

Broadening Your Perspective

Have you ever felt distressed by your own thoughts about an event, but struggled to think differently about it? Broadening Your Perspective will help you do just that. This technique helps you think differently about negative events so that you may begin to feel differently (less distressed) as well. This is done by incorporating additional information that can help ease negative emotions about what happened to you. If possible, complete this exercise soon after a distressing event or conflict, and practice this technique frequently.

- 1. Write down a few sentences about a distressing event that occurred recently with another individual. Be specific about the facts of the event, such as what happened, who was there, where it took place, and when it took place. Refrain from interpretations or speculations about the causes of the event right now.**

- 2. Next, write down a few sentences about *why* the event occurred, and how you interpret the cause and meaning of the event.**

- 3. Identify the “main character(s)” of this event, besides yourself. Who was the main person, or main people, who you believe caused the event to happen? Just list them below.**

4. Now, go back to the first two steps and re-read what you wrote about the facts of the event, as well as your interpretations of the event. When you think about the event like this, and the main character(s) involved, what emotions do you feel? What emotions did you feel at the time the event was happening?

5. With the event still in your mind, imagine that you are the main character (or one of the main characters) of that event. Pretending for a moment that you are that person, begin to speculate why the main character may have acted the way they did. List at least five explanations for the main character's behavior *that do not reflect poorly on the main character or imply malicious intent* toward others. These are not facts about the situation; rather, they are speculations about the cause of another person's behavior that are either neutral or positive.

6. Imagine that the main character was in fact experiencing the things you just listed above. What emotions do you feel now, with this broadened perspective and additional information?

Take Home Point: Our interpretations about *why* things happen strongly shape our emotional reactions to them. Events themselves do not “make” us feel bad or good; rather, it is how we think about them that creates suffering or contentment. This cognitive reappraisal exercise broadens our perspective and allows us to “step into others’ shoes” to imagine how others’ behaviors may make sense. This is not done in order to excuse the behavior, but to feel less distressed about it, so that it causes us less suffering! Keep in mind that while the cognitive reappraisal is based on speculation only, ALL interpretations are speculative anyway, and we rarely know the entire truth about any event or circumstance.