CHANGING COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS INTO CLEAR THINKING

The following 5 steps offer a means to change cognitive distortions and automatic reactions into clear thinking and conscious responses.

1. Stop:

Before your thoughts create the worst possible scenerio and your body's

stress reaction escalates, pause. Be still.

2 Breathe:

This will bring your attention into the present moment. This will also

release physical tension and decrease your body's stress reaction.

3. Be Mindfull: With your breath as your mind's foundation, observe your thoughts.

Observe your physical sensations and feelings. Be open, accepting and non-

judging.

4. Reflect:

Once you have broken the pattern of automatic reactions, you can focus your

attention in a conscious and constructive manner. The following questions

may be helpful:

What is happening here?

Why am I reacting this way?

What are my automatic thoughts?

Am I exaggerating the situation with negative thinking?

Can I be more clear or constructive in my thinking?

Is there a constructive or positive way to frame this situation?

What is my intuition telling me?

What is my heart telling me?

What is most important to me?

What are my options?

5. Choose:

Instead of automatically reacting, you can make a conscious and

constructive choice.

Watering the Seeds of Joy

One choice we can make when facing difficult circumstances is to focus some attention on what is positive in our lives. This helps us experience a larger and often more realistic perspective and find greater stability. From this stable foundation, we can face our challenge with greater equanimity and clarity. This does not mean denying the difficulty or suppressing unpleasant or unwanted feelings such as pain, anger or fear. Joy and sorrow co-exist. This practice means recognizing the larger field of our life experience in which the difficult situation is occurring.

Imagine your life is like a huge garden with some plants growing beautifully, and some plants not doing well. Let your heart and mind take in the *whole* garden. Make a conscious effort to recognize what is positive and going right each day. I call this "watering the seeds of joy."

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Change Your Mind

Automatic Thinking Habits that Increase Stress

1. All or nothing thinking

You assess people and/or situations to be black and white, all good or all bad.

2. Focus exclusively on the negative or "The cup is half empty"

You place your attention on what is negative, unwanted or unpleasant. Water the weeds.

3. Discount the positive

You reject or diminish positive experiences.

4. Jump to conclusions

You conclude the worst when there is no evidence to support your judgement.

a. Mind/emotion reading

You assume someone is reacting negatively to you without checking it out.

b. Fortune telling

You assume things will turn out poorly.

Conscious Choices that Decrease Stress

1. Open to the whole spectrum

Rarely are things in life all good or all bad. You are sensitive to the whole picture, with its many shades of gray.

2. See the whole picture

You keep a negative event, quality or problem in context.

3. Affirm the positive

You fully acknowledge and let yourself be nourished by the good things that happen. Water the seeds of joy.

4. Remain open

You gather information and are open to the process.

a. Seek clarification

You check out your impressions.

b. Live in the present and be open to the outcome

You address the situation in the present and refrain from predicting the future. None of us know what tomorrow may bring.