

Broadening Your Perspective

Symptoms Addressed

- Concentration
- DSM-5 PTSD alterations in cognition and mood symptoms
- Stress response
- DSM-5 PTSD arousal and reactivity symptoms

Broadening Your Perspective teaches clients to reappraise distressing events by incorporating additional information that helps to reduce the distress they feel when remembering these events. This information can include facts about the event (who was present, when it took place, etc.) as well as speculations or opinions. Speculations may include information such as the moods or life circumstances of someone involved in the distressing event, or other factors outside of the client that may have influenced how the event occurred or was interpreted.

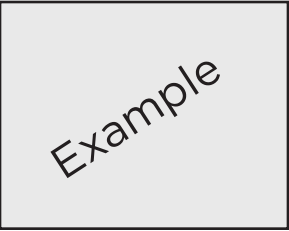
The following pages present examples of how to complete this technique, and a blank worksheet for clients wanting to practice these exercises.

BROADENING YOUR PERSPECTIVE TIPS

- If possible, it is recommended that clients complete this exercise soon after the distressing event or conflict.
- Encourage clients to identify additional information that is true and that they can “buy into.”
- It is recommended that individuals practice this exercise frequently, as practice makes progress, and practice is required to shift neural networks.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Improved emotion regulation (Gross, 2010)
- Fewer depression symptoms after experiencing stressful events (Troy et al., 2010)
- Less anger and more positive emotions (Mauss et al., 2007)



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. Here is an example of how you might complete this technique.

- 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.**

I was standing in a long line at the grocery store last week, and this woman had four children who were running around arguing with one another, asking for candy, and bumping my cart. They had no respect for personal space and the mother did not do anything to control them. In fact, she just stood there looking like she was spacing off. Finally, after several minutes, the line moved, but this event ruined my mood for the rest of the evening.

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

The event occurred because the mother was lazy and did not want to control her kids. She is inconsiderate and does not care about other people's comfort and personal space. This is why kids grow up to be rude adults! Parents are supposed to discipline their kids, not let them run wild while other people around them suffer.

- 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.**

The lady at the grocery store. It wasn't the kids' faults really; it was that lady, their mother.

- 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?**

I feel mad now, and I felt mad as heck then! I also felt disrespected at the time.

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.

- a. *She could have just learned a family member has cancer and was preoccupied with thoughts about that.*
- b. *Maybe a couple of the children were not hers, but were friends of her own children, and so maybe she did not feel she could discipline them.*
- c. *She could have been a single parent who was overwhelmed and did not know how to handle the situation better.*
- d. *Maybe she is trying to ignore the bad behavior as a way of getting it to stop. It could be that yelling at them makes the behavior worse, and her therapist told her to try to ignore bad behavior for a while instead.*
- e. *She could have just come from an appointment where she received very bad or sad news that she feels stunned by.*

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?

I now feel like there is still no excuse for her acting like that, but I feel less angry with her, and more compassion toward her, if it were true that something bad had just happened. If she was just trying to ignore the bad behavior, I do not feel as much compassion toward her, but if she had just received very bad news, I feel empathy and compassion for her.

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.

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