with others, with God, and with the universe, you may gain the joy and comfort of being a natural part of all that is and ever will be.
- There are dangerous claims by some radical writers that serious physical diseases can be cured (like cancer). There are mystical claims, for instance that your soul can leave your body and travel great distances to communicate with others.

### Steps

#### STEP ONE: Read more about meditation

Meditation is done daily, perhaps for life. To even get a feel for meditation you need to read about it and practice it for a few months. So it is a major undertaking; you need good advice from more than one teacher. Several references are given below; I recommend Kabat-Zinn (1990 and 1994), Singh (1996), or Goleman (1991). A word of caution: some writers promise magical, mystical powers. This poses a problem: you need to be motivated and to have hopes that meditating

for months will bring rewards, but to hope for "magic" and, as a result, forsake better forms of treatment would be a mistake. Meditation is worthwhile as a relaxant alone (see Benson). If it also brings you a few insights from time to time, that's a bonus. There are no miracle self-help methods.

## STEP TWO: Find a daily time and place to meditate

Set aside one-half hour each day. Select a time when you are least pressured. Of course, it is essential to have a quiet, uninterrupted place, perhaps your room, a church or a private spot outdoors.

## STEP THREE: Get into a comfortable, alert position and withdraw within

Sit in a comfortable, relaxed position. Do not lie down, the head should be free to move. The classical position is the crossed legs, but any sitting position is fine, e.g. in a simple straight back chair. Then close your eyes (unless focusing on a visual object). Sit quietly for a minute or so, letting your body relax and your mind forget the external pressures on you. Withdraw to within yourself.

## STEP FOUR: To free the mind, focus on something constant

The purpose is to free the mind. Thus, no demands should be made on it by the external world or by your own directions or wishes. The way pressure is removed from the mind is to focus your attention on one thing, e.g. (1) the flame of a candle, (2) your own breathing--the internal sensations in the nose, throat, chest and stomach created by breathing, or (3) a simple pleasant sound (called a mantra), such as "oohmm" or "hoomme," made every time you exhale.

When images or thoughts do occur to your mind, don't be concerned, don't pursue them or push them out. Remember, you are giving up control. Just relax and when the thought is finished, go back to focusing on the candle or breathing or sound. The focusing should, with practice, become effortless.

## STEP FIVE: Let the mind go free, observe it

You merely continue to focus your awareness on something (candle, breathing or sound); it is not determined concentration. Don't insist that your mind stay on the focus, which would be controlling your thoughts. Give up control, just let things happen. Thoughts, plans, memories, and fantasies will enter your mind. You may get lost in a thought for a little while. That is fine. When the thoughts have passed, return to your focus of awareness. The mind should be left free, "on its own." Occasionally, it will seem as though nothing is happening. That's fine too. Stay relaxed. It is all natural. Your attitude is important; be serious, calm, interested, optimistic, tolerant, relaxed, and open to new insights but not pressing for them.

Calmly observe whatever comes into your awareness--images, fantasies, emotions, concerns, thoughts or solutions. If it is important, you will remember it, no effort is necessary. Always return to your focus and make no demands on your mind. With practice, skeptical ideas and distracting sensations, like an itch, will fade away. More frequently you will have thoughts or feelings that reveal more significant emotions and insights. Your ability to relax will gradually increase. Don't demand rapid progress; being self-critical or dissatisfied with meditation only slows your progress.

#### STEP SIX: Coming back to the real world

After 20 to 30 minutes, stop focusing your awareness on the candle, breathing or sound and allow yourself to slowly come out of the deep state of relaxation. Open your eyes. Move slightly. Start thinking again. This may take two or three minutes but you should emerge relaxed and with new energy.

#### STEP SEVEN: Record the experience

You may find it profitable to record the experiences you have while meditating (like a dream journal--see chapter 14). Or you may want to rate the relaxation and/or useful insight after each session in order to measure progress. Do not expect fantastic insights immediately. Understanding ourselves takes time.

#### Time involved

It is ideal to spend several hours reading about meditation, but it isn't necessary. It will take a few minutes to select something to focus on but the major time commitment is 30 minutes a day for at least several weeks.

#### Common problems

It is rare but a few people find meditating unpleasant; they may feel afraid, overwhelmed or bored. In such cases, it is best to stop meditating. Perhaps one should seek professional help to understand this reaction.

The biggest problem, as I see it, is the unwarranted promises made by some meditation-yoga literature. Of course, for some people the mystical purposes are their major reasons for practicing meditation. One never knows if the results of meditation are due to (1) these promises--like astrotravel, curing serious diseases, and spiritual union with the cosmos--and placebo effects, (2) the philosophy of acceptance and hope, or (3) the process of meditating. Perhaps it doesn't matter, except to the researcher.

Another problem is the dedication needed to persist day after day. Your "mind" may at first resist and try to talk you out of meditating:

"there is so much to do," "you probably aren't meditating right," "it is a waste of time," "you may think of something dreadful," etc. Continue for a month before you decide if it is worthwhile.

### Effectiveness, advantages and danger

The method is as old as recorded history, so it has withstood the test of time. It also illustrates the human tendency to avoid testing the effectiveness of mystical processes. Recently, there have been more scientific studies. In general, the combination of meditation, the accompanying philosophy, and the suggestion-placebo effects seems to yield these results: relaxation, better self-control and self-evaluation, more confidence in self-control, reduction ("desensitization") of frightening ideas and concerns, and greater awareness of internal and external stimuli (Shapiro & Zifferblatt, 1976). But...

When David Holmes (1984) compared the effectiveness of meditation with simple resting, he found no significant differences! Subjects relaxed (as measured in several ways) equally well using meditation or relaxation. Furthermore, experienced meditators became just as physiologically aroused in stressful situations as did nonmeditators. That is not shocking, except that meditators would like to believe their method is best. There is no magic method.

Meditation's long association and similarity with religion makes it just as hard to evaluate as religion. The belief that meditation provides a sense of oneness and communion with everything in the universe is based on the beliefs and testimony of millions of Hindus and Buddhists and other practitioners. How do you challenge that? Perhaps, the inner peace and tolerance of all things, claimed by so many from meditation, can be scientifically demonstrated eventually. (On the other hand, the value of tolerance, when it is tolerance of ignorance, injustice and problems, has to be questioned.) We, as a society, should demand more hard evidence from our soft sciences. Like religion, the promise of so much is both meditation's strength and its weakness. Just don't expect it to cure physical diseases or provide long-distance messages. These can be better accomplished by modern medicine and a telephone.

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## Desensitization

What is fear? In a simple sense, it is a connection between certain neutral stimuli and an inappropriate emotional reaction (identified as fear), such as a fear of heights or leaving home or public speaking etc. Desensitization is a treatment procedure designed to break that connection and replace the fear response to the situation with a stronger relaxed response. It is also called counter-conditioning. Fear is countered with calm relaxation, since you can't feel both fear and calm at the same time.

How is this done? Very gradually. You start with mildly scary situations where a strong relaxed response might over-ride the weak anxiety response. You imagine being in that slightly disturbing scene while remaining very relaxed. You do this over and over, breaking the connection with fear. Next, you do the same thing with a slightly more scary situation. You continue this process until you can imagine climbing a tower, leaving home, or speaking to a crowd without experiencing strong fear. Then you are ready to handle reality (not without some anxiety but without overwhelming fear).

## Purposes

- To relieve excessive, unreasonable or unneeded fears and traumatic memories, such as a fear of heights, violence, war,

flying, the dark, bugs, public speaking, taking tests, meeting people, asserting one's self, being away from home and many other situations.

- To break the connection between any given situation and an unwanted emotional response, e.g. to extinguish depression or anger associated with a certain person or behavior or situation. For instance, several students have used this method to reduce their jealousy when a date or spouse attends to another person.

## Steps

### STEP ONE: Learn a method of relaxing

Deep-muscle relaxation is recommended, but any method that works well for you is fine. Some therapists use drugs; self-hypnosis (chapter 14) might be a good choice. You may find that a certain time or place relaxes you, e.g. right after awakening, after exercising, or in bed late at night. Thorough, strong relaxation is necessary because it must over-ride the fear reaction.

Recently, a new, rather strange sounding desensitization procedure has been developed for use by professionals (Shapiro, 1995). Instead of using relaxation, this method uses rapid eye movements (left and right), much like what occurs with the eyes closed during dreams. The therapist quickly moves his/her finger back and forth in front of the client and the client follows the finger with his/her eyes. While moving his/her eyes, the client also focuses his/her awareness on the traumatic memory or scary scene... and he/she should also focus on the physical bodily sensations associated with the fear or anxiety. Rapid reduction of the fearful reactions are reported. In addition, repressed traumas are sometimes uncovered and new positive feelings about themselves are claimed by some clients after only an hour or two of this process. More research of this procedure is needed but it is an interesting finding (I expected it would go the way of Silva Mind Control, EST Seminars, NLP eye movements, etc. but it hasn't yet; it has strong supporters and critics.).

Dr. Richmond provides detailed instructions for [Systematic Desensitization](http://members.aol.com/avpsyrich/sysden.htm) ( <http://members.aol.com/avpsyrich/sysden.htm>) very similar to mine. At this page you can also find links to several other self-help methods, such as [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](http://members.aol.com/avpsyrich/intro.htm) ( <http://members.aol.com/avpsyrich/intro.htm>) , meditation, and prayer. We will use deep muscle relaxation in our example.

### STEP TWO: Study your fear response (or other emotional response)

Every time you have the unwanted emotional response, record these five things: (a) the antecedents or situation prior to the emotional response, (b) the feelings you have, e.g. fear or anger, including the intensity on a scale of 0 to 99, (c) the thoughts you

have, (d) how you behave while experiencing the emotion, and (e) the consequences of your response, i.e. how others react to you and what the outcome usually is. This information has many uses: (a) and (b) will be necessary in the next step when you rank order several scary scenes, (c) is needed to know if your thoughts--misinformation or misperceptions--might cause the emotions, (d) and (e) help you determine if your emotional reaction is being reinforced by others. If the emotional response doesn't occur very often, imagine what it is like and make these ratings.

Keep these records for a week or so, and then try to answer these questions: Could I avoid these situations? If the emotion occurs in many situations, what do they have in common (e.g. a fear of criticism or losing control or looking dumb?) Could the emotions be based on misconceptions? (Is the probability of rejection that high? Is the teacher or boss that critical?) Could the emotions be yielding some payoff? (Do fears keep me dependent and cared for? Does anger get me my way?) These records provide some answers and a way of measuring your progress in overcoming the fear.

### STEP THREE: Make a list of scary situations

Use the rating (a) and (b) above. For each fear, make a list (called a hierarchy) of 10 to 20 scary situations that you have faced or might. Start the list with a few very slightly disturbing situations or scenes. In very small steps, add more scenes that arouse more and more fear or anxiety (see samples below). Use a fear scale from 0 (not frightening at all) to 100 (terrorizing) to rate each scene. The increase in rated fear from one scene to the next in the hierarchy should be no greater than 10 scale score units. It's important to conquer the fear one small step at a time. It's also important to include *realistic* but scary scenes at the frightening end of the list. Do not include scenes that involve real dangers or consequences that would inevitably be disturbing, e.g. if you are afraid of flying, do not include a scene where you burn up in a fiery crash. If you are afraid of speaking to groups, do not imagine the crowd becomes unruly, throws tomatoes and boos you off the stage. Instead, include at the high end (rated about 75, not 99) scenes of things you'd like to do if you were not afraid, such as flying safely cross-country or successfully addressing a large audience.

Several sample hierarchies are given below (Rosen, 1976). They illustrate the kind of list you should develop for each specific fear but they probably do not fit your situation accurately enough to be used as they are. Example: suppose you are uncomfortable in social gatherings. It is crucial that you know why you are scared--is it the number of people? the type of people? the activities engaged in? the topics of conversation? the drinks and drugs being offered? the way you talk or act? the way you look? the way people look at you? what you think they are thinking about you? The relevant factors need to be included in your hierarchy (Rosen, 1976).

Problem: Speaking to a familiar class--

| Item # | Rating (0-100) | Scary Scenes  |
|--------|----------------|---|
| 1.     | 8              | Signing up for a class that requires presentations.   |
| 2.     | 15             | Hearing the instructor describe what is to be done in our presentations.  |
| 3.     | 20             | Going to the library and preparing the talk--and thinking about what I will say. Wondering if the material I find will be of interest.  |
| 4.     | 25             | Watching others give their talk. Seeing that they are nervous.  |
| 5.     | 30             | Realizing the presentation is just a week away and planning when to finish preparing and when to practice.  |
| 6.     | 35             | Rehearsing the talk in my room in front of a mirror. The notes are not well organized but I'm getting smoother.   |
| 7.     | 40             | I invite a friend over to hear my talk. He/she listens intently and makes some suggestions.   |
| 8.     | 50             | Final practice the night before it is due. Three or four friends come over and listen while I rehearse again. I am a little bothered by their being there but I know the speech pretty well.  |
| 9.     | 55             | Going into class--wondering if I will be called on first, trying to keep my opening remarks in mind, and hoping a fantastic speaker doesn't go right before me.   |
| 10.    | 60             | Sitting in class, waiting to be called on. Only partially listening to what is being said by other presenters, mostly thinking about what I will say.   |
| 11.    | 65             | The teacher calls on me, I walk up to the rostrum, spread out my notes, make eye contact, see the teacher smiling at me, and feel ready to start my talk.   |
| 12.    | 70             | I give the speech-I remember the opening lines, it is going pretty well, occasionally I don't use exactly the right words but it's OK. The class seems interested. I finish and there is a little round of applause. They smile and I sit down. |

Naturally, one would want the ability to speak to groups to generalize to other settings. So you might select scary scenes that involve speaking up at social gatherings, handling a business meeting,

making a point at an intellectual discussion, challenging some point made by a speaker, etc. If large audiences are a problem for you, imagine addressing a class of 40, then 80, 120, etc. until you are speaking to stadiums or to TV. If it is the nature of the audience that bothers you, imagine addressing people from your home town, a group of your teachers and professors, or a critical audience who asks you lots of questions.

Problem: Fear of flying

| Item # | Rating (0-100) | Scary Scene   |
|--------|----------------|---|
| 1.     | 5              | Realizing I will have to fly some place.  |
| 2.     | 10             | Planning the flight, making reservations and asking for a big plane.  |
| 3.     | 15             | Packing my bags on the morning of the flight.   |
| 4.     | 20             | Saying "good bye" to my wife and kids.  |
| 5.     | 25             | Playing down my concerns about flying to my wife but being really afraid of a crash.                                    |
| 6.     | 30             | Driving to the airport and watching the planes come in to land.   |
| 7.     | 35             | Going into the terminal and finding out the plane will be 15 minutes late.  |
| 8.     | 40             | Waiting to board and seeing some questionable characters waiting for the same plane.                                    |
| 9.     | 45             | Watching the plane taxi up to the boarding gate; looks huge.  |
| 10.    | 50             | Getting on board and finding my seat near the front.  |
| 11.    | 55             | Plane is backed away from terminal; it squeaks and there is noise.  |
| 12.    | 60             | Plane starts on its own power; I know there is no turning back.   |
| 13.    | 65             | Stewardess gives safety instructions; I try to find exits and think about how I could get to one if there were a crash. |
| 14.    | 70             | Plane waits for take off; there is a loud roar and a forward surge as it starts down the runway to take off.            |
| 15.    | 75             | Plane gains speed going down the runway; I see the terminal out the window.   |

|     |    |  |
|-----|----|--|
| 16. | 80 | I can see the ground rapidly moving away as we gain altitude.  |
| 17. | 85 | The plane enters some clouds; I know the pilot can't see anything.   |
| 18. | 90 | I have to get up to go to the bathroom; I have trouble walking straight and it seems bumpy in the bathroom.                                    |
| 19. | 95 | The pilot warns that there may be some turbulence ahead and asks people to put on their seat belts; it gets rough as we come in for a landing. |

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Problem: fear of social dating.

| Item # | Rating (0-100) | Scary Scene   |
|--------|----------------|---|
| 1.     | 5              | I overhear a friend call someone for a date.  |
| 2.     | 8              | I ask this friend to describe what he/she did to prepare for the phone call and the date. He/she tells me the details.  |
| 3.     | 15             | I am at a party with friends. Someone comes up and starts a conversation with us. I ask this person a question and he/she answers. I like his/her comment and say, "That's a good point." |
| 4.     | 22             | I am at a party with a group of friends. I get into an extended conversation with someone. I wonder if I will have anything to say; it turns out to be enjoyable.                         |
| 5.     | 28             | I am at another party and get into an conversation with someone attractive. At the end of the conversation I ask this person if he/she would like to go to a show with me.                |
| 6.     | 33             | I am at home and phone someone for a date. The person says he/she is busy that evening but would like to do something at another time.  |
| 7.     | 40             | same, but does not suggest getting together at another time.  |
| 8.     | 43             | I call someone for a date and he/she asks me several questions about my interests and my work before agreeing to go out. I handled the questions all right.                               |
| 9.     | 48             | I go to a party alone and try to make conversation. I'm not trying to find a date, just making light social   |

conversation. Sometimes I don't know what to say but they usually think of something when I can't.

- |     |    |   |
|-----|----|---|
| 10. | 53 | I see someone at a party I'd like to meet. I go over and introduce myself and find out about them. They have a boy (girl) friend.                         |
| 11. | 58 | I call up a person I met in class and ask them to have a coke some afternoon after class. He/she says that would be nice.                                 |
| 12. | 63 | I have a coke with this person and we talk about school, home-town, interests, and so on. Then I ask him/her to go to a concert with me the next weekend. |
| 13. | 69 | I have a whole evening with a date. We go out to eat, then to a show. Later, we stop for a drink and I take him/her home. The conversation goes OK.       |

Successful dating may not be just a matter of overcoming fears; it is likely to involve many skills--approaching people, conversing, self-disclosing, empathizing, knowing about current events, being able to tolerate silence, having stories to tell, having a sense of humor, being able to touch, etc. So, first identify the social skills needed, then imagine rehearsing these new skills over and over, and finally try them out in real life (see chapter 13). Usually, gaining skills reduces fears. Clearly, reducing our fears frees us to use the skills we have.

After you have constructed your hierarchy of increasingly scary scenes, write each one on a 3 x 5 card. This way you can easily add a scene if it is needed. Also, feel free to modify your scenes to make them more realistic or easier to imagine--and to make them more or less frightening.

#### STEP FOUR: Shift back and forth between imagining the scary scenes and relaxing

After learning to relax and making a hierarchy, you are ready to replace fear with relaxation. Follow this procedure:

Become deeply relaxed (using your preferred method). The task is to have a stronger relaxed response than fear response while imagining the scary scenes. So, if you start to feel tense anytime while imagining the scenes, turn off the scene and go back to relaxing, then continue. Place the 3 x 5 cards in order on your lap so you can easily refer to them without disrupting your relaxation.

The crux of the desensitization process is continuously (every 10-30 seconds) shifting back and forth between (a) briefly imagining a scary scene and (b) relaxing. The purpose is to stay thoroughly relaxed while imagining the scenes; thus, breaking the situation-fear connection. Example: visualize a scary scene for 10 to 30

seconds, whatever is comfortable for you. Then, go back to relaxing and giving yourself relaxation instructions for 10 to 30 seconds. Then, imagine the same scene again for 10 to 30 seconds, relax again, imagine, relax, etc. until the scene no longer arouses anxiety. You are ready to go on to the next scene.

If you become tense while imagining the scenes, you will be strengthening the situation-fear connection, so stop the fantasy and go back to relaxing. If a scene consistently arouses anxiety, it is probably too big a jump from the previous scenes or it is more scary than you judged it to be. There are three things to do: go back and work on the less-scary scenes more, add some less scary scenes that lead up to this one, or this scene may be out of order and needs to be moved to later in the hierarchy.

After you have imagined a scene three consecutive times (10 to 30 seconds each) without experiencing anxiety, you can go on to the next scene on the list. Imagine each scary scene as vividly as possible, include details and realistic action. Visualize the situation exactly as it is, picture the people involved, see clearly how you behave, etc. Hear, feel and smell everything that is going on too. There are perhaps thousands of stimuli associated with the unwanted fear response. Each of these connections has to be broken. The more life-like you make the imagined scene, the faster your fear of the real situation will be extinguished.

Do desensitization for 30 minutes to one hour every other day or 1/2 hour every day in a quiet, private place. Start each new session by repeating the most intense scene you imagined the last session and then work up the hierarchy from there. Continue the method until you can imagine all the scenes without feeling fear (or whatever feeling you are extinguishing).

#### STEP FIVE: Confront the real situation

What is important is how well you can handle the real life situation. So, after desensitizing all the scary scenes, test your reaction in reality. After imagining approaching people you find attractive, then be sure to approach people in real life--start a conversation with someone in your class, ask someone to go out, etc. Keep in mind, there is a lag, often, between what you have done with ease in fantasy and what you will be able to do easily in real life. But your anxiety should be reduced by desensitization sufficiently that you can now handle the real situations that previously frightened you away. Expose yourself to the scary real situations over and over while relaxing as much as possible. Soon you will have conquered your unreasonable fears. Keep practicing your new skills.

Keep in mind that fear is natural in many situations. You can't eliminate it entirely. It may even be beneficial. Almost everyone feels tense giving a speech (anxiety helps us prepare). Who doesn't feel a tinge of fear when 40 or 50 feet above the ground? Who doesn't feel a



little jealous sometimes? The goal is not to remove all fears, just to make them tolerable and to avoid being controlled by unreasonable fears.

### Time involved

Learning to relax may take two to five hours. Another one or two hours for making up your own unique hierarchy. Some people get results after only a few hours of desensitization; others require three hours a week for a couple months. If you don't get results in that time, see a professional. Don't expect instant cures; the professionals take months too. Most fears have occurred many times in the same situation, i.e. fear has been paired with a stimulus and/or reinforced perhaps thousands of times. It isn't unreasonable to expect 1/10th as many unlearning trials as were involved in the original learning, so if you have gotten a little anxious in class a thousand times while preparing to speak up (even if you didn't go through with it), it may take 100+ fantasies of speaking without fear to extinguish the fear.

It also takes time to "test out" the fears in real situations. Sometimes the test situation is hard to arrange. A plane trip in rough weather isn't easy to schedule. How often do you get to give a speech? You will just have to wait until the real occasion arises. When it does, prepare well and desensitize yourself again right before testing out your reactions. At other times, the opportunity to test oneself is readily available and can be done in a few minutes (like calling someone for a date).

### Common problems

Several problems have already been mentioned: some people can't relax, others have trouble fantasizing, some hierarchies have gaps between items, sometimes actually dangerous or harmful scenes are included at the end of the hierarchy. Some people are afraid of fear; they worry and fret when they think about having fears and would prefer to believe they have no concerns at all.

Sometimes what appears to be the major fear is not the real problem. Joseph Wolpe (1958) gave an example of a man who thought he was afraid of open places who was really afraid of dying (and being unable to get help). Another patient, who avoided all social interaction, was basically afraid of being trapped in her marriage. These are unusual cases, but it would be naive to assume that we are aware of the true sources of all our fears.

In step one, it was mentioned that some emotions are the result of our thinking and expectations and misunderstandings. In these cases, our thoughts and views need to be corrected (Burns, 1980, for depression). Other emotions yield payoffs; it is unlikely that desensitization will extinguish an emotional response that is being

highly reinforced, such as one person's jealousy that keeps his/her partner from associating with any attractive competitors. You may have to give up the payoffs first.

Desensitization is not a fast cure. It takes hours spread over weeks or months. And in the end you have to do whatever you are afraid of-- fly in a plane, ride in an elevator, give a speech, ask for a date, etc. That involves some stress, so why not just "bite the bullet" and immediately do what you are afraid of doing? For some people confronting the fear (method #6) would be more efficient but for many it seems impossible to do without the aid of a method like desensitization.

Lastly, there is some evidence that body chemistry is involved in some fears, especially agoraphobia (fear of being away from home) which is difficult to treat. Fortunately, tricyclic antidepressants are effective in preventing the panic reactions of some people with agoraphobia, so that 1/3 do not need psychotherapy or desensitization. Yet, even if biochemical factors are involved, desensitization claims an 85% cure rate with agoraphobia (Salholz, Namuth, Zabarsky, Junkin, & Jackson, 1984).

### Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Extensive research during the last 20 to 25 years has generally documented the effectiveness of desensitization. Wolpe originally reported 90% effectiveness but later results have not been quite so positive. Psychologists do not know exactly how it works. There is clearly a strong suggestion effect built into the method. And, some experiments have found powerful placebo effects (suggestion effects) to be as effective in reducing fears as desensitization.

Since it emphasizes relaxation, desensitization is excellent for people who hate pain and stress. It is painless. Another advantage is that the procedures are simple and easily understood. As mentioned in chapter 5, self-desensitization has been reported to be more effective than therapist administered desensitization. It is a lot cheaper. There are no known dangers.

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### Case illustration

In the middle 1960's, I started giving my psychotherapy patients little lecturettes about how to help themselves with rewards, desensitization, etc. One of these clients was a graduate student in zoology who had a fear of heights. The fear was life-long and, indeed, it was a family trait. She was so bright and motivated that I explained the idea of desensitization (or counter-conditioning) to her in 10 minutes or so. She immediately understood the concept and thought she could use it on her own. Her fear had restricted her a lot: she couldn't walk up a fire escape or climb a ladder. It was stressful to look out of windows above the first floor, ride an elevator, and fly. Most difficult were climbing towers and walking on boat docks one can see through.

By the next session one week later, she had been relaxing and imagining climbing the fire escape in her dorm. As soon as she could imagine climbing half a flight of stairs without being tense, she immediately went out to the fire escape and did it! During that week she had climbed up one and a half flights. She felt fantastic about her accomplishment. By the end of the second week, she was climbing the fire escape to a friend's room on the fifth floor and looking out her window! These accomplishments were not easy for her but she became confident she could do it. She was delighted with herself--and with desensitization.

The third week was spring break and she was going to Florida. Before going, she imagined walking on docks while relaxing. She came back gleeful; she had walked on and looked through every dock she could find in Florida. She was also writing all her relatives about how to overcome their fears of heights. She hadn't done desensitization

exactly like the textbooks say but she grabbed the idea and ran with it. She changed herself...and she changed me too (I became much more interested in self-help).

## Self-desensitization in the real situation (in vivo)

Keep yourself calm and very gradually approach the stressful situation. Get a friend to provide support. Relax before the confrontation and during it as much as possible. The objective is to extinguish the unreasonable fear response by replacing it with a more relaxed response. To do this, you need a hierarchy of real situations involving increasing stresses. The rationale for in vivo is the same as systematic desensitization (method #4).

### Purposes

- To reduce the unwanted fears and stresses associated with many situations where the fear is excessive or unreasonable.
- To enable you to handle scary situations better and with less emotional stress.

The procedures are the same as in the last method, except that here you use real situations, not imagined scenes. Refer to the last method for detailed instructions.

### Steps

#### STEP ONE: List the stressful situations in order of scariness

Describe several situations related to your fear on separate 3 x 5 cards. List only situations that are readily available to you, e.g. asking questions in class if you are a phonophobic student (whereas flying cross-country several times might be expensive treatment for an aerophobiatic). Arrange 10 or 15 of the situations in order from least scary to most scary. For example, if you wanted to ask a special someone for a date, you might first (1) talk with a friend about asking this person out, (2) ask this friend to help you plan the date, (3) ask another friend to role-play the situation in which you practice approaching this special person, (4) talk to the special person without asking him/her out, and so on.

There are other ways to gradually approach a real situation: (1) look at a picture of a scary situation (or imagine it) instead of actually being there, (2) look at the scary situation, such as a tower or animal, from a distance and gradually approach it, (3) take a supportive friend along, (4) shorten the amount of time spent in the scary situation, and (5) approach smaller or less scary versions of the thing you fear (examples: approach less attractive males/females before the beautiful ones or buy a puppy if afraid of big dogs).

## STEP TWO: Develop an emotion incompatible with fear

You need some emotion to counter the fear, usually relaxation but perhaps fatigue or anger or assertiveness. The relaxation techniques given earlier will do fine. Recently, it has been reported that fatigue, e.g. immediately after jogging your limit, is incompatible with fear, just as relaxation is. So the person with a fear of elevators might run three miles first and end up jogging into the elevator. An assertive attitude, such as "I won't let them push me around any more," can counter fear.

## STEP THREE: Confront the scary situations starting with a very mildly stressful one

Place yourself in the least frightening situation on your 3 x 5 cards and remain as relaxed as possible. Stay in the situation or repeat it over and over until you are entirely unafraid. Work your way through the list until you can handle the most scary situation well. It might be helpful to record and reward your progress.

### Time involved

The time depends on availability of the situations. If actual circumstances seem impossible to arrange, you always have your imagination (method #4).

### Common problems

Many real life situations just aren't available at the right time. Sometimes it is hard to arrange actual situations close enough together in scariness that you can move on easily to the next situation. In these cases, use some of the suggestions in step one above or use imagined scenes instead of real situations to fill in the gaps.

### Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Watson and Tharp (1972) gave three reasons why in vivo desensitization may be better than fantasized scenes: (1) the actual behavior change is what is important--the real-life problems eventually have to be faced anyway, (2) imagined scenes are not as complete and realistic as the real thing, thus, it takes longer to extinguish the fear, and (3) often effective coping with the situation requires more than removal of fears. Watson and Tharp cite a case of a shy young woman who reduced her fear of men via desensitization but had not learned how to converse, how to handle their advances, or how to handle her other emotions besides fear. With in vivo desensitization the social skills are, hopefully, being learned as the fears are reduced.

There are no known scientific evaluations of in vivo self-desensitization. Of course, the method has been used many times in

therapy and described in case studies. Throughout history, people have learned as much as possible about the things they fear as a way of conquering the phobias. A famous case is Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, one of the world's greatest minds--a poet, author and philosopher. Goethe was born into wealth and became a good student but a restless, sexually active playboy in 1765-70. During this time, he became seriously ill and was treated at home for a year. Following this illness, he became obsessed with fears of having "diseased organs." He decided to study medicine as a means of overcoming his morbid fears. Goethe's greatest work, *Faust*, tells of a man striving for complete knowledge of life in all its forms. Faust is torn between the devil, who provides him with many life experiences, and God. Eventually, God saves Faust from the devil, partly because Faust continually sought self-improvement in the hopes of becoming perfect.

There are no known dangers except the stress you might feel if you proceed too rapidly. Of course, you should never do anything dangerous in an effort to overcome a fear. We are talking only about overcoming unreasonable fears, not realistic fears.

### Additional reading

Watson, D. & Tharp, R. (1972). *Self-directed behavior*

### Exposure to the fear (flooding)

There are two ideas involved. First is the idea that irrational fears grow stronger whenever we run away from the scary-but-not-dangerous situation. Second is the idea that we can change our attitude from, "I can't stand the stress" to "I can stand it." Putting these ideas together, the method is to gradually approach the frightening situation with a strong determination to take all the fear it can generate.



The most thorough description of this method and its application is by Jeffers (1987).



### Purpose

- To quickly deal with excessive fears and anxieties in any scary situation that cannot hurt you.

### Steps

### STEP ONE: Arrange for plenty of time and a supportive friend, if needed, to help you

You should have at least two hours, perhaps all day. Select a friend who is sympathetic and encouraging, who can cheer you on and give advice like a coach. Besides, if the fears should become extremely intense, you need a dependable friend there in case you start to feel overwhelmed (not likely but be prepared).

### STEP TWO: Expose yourself to the scary situation

Approach the scary situation. If you can go all the way at first, then do it and stay in the situation until the fear declines. If you can't stand to go all the way at first, get as close as you can stand, wait until the fear declines at that point, and then advance a little further as you can tolerate it. Example: if you are afraid of elevators, perhaps you can just get on and ride all day until the fear subsides. If you can't get on it and ride immediately, you can stand outside it, then stand on it without going up or down, then go only one floor, etc.

### STEP THREE: Experience the fear completely until it loses its strength

The use of this method has gone different directions over the years. In this step I used to say: If needed hold your friend's hand, but approach the frightening situation so that the fear is intense. Don't try to reduce the fear, rather try to experience the fear fully. Tell yourself you want to feel it, not run away. Focus on the fear, not on the situation and not on your urge to run. Concentrate on your physical reactions (shaking, sweating, rapid heart beat, etc.) and on your thoughts about all the awful things that might happen. Recognize how unrealistic the thoughts and fears are.

Try to arouse the fear to its full fury, study it (telling yourself you can stand more), and challenge it to become even more intense. Welcome it. Be determined to stay right there as long as it takes to overpower and shrink the fear response. The fear will decline after some time, maybe after a couple hours or maybe after 6 or 8 hours (probably not that long).

Today, exposure has become a much more common approach because it is a very simple and effective way to reduce certain fears. But there is less emphasis on the need in most cases to arouse extreme fear. Just getting people to gradually expose themselves to heights or bugs or large (friendly) dogs or asking questions in meetings or public speaking may be all one needs to do. One reason for this change in approach is because commercial airlines and other businesses would like to help people get more comfortable using their products. In those cases arousing intense fear and having horrible fantasies are not desirable or acceptable. Some airlines provide a instructional/informational approach giving explanations of the physics of flying, the causes and consequences of turbulence, the reasons for

certain flight instructions and noises, the facts about airline safety, etc. All of which arouse many fantasies of flying. Other approaches simply expose potential flying customers over and over to various scenes (sights and sounds) they will encounter in flight. There are several impressive efforts to use computer-assisted instruction and videos to expose flight phobic people to scary situations until the anxiety responses are acceptable (Bornas, Tortella-Feliu, Llabrés & Fullana, 2001).

Many fears may involve situations you can not create, so you will need to use your imagination. Examples: speaking to large crowds or auto accidents or fires or a death. Pictures can be used to augment your fantasy. You have a choice to make the fantasies as scary as possible (as mentioned above and in implosive therapy--see method #10) or you can simply confront (in reality or in fantasy) the situations that make you uncomfortable until you are fairly comfortable. However, it seems clear to most of us that viewing a picture of the inside of a plane or of a street far below the balcony railing is not the same as being there. Likewise, imagining giving a speech is not the same as doing it. So your fantasies may need to approach reality fairly closely. This is the rationale for including scary scenes and distressing consequences, like a speaker being rejected by the audience, losing esteem in the eyes of the listeners, being rejected, questioned, and walked out on. Continue the fantasies until the anxiety is lowered to tolerable levels. The alternative would be to imagine over and over giving the speech and doing fairly well. I don't think we know which approach works best or when. In either case, when appropriate (and fairly promptly), you have to expose yourself to the real-but-not-dangerous situation until you can conquer the fear in real life.

#### STEP FOUR: Continue the exposure continuously until the fear is conquered

Don't give up. Don't be intimidated by the fear. Repeatedly have the experience if a few exposures are not enough (don't forget you may need new skills to become comfortable--relaxed dancers must learn how to dance; confident speakers must know what to say). Also, continue to have the experience occasionally, otherwise the fear may return.

#### Time involved

Possibly a total of 10 to 15 hours. It will take an hour or two for the fear to subside the first time, maybe much longer. Then the experience needs to be repeated.

#### Common problems

The most common problem is that people do not want to suffer the stress, in which case they could use [desensitization](#). This method is only appropriate when there is a specific and available scary situation.



Vague generalized anxiety doesn't involve a specific scary situation to confront.

### Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Several researchers (Gelder, 1976; MacLean and Graff, 1970; Olson, 1975) have found this method to be generally effective--also see references above and under fear and panic in chapter 5. The major advantage of the method is its speed. Another possible advantage is the self-esteem, the feeling of strength one might gain during the process. The major danger is, if during the exposure, the stress becomes too great and you give up. If the fear over-whelms you, you will be strengthening the fear response and weakening your self-confidence. There are probably some mild risks in the opposite direction, namely, of exposing yourself to various mildly scary scenes but never getting to the point of extinguishing the unwanted intense fear responses. This could actually strengthen your fear somewhat. Another danger is using the method *where real dangers exist*, like jumping into water over your head or confronting a bully or a vindictive boss. Don't do these things. We are only reducing *unrealistic* fears. Be careful, take no real risks.

### Additional readings

Gelder, M. (1976). Flooding. In T. Thompson & W. Dockens (Eds.), *Applications of behavior modification*. New York: Academic Press.

Olsen, P. (1975). *Emotional flooding*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books.

## Stress-inoculation: Self-instructions and coping imagery

Stress-inoculation involves gaining awareness of why we get upset. Then we learn ways to control our emotions, e.g. through self-instructions and rational thinking and by changing our attitudes and expectations. Finally, by imagining being in the stressful situation over and over, we can practice calming ourselves down with these self-help methods. Later, we use these same self-instructions and techniques to stay calm in the real situation. In short, we use our reasoning power and imagination to reduce our unwanted emotional responses.

This method combines several cognitive techniques into a complex treatment program which is useful with several emotions in many situations. Meichenbaum (1985) is the originator and principle advocate.

### Purposes

- To devise ways of coping with your stressful emotions, such as fears, anxiety, worries, sadness, anger, jealousy, guilt, shyness, self-criticism or almost any other emotion. Fear and anger are the most common emotions dealt with.
- To learn how to deal with one emotion experienced in many different stressful circumstances which you expect to face in the near future, including family, school, work, friends and so on. In this case you might list 15 or 20 situations that upset you, arranged from mild to intense stress or anger or submissiveness. Then learn to deal with the mildest first and work down the list, as in desensitization (method #4).
- To learn how to deal with a specific emotional situation, usually a scary or irritating one. Several case illustrations are given.

## Steps

### STEP ONE: Plan how to reduce the unwanted emotion by using thoughts, imagination, and self-instructions

This first step is an educational process: learning a variety of mental processes that can influence emotions. Cognitive theory emphasizes that emotions reflect how we appraise the situation, our expectations, our beliefs about others' motives and our interpretation of our physiological reactions, i.e. our thoughts determine our feelings. We need to understand this in detail.

Learn about Rational-Emotive Therapy (RET) and challenging irrational ideas (see method #3 in chapter 14). Ideas can produce emotions; changing our thinking (these ideas) can change our emotions. Consider these examples of how our ideas, automatic thoughts, attributions, conclusions, judgments, beliefs and self-statements can create anger within us: (remember these are *not* examples of things really said to another person; they are thoughts you might have about another person.)

- Intolerant thoughts--"I hate pushy people...stupid workers...stuck up people." More reasonable--"I understand them."
- High expectations--"This person (thoughts about a child, an employee, a student,...) should have known better...worked harder...been honest about it." More reasonable--"Sorry it worked out this way; can I help this person do better?"
- Punitive beliefs--"That was such an awful thing this person did, I feel like beating up on him/her...firing him/her...telling everyone." More reasonable--"I know this person had reasons for what he/she did, but can I help make sure it never happens again?"
- Wounded pride thinking--"Your spreading gossip about me really hurt, I'm going to tell everyone what a nasty person you are." More reasonable--"I felt hurt and betrayed, but I can handle that."

- Anger-producing, put-down, automatic thoughts--"You're deliberately being mean...who the hell do you think you are...you're a creep...you don't give a damn about me." Also, thinking of how you would like to hurt the other person only makes you more angry and irrational. More reasonable--"I'm making myself angry and unhappy; let's find a solution or avoid each other."

Many of our irrational emotion-causing thoughts are "shoulds"--"I should do better," "They should be better," "They should not treat me that way," "Things should not be this way," "They should be punished," and so on. These ideas reflect our own unfulfilled expectations; often they are our dreams or hopes that were never reasonable or carefully cultivated. Irrational ideas can be changed to be reasonable (see method #3 in chapter 14).

Learn to think logically. Our thinking is distorted in many ways (see method #8 in chapter 14). We often draw false conclusions about ourselves or others. We misunderstand the implications of someone's behavior; we misinterpret other peoples' comments; we make false assumptions about what people are thinking and feeling. Examples: Someone turns us down for a date and we conclude that most people would not want to go out with us. We are used and deceived by someone of the opposite sex and we conclude that all men/women are self-serving creeps. We are turned down after interviewing for seven different jobs and we conclude that there are no jobs to be had, that employers are prejudiced against us, or that there is nothing we can do to improve our chances of being selected. Our spouse hasn't been affectionate and we conclude that he/she is interested in someone else. In short, when we have negative expectations, we should ask ourselves "What is the evidence?" and "Is there another way to interpret that data?" As we saw in chapter 9, the best way to check our assumptions about how others are feeling and thinking is to *ask them!*

Learn to think like a determinist. So far as anyone knows, everything has its causes. Just as the laws of physics and chemistry describe the physical world, the laws of behavior describe the animal world. Every action, every feeling, every thought, so far as we know, has a cause--it is lawfully determined, even our "free will" and our "free choices." We can learn to accept our and others' behavior as being lawful, i.e. the natural, inevitable outcome of earlier events (see method 4 in chapter 14). We can't change the causes of the past and present; "it's water over the dam;" we may be able to change the causes of future events. It is on these logical grounds that a person can come to accept him/herself and others, to be tolerant of the past and hopeful to improve in the future.

Learn to be a hopeful self-helper. Believe you can change the unwanted emotions. Avoid defeatism. Avoid catastrophizing--ask yourself, "What is the worst that could happen? Would that be the end of the world?" Be optimistic--ask yourself, "Life is a lemon right now,

how can I make lemonade out of it?" or "What would a super well adjusted person in my situation say to themselves and do?" Think big. Think positive. Use your problem-solving and assertiveness skills (chapters 2 and 13) to plan several ways of changing the unwanted emotions.

Learn to give self-instructions to control your own behavior and emotions. This includes self-directions and advice about how to accomplish the task at hand (see method 2 in chapter 11). It also includes self-help techniques for relaxing and controlling other unwanted emotions (see methods in this chapter). For example, as our body tenses up, if we interpret this reaction as anger or fear, we will "feel" these emotions immediately and more intensely. On the other hand, if we learn (by practicing over and over) to interpret tension as simply a signal to relax, we can avoid unnecessary anger and excessive fear.

Many of us feel bad because we say negative statements to ourselves: "I'm going to mess it up...it will never work out...he/she won't like me...he/she is so selfish...they make me furious...I can't stand...." These thoughts are our negative interpretations of other peoples' behavior and intentions, of sensations inside our own body, of our own behavior and situation. Our thoughts could be positive instead and relax us, energize us, lead us wisely, give us hope, etc. Several Cognitive-Behavioral therapists have listed many coping self-statements:

- Preparing to meet a stressful situation
  - "I can handle this. I've practiced."
  - "I'm OK once I get started. I'll jump right in."
  - "Don't let the negative thoughts get you down."
  - "Relax and remember your plan."
- Confronting the situation
  - "Do one step at a time. It will work out."
  - "If I start to feel up tight, I can relax."
  - "Focus on the task at hand, not on the fear."
  - "It's OK to make a mistake. I'll do my best."
- Handling the emotions
  - "Take a second to breathe deeply and think about what to do next."
  - "Don't get too mad (frightened, passive)."
  - "I'm going to stand up for my rights now."
  - "Stay calm, it will be over soon."
- Enjoy the success
  - "I did it!"
  - "I can handle my feelings. I can relax away fear (anger, dependency, crying)."
  - "Next time it will be easier."

Make up your own list of coping statements. Repeat them over and over to yourself and say them with feeling, so they do not seem foreign to you when you use them under stress.

The essence of this "stress inoculation" method is the development of self-instructions that we can use in stressful situations to calm us down and make us more effective. The above methods and attitudes--RET, logical reasoning, determinism, optimism, self-instructions, and anything else that will work--can be utilized in the coping self-instructions developed by you for your specific situation in step three. But, first, you must be aware of your specific feelings in specific situations and your thoughts and attitudes that contribute to those feelings.

### STEP TWO: Run a mental movie of the emotion-arousing situation(s). What are your feelings? What are your thoughts?

In fantasy, re-live the stressful experience(s). Do this over and over, if needed. First, focus on your feelings and try to identify all the emotions you are having. There's probably more than one. What are the first signs of the unwanted emotion? (Use these as signals to relax.) Then, see if you can discover the ideas, automatic thoughts or beliefs you have that create or intensify your unwanted feelings. Ask yourself if you have possibly drawn false conclusions. Check to see if your attitudes are non-accepting of others or of yourself. Did you label other people as bad? Are you pessimistic and/or overly quick to conclude that there is nothing you can do about the situation?

The general idea is to understand the causes and sources of your feelings (not the external causes but your own thoughts and attitudes and false conclusions that cause or intensify emotions).

If you need to reduce your anxiety or anger, you should, at this point, make up a hierarchy of common situations you encounter that are associated with these emotions. See desensitization (method # 4) for instructions about how to rate these scenes. If you are dealing with only one situation, go on to step three.

### STEP THREE: Figure out better things to say to yourself; learn attitudes and self-instructions that will control your unwanted emotions

As you have gained awareness of your irrational ideas and false conclusions that generate your unwanted emotions, you have undoubtedly thought of some more reasonable ideas and attitudes to have. These positive, rational ideas and decisions are not adopted by our minds immediately; you have to reason out the ideas and double check the conclusions. You have to carefully control and consciously change your thinking. You have to constantly monitor your thinking for days or weeks. Changing from being illogical to logical is not an easy, automatic process. Specifically, you are looking for rational ideas to replace irrational ones, for valid conclusions instead of faulty ones, and for positive attitudes that can replace detrimental ones. You must learn new self-instructions that will help you stay in control of your emotions. Let's consider several illustrations.

Suppose you have a roommate who drives you up a wall by using and breaking your things, playing loud music, talking on and on about boring topics and neglecting his/her share of the cleaning and cooking. In step two above, you recognized your anger and your fear of the roommate's resentment of being confronted. In this step, you are looking for solutions. For instance, you wonder if you would be less irritated if you borrowed just as much from him/her. You wonder why the music and topics upset you: is it because you think these things prove he/she is an inconsiderate jerk who should be punished? Is that a valid conclusion if he/she thinks you like loud music and the topics? You wonder if you can reduce your anger: Can you tune the disruptions out or avoid the irritating behavior? Can you imagine the roommate being much worse and, thus, develop a tolerance for what he/she is? Can you go beat on the bed and get the anger out? Can you learn to like the music and topics? You wonder if the situation can be changed: Can you tell him/her how you feel and ask for changes? You try to imagine how these various approaches would work out.

Suppose after considering many alternatives you decide to confront the roommate. You expect tempers to flare but want to keep your anger under control and you want to get results. Here are some self-instructions that could replace irrational ideas and add some self-control at four stages typical of any angry conflict:

1. First stage--preparing for a conflict
  - o "I know how to handle these kind of situations. I have a good plan."
  - o "Remember, other people don't upset me, I upset myself with my own thoughts."
2. Second stage--facing the adversary
  - o "Don't get upset, stay in control of my emotions."
  - o "If I start to get angry, I'll try relaxing and checking out my irrational ideas...I can do it."
  - o "I'm trying to get a solution, rather than get even."
  - o "I'm going to give it a try, right now."
3. Third stage--handling your anger if it flares
  - o "OK, I'm getting up tight, relax and take a deep breath."
  - o "I can't just demand that other people be the way I want them to be, I have to show them good reasons for changing."
  - o "If I just understood this person--his/her past, his/her pain, his/her hopes--I'd realize why he/she is this way."
  - o "Take it slow and easy but firm; he/she will see my point."
  - o "Express your feelings and preferences clearly; be reasonable."
4. Fourth stage--after it's over
  - o "I did well! I avoided getting into a big fight and we came to a solution."
  - o "I'm proud of myself, I handled that without losing my cool."

Keep in mind that these self-instructions are not nearly all you would be saying to yourself. They are new additions to handle your anger and fear of the roommate's reactions during the confrontation. You still have to explain to the person what behavior you don't like and the changes you would like to see made (and what rewards and other consequences depend on the outcome). As you can see, there are many alternatives. In the past, you may not have seen all your choices. You may have acted impulsively. You may still be inclined to act on old habits. Yet, you could make choices.

Let's consider another example. Suppose you have just had an argument with your boy/girlfriend. You are afraid that he/she might stop going with you. The two of you have been going together two years; you have been close; you have loved each other; you have talked about getting married. It is crushing to think of breaking up, you feel panicky. You consider your alternatives. You wonder what you could say to smooth over the argument and how to get him/her to talk about it some more. Let's suppose he/she doesn't want to talk. He/she seems to want to break up. You wonder how you could ever stand losing him/her; it is so painful to think of all your life plans crumbling. What can you do to make it more bearable? Here are some self-instructions that might replace the awful catastrophizing:

1. First stage--we might break up
  - o "I hope it doesn't happen but I'm a survivor."
2. Second stage--it's definite, the relationship is over
  - o "It hurts so bad, but I'll be over it in a month if I don't drag it out."
  - o "I'd like to beg him/her to come back, but that would just prolong the agony."
  - o "I'll do some things with friends to forget (not talk about breaking up)."
  - o "I've been wanting to go traveling, now is a good time."
3. Third stage--this is the worst two or three weeks of my life
  - o "I have really hurt, but I'm glad I can love so deeply. I'd do it again."
  - o "I'm proud I can do so many things alone. It feels good not to be dependent and tied to a partner. It's important I stay independent."
  - o "I'll make plans to take another evening course; it keeps me up-to-date and sharp."
  - o "Just hang in there a couple more weeks and the pain will go away."
4. Fourth stage--I've got to get out of the dumps
  - o "I'm going to learn from the last relationship so I can make the next one even better."
  - o "Where and how am I going to find a good partner? I'll make some plans."
  - o "I'm really glad I can handle being alone but I'm going to ask \_\_\_\_\_ for a date."

I'm only suggesting that breaking up can be made less stressful, less depressing, less lonely, depending on how you view it (see chapters 6 and 8). There is no way to avoid all the pain.

#### STEP FOUR: Play the movie again. Use the self-help methods (developed in step three) to prevent or to reduce the unwanted emotions

You can, in effect, test out the emotion-control methods by imagining being in the upsetting scene. After arousing the unwanted emotions by thinking about being angry at your roommate or being hurt by rejection, you "talk yourself down." Use the relaxation techniques, deep breathing, self-instructions, and new attitudes to avoid getting upset, to calm down, or to resolve the problem.

Repeat this mental process (the movie of the situation) over and over, discovering which methods work best for you. Keep rehearsing until you are sure you can control your feelings and handle the situation. Example: suppose you are a college sophomore who has never done well on objective examinations. You seem to "clutch up" or freeze; you just don't think well although you have studied and seem to know the material. So, before the exam, you might say:

- "I have studied more than a lot of people. I should do pretty well."
- "Try to relax now and during the exam--take a deep breath and enjoy the relaxation as I exhale."

It is easy for you to imagine taking an exam, reading a hard question, coming up with a blank, and thinking "I'm going to flunk this test" with a sinking, panicky feeling inside because it has happened so many times during a test before. Your palms sweat; you feel scared; you are embarrassed. As you imagine feeling these things, start giving yourself self-instructions to lower your anxiety, to get you back on track and go on with the exam:

- "I'll just mark this item and come back to it later. I want to stay calm."
- "Just because I didn't know that answer immediately doesn't mean I'll fail. Lots of people probably clutched on it too."
- "OK, what's the answer to the next question? It's not a or c, and b says 'always', and besides d sounds right, it's d!"
- "I'm getting along pretty well. If I just stay relaxed, I'm going to feel good about myself."
- "I'll make an outline for the essay question; maybe reading some more objective questions will help me remember more little details about authors and research to include in the essay."
- "Stay relaxed, it will come to you. You are doing well. Go back and read the hard questions again."



After handling the fantasy-induced stress, take a break, relax, praise your efforts and map out a strategy for the next trial run. Keep repeating the fantasies until you are able to control the emotions.

#### STEP FIVE: Try out the methods that have worked best in fantasy about a real situation

Prepare well but don't procrastinate. One is never thoroughly prepared. Also, remember, you can always sing better in the shower than on stage. Likewise, you can handle emotions better in fantasy than in reality. So, don't expect perfect control of your emotions. But you will do better than if you had no practice or preplanning at all. Use these new techniques the first chance you get.

There are two basic procedures at this stage of stress-inoculation: (1) you may have learned (in fantasy) to control your emotional response and need the situation to remain the same so you can practice your self-control in real life. Examples: if you had practiced liking loud music and certain topics, your goal is to change yourself and not your roommate. So, you would want him/her to remain the same (in those ways) and you need practice learning to enjoy the new music and topics. Likewise, suppose you have a choice of tolerating your parents' political views, prejudiced attitudes, and insistence on "no messes" (all of which drive you crazy) or of getting out of their house. Some therapists would say you shouldn't leave home until you had learned to tolerate those conditions without getting "bent out of shape." These situations require self-change.

(2) In other cases, stress-inoculation results in your controlling your emotions but still wanting the situation to change, like asking the roommate to change his/her behavior. There are several factors to consider when handling a situation where one or both people are prone to get angry: please refer to several skills in chapter 13, especially assertiveness, expressing anger and fair fighting, and the "no lose" negotiation method.

Practice handling your emotions repeatedly as new situations arise. See how well the new self-instructions, attitudes, and expectations work for you. Make changes in your approach to handling unwanted emotions as the situation changes and as you learn more and more about self-control. Expose yourself repeatedly to emotional situations until there is no doubt that you are in control.

#### Time involved

Review chapter 5, 6, 7, or 8, whichever is most related to the unwanted emotion you are working on. This will take an hour or two. The amount of additional time needed depends a great deal on how many techniques and concepts one attempts to learn and apply. If one just uses relaxation and self-instructions to reduce stress, then step one will be brief. If one tries to get insight into their negative thinking and learns many cognitive emotion-control methods, it may take many

hours. Likewise, it will take much longer to deal with a 20-item hierarchy than to deal with one situation. The practicing of emotional control in fantasy may take 2 to 10 hours and about the same time for practicing in real life situations. Total= 6 to 25 hours or more spread over several weeks. Actually, it is unending because rational thinking and self-instructions will stay with you forever.

### Common problems

Some people have great difficulty believing they are responsible for their emotions. Other people like to be emotional; they feel it is "real" and being controlled is phony. (No doubt many of us are loaded with intense, usually unreasonable emotions; yet, spewing our vile emotions on others is not healthy or considerate, although it may be real.) Still other people can't imagine fantasies vivid enough to arouse the unwanted emotions. And some have trouble fantasizing how different techniques will work out.

If the emotions are too unpleasant to voluntarily experience, start with less intense emotions in an hierarchy or seek therapy.

### Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

This method is only 20 years old or so. It is part of "Cognitive Behavioral Modification" and has been empirically tested several times. The results are promising, suggesting about the same effectiveness as desensitization. To the extent that our emotions are a product of how we think, this method seems reasonable. Remember, some theorists believe thoughts are independent of emotions. (I believe some emotions are generated by our thoughts and fantasies, but other emotions are automatic, conditioned responses and still others are socially learned or lead to a pay off. I further suspect that still other feelings are hormonal and genetic.) This method is well worth a try.

Any method that uses imagination has the advantage of being convenient--it's always available. It probably takes no more time to think positively about a problem than would be spent in the natural course of events thinking negatively about the situation.

A possible danger is strengthening the unwanted emotional response to the situation by producing the emotion over and over again using fantasy. Just as naturally occurs, we become obsessed with an upsetting or angering situation and the emotion grows as we think about it (see chapter 7). Yet, the use of cognitive methods and reasoning to reduce the emotions offers considerable hope for effective self-control.

### Additional readings

Mahoney, M. (1974). *Cognition and behavior modification*. Cambridge, Mass: Ballinger Publishing Co.

McKay, M., Davis, M. & Fanning, P. (1981). *Thoughts & feelings: The art of cognitive stress intervention*. Richmond, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Meichenbaum, D. (1974). *Cognitive behavior modification*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.

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## Getting It Off Your Chest

One of Freud's great contributions was his emphasis on the unconscious. Today, it is generally accepted in clinical psychology and psychiatry that certain emotions and motives are so abhorrent or upsetting that we may suppress or repress these scary, disgusting, embarrassing feelings into our unconscious. Examples: murderous impulses, wanting every whim cared for like a baby, fear of being rejected or unloved, resentment of rivals, sexual thoughts and urges, etc. But, once repressed into the unconscious, these feelings are not dormant. These mean, nasty, crude urges and feelings (good feelings don't need to be repressed) are, according to Freud, continually trying to express themselves some way.

Many therapists believe that unconsciously repressed emotions cause a variety of major problems: neurotic and psychotic behaviors, interpersonal conflicts (see games and scripts in chapter 9), psychosomatic disorders (stomach trouble, headaches, hypertension, tiredness), defense mechanisms (chapters 5 and 15), distorted thinking (chapter 14), and many other unhealthy consequences. Perceptions can be distorted: if as a child you saw your father as cold, critical and unloving, you may throughout life expect male teachers or work supervisors to be that way too. Similarly, certain recent emotions may be so threatening that they get expressed indirectly, i.e. displaced from one person to another, such as anger from the boss to the spouse, from a spouse to a child, or from a parent to a little brother, etc. And a conscious emotion may be a substitute for an unconscious one, e.g. one may cry instead of showing anger, laugh excessively instead of expressing anxiety, feel tired instead of guilt, etc. We fool ourselves in all of these ways.

Some therapies hope to change the inner workings of the client, not just the behavior or the interpersonal relationships. There are two basic approaches to changing the inner person:

1. Freud and several of his followers believed patients need to uncover the unconscious--to gain insight into deeply hidden experiences, conflicts and urges, mostly from childhood. As a byproduct of gaining insight, patients often uncover repressed

feelings which they pour out along with the memories, cleansing themselves of these pent up emotions and the associated guilt. This experience in therapy was sometimes a vivid re-living of some traumatic event, called an abreaction. This "exorcising" of the forbidden memories and emotions was called catharsis. Many of the neo-Freudians take this approach. Therapy is probably better than self-help at uncovering unconscious material, but there are several self-analysis methods available in chapter 15.

2. A variety of other therapies focus on changing the inner person by concentrating more on becoming more aware and expressive of feelings, rather than on understanding the origin of one's hang-ups. These therapies concentrate on the release of pent up emotions for mental health. They include Client-centered (Carl Rogers), Gestalt (Fritz Perls), body-centered therapies by Wilhelm Reich and Alexander Lowen, Primal Scream (Arthur Janov), Re-evaluation (Harvey Jackins), Feeling-Expressive (Pierce & DuBrin) and others. These therapies view feelings as being the core of our lives or, at least, the repression of feelings is the crux of many problems. Thus, feelings are valuable and need to be expressed. Emotions represent tendencies to act and learning to express feelings makes us more alive--more sensitive and responsive, more free to know our true selves, and more free to act on our needs (Pierce, Nichols, & DuBrin, 1983). In contrast to Psychoanalysis, this kind of "expressive" therapy uses "catharsis" to enable the patient to handle strong emotions or to learn to freely express more and more emotions, not get rid of feelings. The next self-help method can serve both of these purposes.

Some people become overwhelmed by their emotions; others hold in their feelings and don't even know they are there. Some need to reduce the strength of their emotions; they need to "discharge" or release or vent the emotions so they can get the feelings under control. The classic examples are the crushed, jilted lover, and the person in a rage. Other people are over-controlled and need help in accepting and expressing their feelings. Examples here are "thinkers"--intellectualizers or obsessive-compulsives who are so busy thinking, acting, and analyzing they don't feel--or macho men who are too tough to be afraid and cry. They need self-help methods for internally experiencing more feelings, for understanding and appreciating their emotions, and for appropriately disclosing or sharing their feelings with others. It is probably easy for you to tell if you tend to be an "expresser" or a "repressor." Then, it will probably be clear how you can use the following techniques for your purposes.

If humans ever came to accept all their (and everyone's) thoughts and feelings as natural, normal, and harmless (only actions hurt), then perhaps we wouldn't have to repress any emotions. You could accept all your emotions and be aware of all your motives (but not act on all of them). There would be no sneaky tricks, no self-cons, no freaky urges by your unconscious. But that seems a long way off.

## Catharsis...venting...discharging...expressing emotions

Holding in our feelings causes mental and physical stress. And, stress can be very destructive. Often suppressing and hiding an "awful" thought actually results in uncontrollable obsessions about the very thing we are trying to hide. Sharing our secrets often provides relief. On the other hand, letting vile feelings spew out all over others is surely harmful too. Moreover, our own intense emotions can be very frightening to others and to us, so we often avoid dealing with them or pretend we don't feel so strongly and, thus, problems don't get resolved. For a variety of reasons, it can be helpful to learn we can control and reduce the strength of suppressed or repressed emotions. Methods for uncovering, venting, and reducing emotions are included in this method because once you accumulate intense emotions, then you may need to discharge those strong feelings harmlessly.

For some of us, expressing feelings is hard but we can learn to emote (feel our emotions) by encouraging ourselves to practice doing so, by gradually giving up our inhibitions or fears, and by finding out that it feels good to "let go" and to feel strongly. If you need additional encouragement try attending a self-help group, a 12-step program, or therapy.

It will become clear to you that the private venting or catharsis process described in this method is different from "telling your own story" in a therapeutic group. "Telling your story" is usually more consciously controlled than a catharsis, but a sterile, "clinical" description of some troublesome experience will not yield many, if any, benefits. You need to let go of your feelings, i.e. your heartfelt emotions must be expressed openly, not just described in well measured words. Also, to be therapeutic, your disclosure must be received by accepting, not critical people. Under therapeutic circumstances, there is growing scientific evidence that sharing your feelings and problems by talking or writing is helpful and healthy. Likewise, keeping traumas a secret is unhealthy (Pennebaker, 1995). This method describes a process that can be used when all alone.

Venting or discharging emotions involves vigorously expressing the emotion--fear, sadness, anger, dependency--so completely you feel "drained." Then, the strength of the emotion is markedly reduced or eliminated. Do this in a private place because strong emotions often offend and upset others. Expressing your emotions fully may be hard even when alone; this may be true for persons already expert at wailing or raging with people.

*A warning.* Many professionals doubt the effectiveness of these processes to "clean out" toxic emotions held inside (see discussion of outcome research later). Moreover, especially when dealing with a traumatic experience, such as a horrible crime or accident or a rape or abuse as a child, there is a risk of being retraumatized by this procedure. Recently, most therapists, in these cases, prefer "trauma reconstruction" in which order and completeness of the experience is

gradually restored. That is, the complex, emotional, fragmented, often distorted experiences and memories associated with the original trauma are carefully reviewed bit by bit and, in time, brought together into a coherent, understandable, whole picture of the event(s). In this way overwhelming emotions are avoided (also see chapter 15 for the use of writing as a way of coping with traumas).

### Purposes

- To learn it is healthy to express feelings, that it feels good to get them into awareness so you can deal with them.
- To learn or re-learn (we all knew how to throw a temper tantrum at age 3) how to fully and honestly express our feelings, at least to ourselves. You may have lost touch with your body or your "gut" reactions, i.e. you may inhibit feelings so well that you have forgotten how to emote fully and spontaneously.
- To privately vent unwanted feelings--to get them out of your system--so that you feel more in control and able to take constructive, rational action. The most common feelings that need to be discharged are: anger, frustration, disappointment, depression, dependency, helplessness, fears, and child-like desires.
- To gain some insight into the original causes of your strong emotions that seem inappropriate responses to the current situation (this may occur but most insight-producing methods are described in chapter 15).
- To counteract the belief that we'll only hurt more if we attend to our feelings or that we'll find out we are really bad. To realize that we can cope better if we know what's going on inside us.
- To overcome your own fears of strong or taboo emotions, to learn that you can tolerate and control these feelings. (Example: one doesn't immediately seduce a person of the same sex just as soon as homosexual interests break into awareness.)

### Steps

#### STEP ONE: Becoming more aware of your feelings (if you swallow your feelings)

If you are inclined to avoid feelings, here are some exercises to sharpen your awareness of feelings (Pierce, Nichols & DuBrin, 1983). Skip to step two if you do not need this, i.e. if you feel intensely and vent your feelings fully, perhaps too freely.

Find a quiet, private place to talk to yourself about feelings. This could be sitting in a favorite chair, alone in the woods, or doing exercise. Talk out loud. When you notice a feeling, stay with it and let it grow to its full strength. Often we shut off feelings so they won't get stronger but now let them grow or even exaggerate them. If you feel a

little anxious, say you are terrified and try to feel it. If you are irritated, say you are really mad, shout, and pretend to hit something. If you feel bored, feel depressed and look for things you hate to do. Practice tuning in on your feelings and expressing them.

All forms of art express feelings. Indeed, many of us are more emotionally responsive to stories in books, movies, TV, paintings or music than we are to real life events. We can be touched by an unlucky character in a song but remain untouched by a classmate or co-worker who has a misfortune. Make use of your emotional responses to stories, films, and music for a better understanding of your emotions.

Make a list of what situations you respond to emotionally--what TV stories? What songs? What parts of novels? What art? What situations or interactions seem to generate what feelings? What common themes lead to joy? to commitment? to sadness? to anger? to crying? to loneliness? to self-criticism? to self-satisfaction? All of this helps you focus on your strongest or favorite feelings and become more aware of them. It helps you understand your feelings, e.g. suppose you especially enjoy movies where teenagers defy and outwit police and other authorities. What does this say about your relationship with parents or teachers and about your emotions?

After observing the specific connections between human events in movies, stories, music, etc. and your emotions, now try to figure out the factors in your past (and/or in your current situation) that contribute to these emotional responses. Does the divorce of your parents make you uncomfortable when a couple fights in a movie? Does a successful, beautiful older sister make you disinterested in or resentful of movie stars? Does a smart brother make you avoid hard classes? These are clear memories, what about less obvious connections?

Take an emotional reaction you have, say joy when someone is especially thoughtful of others, and go on a fantasy memory trip. Let your mind wander back to any associations this emotion takes you to. What kind of childhood events does this emotion remind you of? Talk out loud about these memories. Don't concern yourself with "Did this really happen?" or with "Don't be so critical." In fact, if no memories occur to you, make up what might have happened. This can remind you of real memories or bring out hidden wishes and fears and feelings about specific people. Also, you could ask your parents and older siblings where your emotional reactions, such as fears of authority or a quick temper, might have come from. The idea is to gain a greater interest in, awareness of, and understanding of your emotions. Keeping a diary (see chapter 15) and doing daily ratings that focus on feelings would be especially helpful.

Probably the best place to explore feelings is with a friend. It must be someone you like, trust, and have an agreement with about strict confidentiality. It should be someone who would choose you as a

sounding board, because the two of you should reverse roles as needed. Meet in a private place where you can make noise. The person experiencing his/her feelings should say whatever comes to mind, but focus on feelings and express them strongly. The idea is: to feel more, you need to express more. If you feel like hitting something, hit a pillow. Lie on the floor and scream or cry or grunt if you feel like it. Or, just talk about your feelings.

The listener just listens. Being empathic is helpful (see chapter 13). But the crucial thing is to listen with concern, understanding that the other person needs to express his/her feelings. Avoid giving reassurance prematurely; don't give advice; don't ask about the details of the situation (When did this happen?) or the causes (Why did he/she do that?). If you provide any focus at all, encourage him/her to express his/her feelings. Remember, the person probably wants to feel--to re-experience and vent--some emotion, even a very painful one, because it is so important to them. It feels good to share feelings. Give them plenty of time. A truly patient listening friend is not easy to find (that's why we pay psychologists).

#### STEP TWO: Learn how to overtly express overly inhibited or scary emotions

Re-learning to cry. There is a sermon in the Talmud that says that Adam complained to God about how hard life was after being kicked out of the Garden of Eden. God responded that he/she had given Adam and Eve two means of coping with hard times: a day of rest on the Sabbath and tears. Jewish mourners vent their grief by weeping loudly.

Crying is so important that techniques have been developed to re-learn how. Some people cry every day, not because they are suffering some great loss but because they feel better afterwards (more relaxed, fewer headaches, less eye strain). One method is by Luce (1979): Place one hand on your collarbone, right where your neck joins your chest. Breathe very shallowly, only as deeply as your hand. Breathe rapidly and make a whining or sobbing sound, like a baby crying. Try to get into feeling sad. Think of things that make you feel very distraught. If necessary imagine something very sad--leaving your family or friends or loss of a loved one. Let yourself sob until the need is met.

The emotionally inhibited (constipated) person has been called "intellectually honest, but emotionally a liar." One may be unable to feel angry or unable to act out the anger, or both. First, if you do not have many angry feelings, list some situations that you get angry or upset about. Often, these are not close to home but social problems--senseless bombings, rapes, racial discrimination, a show-off, nuclear war, etc. Take one of those situations and provide yourself with directions for imagining it in detail. Here is an example (Ramsay, 1978): "Now start thinking about the war in Vietnam, the women and children lying wounded and maimed in a hospital after being bombed.



Imagine being able to get one of the generals from the Pentagon and take him through such a hospital ward. Clench your fists, clench your teeth, and imagine what you would like to say to him, 'You lousy bastard, you can sit in an office, completely safe, but look what your bombing orders have done. Look at these children, some without limbs, some burned, some blinded!' Imagine showing him around the ward and...get angry...call him all the names you can think of." Get mad verbally and physically; hit a pillow; kick a bean bag; shout. If you can't do these things, see the next suggestion, i.e. (3).

When you can experience anger to these social situations, the next step is to learn to get angry about everyday things in your life. Make a list of irritating situations. Describe some scenes in detail, like the war scene, and repeat them to yourself over and over and get mad. After you have learned to detect and internally experience your anger, then you can start learning to be assertive (see chapter 13). None of these exercises are ever intended to encourage actual hostility towards another person.

Some of us can feel angry but we can't express it, not to another person or even alone. You may feel too self-conscious to hit a pillow or scream in your car. You may know you would like to smash in a person's face, but you can't hit a punching bag.

You need a friend to give you "anger training." The idea is to express anger more thoroughly by getting your whole body into it. You need a coach--your friend. Make believe that your friend has your towel and you want it back, now! He/she teases you with a real towel and refuses to give it back. The objective is not to just get the towel, rather the purpose is to learn how to express strong physical anger (without hurting anyone). In a loud, gruff voice, demand your towel. Look him/her in the eye, no smiles. Your friend does two things--refuses to let you have the towel and coaches you on how to show anger. Get your whole body into it: arms, shoulders, back, brace your legs and pull hard, not just a little one handed tug. The friend might tell you to kick, growl, cuss, frown, and use whatever parts of your body that are not involved. Don't turn the exercise into a game. It is a hard, serious task. When you have practiced getting angry for a few times, you are ready for the next step.

### STEP THREE: Vent the unwanted emotion full force until it is drained

You may find yourself in two conditions: (1) overwhelmed with intense emotions and needing to get them under control or (2) boiling with "bottled up" emotions inside and needing to express these feelings. The venting methods below work well with both conditions. Primarily we are talking about anger (frustration) and sadness. You may find it easier to gradually express stronger and stronger emotions until you feel safe to totally "let go."

If angry, find a private place where you can make noise (if necessary reassure the neighbors everything is okay). Obtain an object you can hit: a punching bag, a large pillow, a bean bag chair, a bed, a sofa. Be sure you will not hurt yourself as you hit the object. Some people prefer to hit with an object rather than their fists, using a tennis racket to hit a bed works well.

The idea is to drain out or use up the anger (or other emotion), so that in the end you are calm and more able to cope. So, go into a rage. Shout, scream, cry, snarl, growl, cuss, shake your fists, kick, bite, and above all hit and hit and hit, until you are exhausted--completely drained of hate. Do it again and again, after you catch your breath, if necessary to feel the anger has been completely discharged.

Another approach is to throw a temper tantrum. Lie on your back and kick the floor or the bed with your feet and hit the floor with your fists. Shake your head and yell, "No, no, no, hell no! I hate you, you SOB." Don't stop until you are drained.

Some people do hard physical work or play a sport, like tennis, when they are angry. If it works, that's fine. But many of us have to consciously express our anger while working or playing for it to do any good. Just hitting balls or smashing bricks with a sledge hammer or scrubbing a floor doesn't help. If we think of smashing the person's head we are mad at, as we pulverize bricks or scrub a floor, that might help. Remember: this is never to encourage violence to another person, it is to drain us of anger and, thus, prevent violence.

Other people, often women, aren't as comfortable with physical aggression as they are with verbal aggression. An alternative is to launch a vicious verbal attack on a cassette recorder. In a loud, screaming voice spew out all the hate you can: brutal threats, nasty name-calling, cussing, dirty words, suspicions, destructive wishes, or whatever you naturally say to yourself when you are mad (don't try to cuss if that isn't natural for you). The idea is to verbally aggress more vigorously and longer than usual, so you are emptied and ready to handle the situation more rationally. (It will be enlightening to listen to the recording a day or two later, looking for the irrational ideas underlying your anger).

If you are sad, disappointed, or have the "blahs," try crying it out. Find a quiet, private place. Start remembering everything that has gone wrong. Let yourself feel deeply disappointed and sad. Cry without holding back. Moan and breathe heavily; tell yourself how awful it is. Talk to yourself about how bad you feel, how crushed, how depressed, how gloomy. Cry until you are cried out.

A few people release their anger in writing or in humor. Abraham Lincoln recommended writing down your negative feelings--then throwing the paper away and in the process reducing your anger. Most of the time it would be a mistake to show your "poison pen letters" to anyone, certainly not to the target. On the other hand, I have found it

helpful to write a poem or a note to someone when I was sad. If one is in the midst of a terrible personal trauma, like the breaking up of a relationship, it may be helpful to write out a detailed explanation of what happened--then file the "report" away and forget it.

Lincoln also used his sense of humor to handle anger, like the time when a heavy-set lady visitor to the White House sat on his high top hat, which he had left on a chair, and he said to her, "if you'd just asked me lady, I could have told you it wouldn't fit." A similar story is told about Winston Churchill when an irate woman was criticizing him and concluded, "if you were my husband, I'd poison your tea." Winston quickly responded, "Lady, if you were my wife, I'd drink it!"

#### STEP FOUR: Tell yourself the emotions have been reduced to manageable size and make plans to cope with the situation

After thoroughly discharging your feelings, shift your attention to considering reasonable, constructive action you can take (including forgetting the whole thing). Make specific plans and carry them out (look up "I" statements, method #4 in chapter 13). Most importantly, keep in mind that these exercises are to reduce unwanted emotions and control them in interaction with others. You may rage in private but remain rational and controlled with others, even with people who have done you wrong.

#### Time involved

If you are emotionally inhibited, it may take several hours and a few patient friends to become more aware and expressive of your feelings. If you can freely vent your feelings already, it may take only 30 minutes or an hour to discharge the emotions. Fifteen minutes of rage is a lot...and tiring. Keep venting (with rests as needed) until you feel drained.

#### Common problems

You may act mad or sad on the surface without feeling intensely in your gut. If so, this will not help you much; indeed, Zen Buddhists have criticized Lowen's (1976) Bioenergetics as not being "belly-centered" enough. The belly is thought to be the "seat of self-expression." Intense, complete expression is necessary.

You may not take the task seriously, especially when with a friend. Joking and playing around is a way to avoid a scary, serious task. Some people are terrified of their own anger; others fear an authority's disapproval. Some people are afraid or ashamed to cry. The idea of losing control is scary. You may want to have a supportive friend with you and you may want to approach an intense emotion gradually, i.e. experience some emotion, then relax, feel more emotion, relax again, express more and more intense anger or sadness but continue to feel "in control" and, at the same time, "let go."

Completely out of control, hysterical expression of intense emotions should be avoided, unless you are supervised by a professional. Occasionally, a disturbing thought or feeling may occur to you. Try to accept it (see chapter 15) and assume you are more able to cope with the feeling when you are aware of it, rather than unaware. Some people object to expressing emotions by using cuss words and obscenities. You should use whatever words are naturally expressive for you. On the other hand, don't let your desire to "be nice" inhibit your expression (in private) of your true thoughts and feelings, some of which are hostile (remember 2/3rds of us would wipe out someone if we could), evil, vulgar, and nasty.

### Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

We have two sources of data: (1) patients in insight therapy vent feelings and generally report feeling better, but (2) subjects in laboratories observe or experience and express aggression and become *more* aggressive (Bandura, 1973; Tavis, 1984). Many therapists also doubt the efficacy of catharsis and abreactions. Unfortunately, there is little or no research about the effectiveness of self-induced discharging of emotions, as described in this self-help method. Tentatively, one might assume that *public* expressions of anger or sadness, like aggression or crying, which are reinforced (yield some payoff) by others, are likely to continue in the future. *Private* expressions of feelings, as in this self-help method where the intent is clearly to reduce the unwanted emotions, could result in decreasing both internal emotional stress and overt expression. You may want to try it and see how you respond but use caution. Much more research is needed. Please note the warning given in the introduction of this method and read the "Dealing with Trauma" section in chapter 5.

Remember, anger, fears, and sadness probably grow, if one obsesses about the situation. In fact, just talking about a highly emotional problem and expressing your feelings with a friend is not always helpful. If the focus is on how to stop the unwanted feeling, the talking may help. And, interestingly enough, talking about other things (not the upsetting problem) can be helpful. So, anything that distracts our attention or helps us forget the distressing situation should be helpful. See if venting your feelings helps you put the troubles aside or if it just reminds you more of the problem.

There are possible dangers. The emotional reaction could be unexpectedly intense. So, having a friend with you, who has plenty of time and knows what to expect, may be wise. Also, know someone to call or a crisis hot line or a hospital emergency service if it should become necessary (not likely). Remember, if your emotions are intense enough that harm could occur to yourself or others, you should seek professional help, not just rely on self-help.

### Additional readings

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## Converting Emotional Energy

### Constructive use of energy

Humans vary greatly in terms of their productivity under stress. As stress increases, some are super effective; others are incapacitated. Do you "fall apart" or "get going?" This approach involves developing a detailed plan, translating it into a daily schedule, and using the emotional energy to motivate us to do what needs to be done (which is what the super effective do).

#### Purposes

- To get yourself together while under pressure.

Many negative emotions--fears, embarrassments, inferiority, disappointments, anger--are a call to action, a signal that things need to be changed. The emotions are probably intended to motivate us.

#### Steps

**STEP ONE: Avoid a defeatist attitude. Select a way of converting energy from unwanted emotions into productive drives.**

Some people respond to frustration with an "I'll-show-you-attitude." Such a response can be very productive, if it is competitive and not hostile. Indeed, many outstanding people started with real handicaps or imagined weaknesses for which they compensated. Great runners had injuries to their legs. Body builders were skinny. Excellent students felt they were inferior. Great speakers stuttered. Some people work incredibly hard to overcome handicaps; others give up.

Sometimes resentment can become a motivator. The teacher or supervisor is critical or overly demanding. You might resolve to be near perfect. Another student or co-worker is a braggart or show-off. You might resolve to do better than they have done. If you experience

success and develop some skills that are rewarding, you may become more invested in achieving even when no one irritates you.

Motivation in most school and work situations is based on fear, i.e. fear of being fired, fear of making a low grade, or fear of having a poor record. Many students say they work harder in college than high school because they have been warned about college being hard and because they are afraid of making C's and D's. Such fears can also be self-generated by setting demanding goals, such as straight A's or all A's and B's, and emphasizing to yourself the bad consequences of low grades.

A competitive spirit will help. Such an attitude comes from setting reachable goals for yourself and from giving yourself pep talks when motivation lags.

**STEP TWO: A carefully planned approach to the problem is more likely to be facilitated by emotional energy.**

Emotions increase the strength of the strongest response tendencies. Without careful planning, anger might prompt aggression, fear might lead to running away or procrastination, etc. But, with careful, detailed planning of your time, you can probably make constructive, tactful responses stronger (more likely to occur) than hurtful, self-defeating responses. Then, using emotions to increase your motivation should benefit everyone. This means planning what to do each minute, each hour, each day in order to reach your goal. Example: if you feel inadequate, you need detailed plans for becoming adequate or even better than average. If you are aiming for all A's, you must have the self-discipline and motivation to study 30-40 hours per week beyond going to classes. That is six hours per day for studying. That means giving up TV, partying, goofing around, time with friends, etc. It means being considered a social nerd.

**STEP THREE: Use your emotional drive to carry out your plan for coping.**

Whenever you become emotional, think of your schedule and the plan you have for coping, and use the energy to accomplish your goals.

### Time involved

Very little time is required, unless the planning is extensive.

### Common problems with the method

Many people become so absorbed in the emotions that they do not think to use the emotions constructively.

### Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

Obviously, some people are very effective in this process. There is no known research evaluating the procedure, however. An unlikely but possible danger is that unwanted emotions, such as anxiety, will be seen as helpful and, thus, reinforced in the process. If that happens, anxiety might reoccur with greater frequency.

## **Additional Methods for Changing Emotions**

### **Distractions and/or exercise**

One of the most common strategies (and more useful) for controlling an emotion is to avoid paying attention to the feelings and the situation associated with the unwanted feelings. People resist temptations in a very simple way: by avoiding thinking about or attending to the temptations. Anger and depression are reduced by thinking about something else: read a good book, watch an interesting movie, etc. Keep in mind, this doesn't "cure" the problem, it just avoids it. That may be all you need to do.

Even eating and drinking (college favorites) can help you get out of a bad mood. Exercise, playing with the kids, doing nice things for yourself, and trying some self-improvement are all effective mood-changers.

### **Exercise**

The evidence grows that physical exercise is good for you. Primitive living conditions and evolution have produced a human body designed to walk, run, lift, throw, breathe hard, etc, etc. This isn't just some PE teacher's opinion; sound physiological/medical research at Duke, Texas A&M and other places concludes: "if you are over-worked, stressed out and discouraged, take a walk, jog, swim, go rock climbing or canoeing..." In fact, researchers have found that aerobic exercises reduce stress better than relaxation techniques (Anshel, 1996). Not only is exercise recommended for stress but also for depression, anger, low self-esteem and, in general, for better mental health. Naturally, it is important for heart and general physical health too. So, get started!

That is the rub--getting started. Mentally decide on a specific time to start--select a convenient time, preferably a time that is almost always open on your schedule. The idea is to make exercising a regular habit, something you do at the same time of day at least three times a week--or better, every day. One of the crucial moments is starting the first day, i.e. do everything you can to make sure that moment is carried out...think about it the previous night, set an alarm if it is in the morning or put reminders around if it is during the day. It would be best if you got a friend to go with you or to call and remind you...if nothing else you can make a public commitment to other

people announcing that you will start exercising at this specific time. Afterwards be sure to tell them you actually started, just like you planned to do. This is such an important time because most failures to establish a habit result from never starting or only exercising a few times and then letting it slide.

If you can attend carefully to being sure you exercise at the same time every day for the first two or three weeks, you are well on your way to creating a good, reliable habit. After a month or two of doing exercises you like to do at the same time every day, the urge to carry out the habit becomes stronger and stronger--that is, it is easier and easier. Indeed, a need to exercise is established and you find yourself doing really weird things--like jogging at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning or going to swim at the YMCA after work at 4:00. There will also be mental/psychological changes too, such things as feeling better about your body, some pride in your self-discipline, a little more self-esteem.

There are lots of exercise books that you can find at Amazon or Barnes & Noble. Three worth mentioning are Gavin (1991) and Hays (1999, 2002). The 1999 Hays book was written by a psychologist for therapists who want to incorporate exercise into the life of their clients. The author gives suggestions for getting started, for overcoming inertia, for using exercise to reduce stress, depression, traumatic reactions, and mental illness. Her 2002 book helps readers select the most fun and effective activities for their specific symptoms. Exercise can also increase self-esteem, help you stay fit, and provide a way to interact.

Several governmental agencies and universities offer Websites about exercise. Here is a sample: [Healthy People 2010](http://www.healthypeople.gov/) ( <http://www.healthypeople.gov/>) , [Medline Plus](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/exerciseandphysicalfitness.html) ( <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/exerciseandphysicalfitness.html> ) , [John Hopkins](http://www.hoptechno.com/book11.htm) ( <http://www.hoptechno.com/book11.htm>) , and [Georgia State](http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwfit/index.html) ( <http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwfit/index.html>) .

## Change the environment and use reinforcement

Depressed people focus on the negative happenings in their lives; they focus on immediate outcomes and lose their perspective of the future. They also blame themselves for failures and set difficult standards for themselves. They give themselves little praise and rewards but lots of self-criticism (see methods 1-9 in chapter 6; Rehm, 1981). This creation of depression involves biased self-observation, negative self-evaluation and self-punishment. Like depression, anxiety involves an expectation of helplessness and doom. Anger involves seeing someone else as intentionally causing you pain. Passive-dependency reflects self-putdowns relative to others. All these emotions involve a complex interaction between the environment and our own cognitive processes.



The environment can change feelings as well as behavior. Some situations make us happy, other situations stress us. We can change our environment, getting into a happier situation, or change our emotional reaction to the environment. Suppose you hate to study. By reinforcing studying with rewards, self-encouragement, self-praise, and reduced anxiety about exams and class participation, the self-helping student will enjoy studying more and more. His/her reaction to the learning environment becomes more pleasant. An environment containing reinforcement can change emotions and behaviors.

### **Practice, practice, practice**

We get better with practice. We feel better with practice (Leitenberg, et al, 1970). Example: we overcome stage fright by speaking. We overcome shyness by socializing. We come to like to study by studying successfully. This is essentially in vivo desensitization. William James said to feel a certain way, e.g. happy, act that way. It is called the "as if" technique. Virgil Thomson recommended practicing some desired trait over and over, at first to "get over the fear" of doing it, later to really "learn how to do it" well, and, finally, to "figure out if you like it."

### **Pleasant activities help us enjoy ourselves**

People plan fun activities to spice up their life. Therapists cheer up depressed patients by increasing their pleasant activities, especially being with other people but avoiding dwelling on their problems (see chapter 6).

### **Massage**

Massage is one of the more relaxing activities two people can do together. It takes no special skills, only gentleness, affection and time. Several books are helpful (e.g. Downing, 1972, 1992 ). Relaxing in a warm bath while reading a good book is another wonderful method. Field, T., et al, (1992) found that depressed and behavior-disordered adolescents benefited more from 10- minute massages each day for five days than from relaxing videotapes. It may be that relaxation and touching together are especially soothing.

### **Drugs**

There are several mood-altering drugs: tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, tranquilizers, anti-depressive medicine, cocaine, mood-elevators, speed, etc. There is always some "new" illegal drug, e.g. ecstasy and LSD (Adler, 1985). Drugs--prescribed and street--are used in enormous quantities in our culture, and probably to some extent by more than half of the adult population. I haven't included drugs in psychological self-help because they aren't psychological--and because I have no expertise in that area. Furthermore, while drugs, legal and illegal, alter our emotions, the drugs do nothing to change the conditions that cause the unwanted feelings. Marijuana, cocaine, anti-depressants and speed will lift your depression momentarily but the drugs will not remove the causes of the depression. Thus, one might come to depend on drugs to cope with unwanted emotions. Removing the causes, if possible, would be a better solution. Many writers have suggested that there are a variety of better alternatives to the use of mood-altering drugs, e.g. travel, sports, fitness, relaxing, reading, movies, eating, good conversation, education, friendships, helping others, a social cause, etc.

### Implosion and Rational-Emotive imagery therapy

Implosion was described in the last section of chapter 5 (method #7). The method is like flooding (method #6 in this chapter) except implosion only uses fantasy. You should know about this therapeutic approach, but it will be difficult for most people to apply implosion to themselves. For instance, surprising and shocking fantasies are needed (it is hard to surprise yourself); also, scenes of special significance to your unconscious are supposedly helpful. For example, Stampfl treated a man with a fear of driving by describing many scary driving and accident scenes. Naturally, the man became very frightened. Then he had the patient imagine driving a sports car down a highway faster and faster. The big engine roars and surges with power. The long, shiny hood of the powerful sports car grows longer and longer. Gradually the hood turns into a huge, throbbing penis, which crashes into a semi-truck and is completely crushed. A Freudian, of course, would assume that the fear of driving involves more fundamental fears, like fears of death and mutilation (castration anxiety), which also need to be reduced. In implosive treatment, the idea is to keep on imagining horrifying scenes for hours until the panic responses diminish; thus, breaking the stimulus (driving)-fear connection.

If a person had a fear of heights, an unconscious fear might be of death or there might be an unconscious wish for death. A few people could make up their own terrifying fantasies, but most of us would need help from a therapist. If you try this method, remember that at first you become *more* afraid and only after a few hours of terror do you start to overcome the fear. So be sure to continue imagining the horror stories until you have become used to them and are not

responding with intense fear. Then you should be able to confront the real situation without serious emotional trauma.

Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavioral therapists use a technique similar to implosion. First, the worrying client imagines the awful things that could happen. Example: a person facing divorce could imagine being alone, missing his/her children, having money problems, being unable to find another partner, etc. Then, the client imagines how each of those awful situations could be realistically dealt with and, thus, gains confidence that he/she can cope with divorce. A similar approach is taken by Wanderer & Ingram (1991). They explain the technique to the phobic person and then ask them to describe his/her most frightening situations and wildest fantasies about the feared situation. This description is recorded on a 3-minute endless loop tape and then played by the client over and over for 20 or 30 minutes until the fears subside. Several such scenes are taped and repeated over and over. Eventually, the person can face the real situation. You could do implosion therapy this way yourself.

### Gradual toleration

Classic example: giving a small puppy to a child who is afraid of big dogs. If a person is afraid of approaching beautiful people of the opposite sex, he/she could start with average-looking persons and work up. If some activity is unpleasant, e.g. studying physics or looking at sexual parts, think about doing the activity increasingly while eating or doing something else enjoyable.

### Biofeedback

We have more potential control over many bodily functions than we realized two decades ago. We can alter our own blood pressure, heart rate, skin temperature, acid secretion in the stomach, muscle tension, brain waves, etc. While equipment is not necessary, biofeedback instruments are the only way of knowing the results with any certainty. Good equipment is expensive; it is probably not worth buying but a local Mental Health Center may have equipment you could borrow. Some clinics specialize in pain, headaches, stress, burnout, etc. See the annual reader, *Biofeedback and Self-control*, published by Aldine-Atherton or *Plain Talk About Biofeedback* published by NIMH.

### Skills

Obviously, learning better skills for handling stressful situations is a good way to cope with many emotions. Being assertive overcomes submissiveness. Describing your anger in "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_" statements seems to reduce subsequent aggression and increase empathy from others (Gaines, Kirwin, & Gentry, 1977). See method #4 in chapter 13.

## Cognitive approaches

Since many emotions are created by our thoughts and views or attitudes (see chapters 5, 6, 7 & 8), the reduction of those emotions depend on cognitive changes (see chapter 14). We can learn to tolerate unpleasant conditions and to accept not getting what we want. To be less depressed and hopeless, we can learn to see external but changeable factors as causing bad events and internal (we're responsible) and lasting factors as causing our successes. We can also correct our irrational ideas and errors in logic. Smith (1990) has described the cognitive-behavioral methods most thoroughly. Also see the other references below.



**Note:** trying to think through what caused us to be depressed or upset **doesn't help** relieve the emotions. Also, trying to suppress ("don't think about it") the thoughts and feelings often **doesn't work** well either. Mentally you have to get entirely away from the disturbing circumstances.



Remember: fears can be conquered by watching someone else overcome the same fear, especially if the person will then help you get into and deal with the situation (see modeling in method #2 in chapter 11).

## Values

Happiness and contentment with one's life is based, in part, on one's values and expectations and attitudes. For example, unconditional positive regard for self and others and the tolerant-accepting attitude of a determinist makes life run smoother (see method #3 and chapter 14). To love and to be loved is life's greatest joy. Having a worthwhile mission--a purpose--adds meaning and satisfaction to life. See chapter 3.

## Paradoxical intentions

Emotions can be changed by doing the opposite of what you want. If a dirty house really bothers you, re-double your efforts or, the opposite, try for dirt, i.e. let the house cleaning go for a couple of weeks. If you are terribly upset by a "B" (since you usually make A's), you could try to get B's until you no longer considered it terrible. If you are afraid of rejection, you can keep asking for dates until you find out it isn't awful to be turned down. If there is some idea or thought that really upsets you (like someone being homosexual or your partner flirting with someone), have thoughts about that occurrence until you are no longer bothered. The process is like flooding (method #6) where one's attitude changes from "I can't stand that thought" to "OK, if I'm going to get up tight with that little thought, then I'm going to make up a fantastically disturbing story this time. I can take it." See chapter 14.

## Express the emotions you want to have

In 1872, Darwin suggested that free expression of an emotion intensifies it. Suppression of the outward signs of an emotion reduces the feelings. Thus, it may be helpful to replace an unwanted emotional expression with another more desired one: a frown with a smile, a bowed head with a raised one, down cast eyes with good eye contact, a slow gait with a quick, peppy walk, a stressed expression with a calm one, etc.

Although we have had 120 years to research this notion, we haven't done much and our knowledge is still not very useful. Obviously, the constant suppression (denial) of some stressful emotion may not be easy or healthy. Yet, there is ample evidence that many (most?) people are not consistent in their expression of their emotions, i.e. our verbalized feelings don't correspond well with our physiological state nor with our appearance (facial expression, body language, voice quality, and so on). Frankly, we're pretty damn dumb about the consequences of pitting one part of ourselves against another in order to change how we feel. Conventional wisdom would say a body in harmony is ideal, but perhaps these parts of ourselves are controlled by independent parts of our brain and consistency doesn't matter (and one part can't control another part). It is needed research and it isn't difficult. You'll just have to try it out yourself.

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