

Pay Attention: The Orienting Response

WHAT STANDS OUT?

Purpose: To discover what your gaze is drawn to—what you are inclined to notice or orient toward—and consider what experiences you have had that may affect what you pay attention to.

Directions: Take a look at the drawing below. Without thinking too much about what you see, circle three things that stand out to you.



1. What stands out to you about each of the three cues you circled? (e.g., *I only circled people having a nice time; I only circled things and animals, not people; I only circled people who were alone; I only circled the people who look unhappy.*)
2. What happens in your body as you think about the cues that you circled?
3. Describe the types of cues that you circled. Do they indicate relationship problems or that bad things might happen? That life is good or the world is safe? Do they confirm negative thoughts & fears or a positive outlook?
4. Reflect on why you might have circled certain cues. Do they remind you of experiences you have had in your life or relationships with family or friends? Or are they things you would like to experience?
5. Look at the picture again to notice all the cues that you did not circle. Reflect on why you might not have circled them. Are there any you would like to try to pay attention to in the future?

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TRACKING YOUR ORIENTING HABITS

Purpose: To notice your orienting habits, reflect on the effect of these habits on your experience, and assess if you want to change any habits.

Directions: Over the next week, be aware of what you tend to orient toward. At the end of each day, put a check mark next to any stimuli that you recall paying attention to during the day. In the empty rows, you can add whatever else you paid attention to that is not listed. At the end of the week, fill out the prompts below.

Signs of potential threat (e.g., people, sounds, things that appear menacing)	Signs of relational strife with family, friends, colleagues
Nature (e.g., rain, clouds, sunshine, trees, the moon, stars, flowers)	Objects (e.g., furniture, buildings, cars, phones, computers, or other devices)
Noises (e.g., pleasant, unpleasant, unusual, music, voices, laughter)	Art, beautiful landscape, colors, design, architecture
People who look friendly to you	Signs of positive relationships with family, friends, colleagues
Praise or compliments	Criticism or negative comments
How people look, their behaviors, movements, postures	Animals (e.g., pets, birds, squirrels)
People's faces, eyes, expressions	People you find attractive

1. What did you orient toward that made you feel good or safe? When you think of these cues that make you feel good or safe, what happens in your body?

2. What did you orient toward that made you feel bad or unsafe? When you think of these cues that make you feel bad or unsafe, what happens in your body?

3. What do you want to pay more attention to? How might orienting toward those cues affect your body?

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CHOOSING WHAT TO ORIENT TO

Purpose: To deliberately choose what you want to orient toward rather than allow your habits to dictate what you notice.

Directions: Make a plan to take a short walk during which you can study your orienting habits. Complete the first prompt before you set out on your walk. When you return, complete the rest of the worksheet.

Before the walk:

1. Describe what you would like to orient toward on your walk (e.g., things that make you feel good such as pleasing scenery, interesting sounds, or friendly faces).

After the walk:

2. List all the stimuli you oriented toward on your walk.

3. To get a better sense of the types of things you orient to, try to put the things you listed in #2 into categories. Circle the categories below that represent what you oriented to, or write in a category that is not listed in the empty spaces.

Possible signs of danger	People	Animals
Things that make me feel bad	Nature	Unpleasant noises
People I am attracted to	The way people dress	Pleasant noises
Things that remind me of the past	Friendly faces	Couples
Things that make me feel good	Buildings, houses	Children
Cars, bikes, motorcycles	People playing sports	Art or artistic objects

4. Reflect on whether you were able to follow your orienting plan for your walk. Describe why, if at all, you had trouble orienting toward what you wanted to. (e.g., *I felt rushed and was only looking straight ahead; I was on the lookout for danger and wasn't aware of the nice scenery; I was thinking so much, I didn't notice what was going on around me.*)

Note: If you were not able to orient toward what you wanted to notice, discuss this with your therapist.

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EARLY ATTACHMENT & ORIENTING

Purpose: To become aware of habits of orienting toward people or situations that are similar to what you learned in early attachment relationships, and to explore how these habits affect your body today.

Directions: Remember a time growing up when you were with your family (e.g., eating dinner together, going on vacation, or playing a game). Follow the prompts below.

1. As you remember, take time to assess the quality of the interactions among your family members. Circle the words that apply, and write in any additional words that apply.

Calm
 Accepting Loving
 Supportive Stable Happy
 Respectful Lighthearted Sad
 Accepting Safe Serious
 Judgmental
 Critical Disrespectful
 Mean Depressing Frantic
 Unpredictable
 Neglectful
 Demanding

2. Describe how the qualities you selected made you feel when you were younger.

3. Describe any current situations or relationships in which you orient toward the same qualities that you circled. (e.g., If you grew up with critical parents, you may orient toward the slightest hint of criticism from your spouse; if you felt loved, you may notice signs of affection.) What changes in your body when you orient toward those cues?

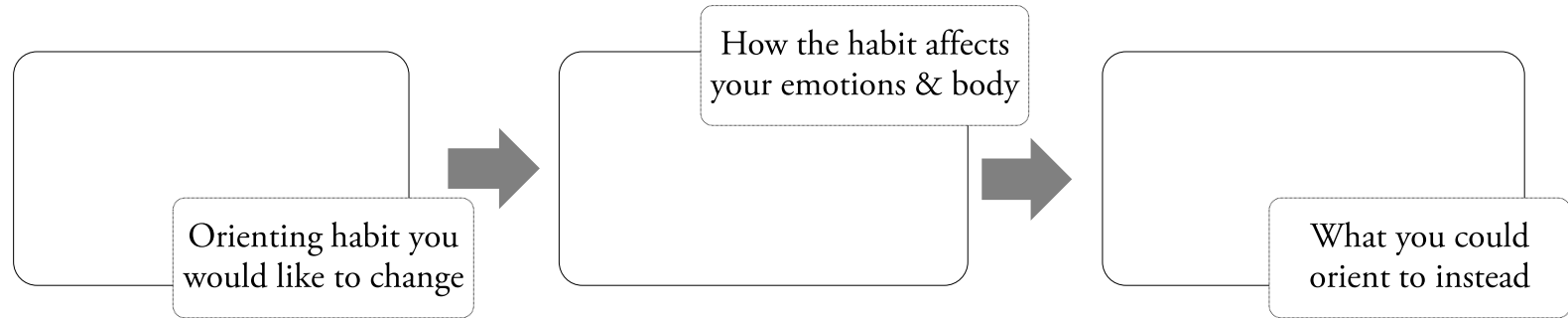
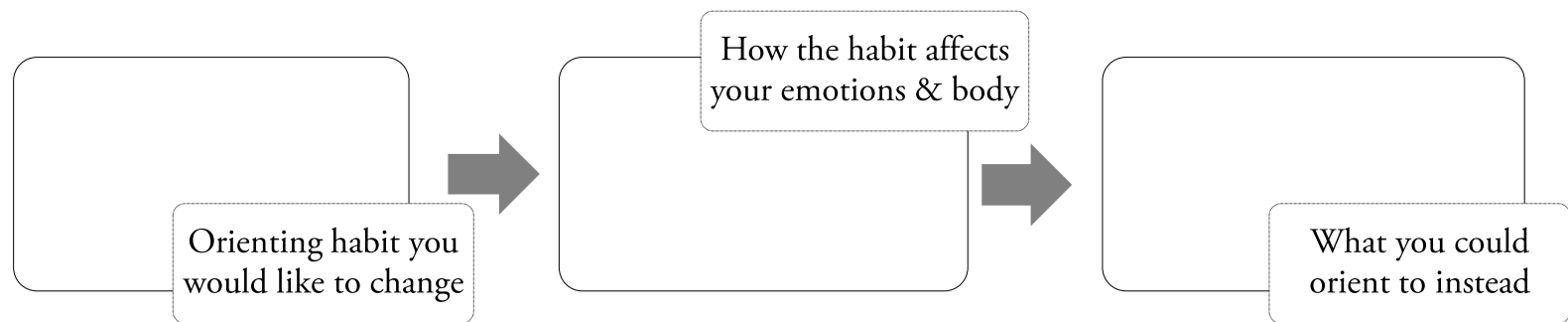
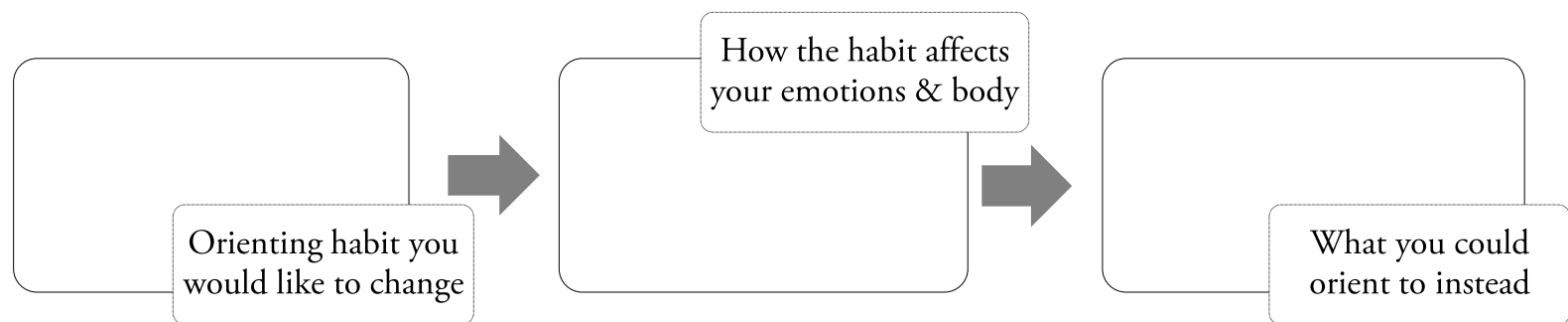
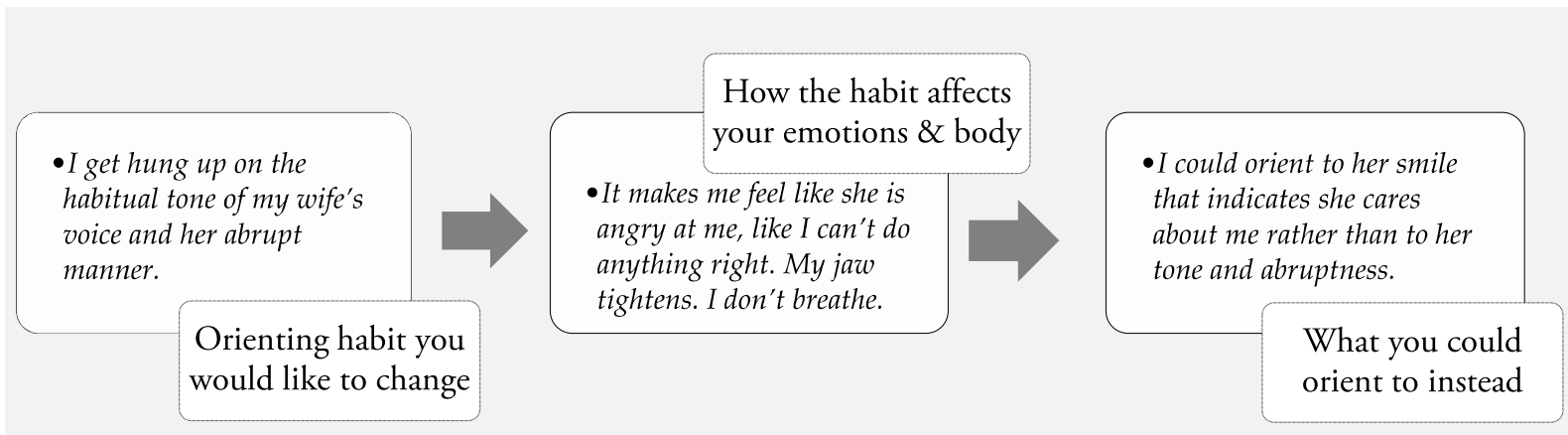
4. Describe any other cues you would like to practice orienting toward. How might orienting toward those cues change your posture, breath, or movement?

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CHANGING ORIENTING HABITS

Purpose: To describe current orienting habits that contribute to your feeling bad or unsafe and then choose to focus on something that makes you feel good or safe instead.

Direction: Choose three orienting habits that you would like to change. Describe how each orienting habit makes you feel. Then describe what you could orient toward instead to practice changing each habit.



What effect does changing each orienting habit have on your experiences and interactions with others?