

HEALTHY INTERACTIONS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER FOR EDUCATORS



healthy interactions
RESOLVING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

HAPPY NEW SCHOOL YEAR!

By the time this newsletter lands in your school, your 2013/14 school year will already be well under way. A new school year always creates great excitement and many professional demands for teachers.

A new year is an opportunity to start fresh and find new ways to do the challenging work of teaching.

This newsletter's theme is about ridding our thinking of unhelpful psychological patterns and providing some different ways to reframe everyday situations.

8 THINKING ERRORS: PITFALLS TO AVOID AND HOW TO REFRAME

Thinking errors are negative thoughts that cloud our view and affect our judgment of situations. Most of us have a tendency to get caught up in various thinking errors, which can lead us to more stress and internal turmoil in our personal and professional lives and relationships. Who, in the high-stress world of schools, needs more internal turmoil?

Being able to recognize these errors in one's own thinking is the first step in setting oneself free from falling into them and the stress that they create. Being able to identify the thinking error and move to the reframe is a great Healthy Interaction communication skill. Like so many of the Healthy Interaction strategies, it is a practice, which takes some mental commitment and intention but is well worth the effort.

Look over the list of the eight thinking errors to see if any of these are your default when you find yourself under stress or duress. If so, the first step toward changing is always gaining awareness so you can identify the pitfall, catch yourself and reframe the situation for a more positive outcome. Do not be hard on yourself—this is all about moving forward as professionals and communicators. Remember, change is a process.

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The Alberta
Teachers' Association

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Continued from the cover.

1. BLACK AND WHITE: ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

Black-and-white thinking is when you think you are either a total success or a total failure. In this type of thinking, you tend to see things, yourself and other people as all wrong, all right or all bad. For example, you allow yourself one piece of cake and you feel like your entire journey toward fitness and health is now completely off the rails. Nothing could be further from the truth, but black-and-white thinking—all-or-nothing thinking—can trap you into that kind of dead-end reasoning.

Catch it, turn it around and reframe:

Realize that you are not perfect—no one is. It's not going to be all or nothing. Accept the fact that you are human and that you make decisions that you sometimes regret. You do not have to give up on your goals because you slip up occasionally. Reset your course and move forward.

2. OVERGENERALIZATION

Overgeneralization is when you take one negative event in your life and apply it to other situations. It's when you make conclusions about yourself based on one situation or one event, and it restricts you from making positive changes in your life. For example, "I had a hard time last school year. I struggled a lot with my class—with everything, it seems. I have lost my groove as a teacher; I'm not the teacher I used to be. Is it over for me professionally?"

Catch it, turn it around and reframe:

Realize that every day is a new opportunity. If you failed before, don't expect failure each time in the future. Try to be more intentional about choosing an optimistic outlook rather than a pessimistic outlook. Try to approach each life situation as a fresh experience and with an open mind for success. It can be different, but it is up to you.



3. AWFULIZING

English teachers everywhere may be cringing at such an invented term, but “awfulizing” expresses it well. It is when you automatically expect that the worst will always happen to you. For example, “I have so much going on at work right now—it’s start-up for the new year, then Meet the Teacher night, long range plans are due ... it’s going to be a terrible week. I bet I will lose it with my class and I won’t have time to exercise or do one thing for myself this whole month to help relieve stress.”

Catch it, turn it around and reframe:

Avoid letting negative thoughts plague you, encompass your mind and dictate responses that are probably unhelpful. Look instead for the positive aspects of situations every day—they are there. Strive to not always assume the worst will happen.

4. NEGATIVE MENTAL FILTER

This is when you see all the negatives and filter out all the good things by focusing only on the negatives in a situation. This is sometimes referred to as seeing the glass half empty rather than half full. It is easy to become blind to all the good things when one’s filter is focused only on the negative.

Catch it, turn it around and reframe:

If you feel yourself thinking negatively about a situation, consciously stop. Halt the negative thought pattern and look instead for the positive aspects of the situation. It takes some training and intentionality and reframing—but it can be done.

5. MAGNIFYING OR MINIMIZING

This is blowing things completely out of proportion. In this thinking pattern, we often minimize our own talents and abilities and, instead, magnify or focus upon our weaknesses and failings. We may also magnify the gifts, talents and abilities of others and compare ourselves unfavourably to them. This can result in feelings of inferiority and insecurity. “My past relationship was an utter failure; no one will ever want a relationship with me.”

Catch it, turn it around and reframe:

Everyone has weaknesses, but everyone also has strengths. Recognize your strengths and remind yourself of what has brought you this far in your life. Try to focus on your unique skill set and personality—in other words, what it is that makes you special. Practise gratitude—there must be something you can be thankful for in terms of who you are and what you do well.

6. BLAME

Many people blame others for their struggles. Playing the blame game blinds us to our own role in the situation and the options for moving forward. For example, “My entire family was overweight. What hope do I have to be different?” “My family never helps out with meals; that’s why we always eat fast food. How can we eat healthy?” “This principal keeps me so swamped with school stuff, I don’t have time to eat properly or get any exercise for that matter. She’s wrecking my health.” Classic blame internal dialogue.

Catch it, turn it around and reframe:

Realize that you have the personal power to turn bad habits into positive and healthy ones. Your health is your responsibility and no one else’s, just as your outlook on life is your personal responsibility. You have choices to make every day, and how you take care of your body and your mind is up to you. Blame is a superficial and unhelpful response to situations. It also stunts personal and professional growth.

7. LABELING

This is using negative phrases to self-describe, like, “I’m so absent minded” or “I’m always late.” Often, by repeating statements such as these to ourselves, we allow ourselves to believe these labels as if they were the truth and behave accordingly. The labels become our own distorted truth.

Catch it, turn it around and reframe:

What is really true about you? Remind yourself of who you really are and don’t let yourself dwell on false thoughts or labels. Think of positive statements about yourself, such as “I’m an amazing teacher,” “I am a really kind and caring person,” or “I am really very strong and resourceful.” Positive self-affirmations do have incredible power to counter the negative self-talk that we can so easily engage in.

8. EMOTIONAL REASONING

Letting your feelings and emotions guide your interpretation of reality can be detrimental to positive thinking. If you feel as if you are a failure, you may start believing that you are a failure.

Catch it, turn it around and reframe:

Logically, what do you know to be true about yourself? Avoid letting yourself dwell on negative thoughts rooted in emotion. Base your thinking on the facts of the situation instead of how you feel about it. Remind yourself that eating healthy, exercising regularly and getting enough rest will help you get healthier, feel better all over and make more constructive decisions.

In closing, all of us readily fall into thinking traps that can trigger decisions and choices that do not move us toward our best and preferred future. This is especially true in times of high stress, such as a new school year.

(Gary Heavin, chief executive officer and founder of Curves International, writes about “thinking errors.”)

Fall is a great time for setting new goals, starting off fresh and decluttering our lives—use the season as an opportunity to disengage from these negative and unhelpful thinking errors.

Have a great school year and enjoy the sunshine of an Alberta autumn.



CONTACTS

If you have questions or issues you would like to discuss confidentially as your year unfolds, feel free to call Member Services at 1-800-232-7208 (Edmonton) or 1-800-332-1280 (Calgary).

www.teachers.ab.ca



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