

Dear Class,

Remember, resilience <<https://my.happify.com/hd/how-to-build-resilience-one-day-at-a-time/?et=0b62255e-5ebd-4e1d-878b-6793d48f8dcc>> is the ability to overcome adversity.

Resilience<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/resilience.htm?utm_source=cons_nl&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11aug2020&utm_content=resilience_cta1> allows us to handle difficulties and move forward. Resilience is the ability to recognize and accept what is beyond our control and work around it. As I've said before there really isn't much we can do about what life has sent our way, but there is a WHOLE lot we can do about how we choose to deal with it.

Also, as I've said before, I believe one of the most important resilience skills is an awareness of our thoughts.<<https://www.actionforhappiness.org/take-action/know-your-thoughts,-choose-your-actions>> Remember, in order to function in this world we need to make sense of it (and right now that's no easy task). We make sense of it by explaining to ourselves why things happen. The more mentally flexible we are, the more accurate we can be in our explanations as to why a given situation took place. The more accurate we are in our explanations the more resilient we will be. Most of us have consistent ways of explaining why something happened, we have patterns of explanations. Within those patterns of explanations we all use what we call Cognitive Distortions<<https://healthypsych.com/psychology-tools-what-are-cognitive-distortions/>> or Irrational Beliefs.

Cognitive

distortions<http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/curriculum/313_MngngImpctTrmtcStrssChldWlfrPrfssnl/hndts/HO15_ThnkngAbtThnkng.pdf> are thoughts that cause people to see reality inaccurately. They are beliefs that are irrational and inaccurate and are usually associated with negative feelings. We all have cognitive distortions and we tend to use the same distortions repeatedly. The thing about these errors in thinking is they happen automatically, we don't intentionally think inaccurately, but we do. And the thing about cognitive distortions is that we feel bad when we think distortedly. When we perceive an event distortedly or irrationally we are negatively impacting our well-being. Remember our thoughts drive our feelings and behavior. By thinking distortedly we are making ourselves feel worse than need be.

So for example, in the face of an upset, I can say to myself "Why am I always (over generalization) reacting this way?! I shouldn't (should statements) feel this way, this is just terrible (catastrophizing.)" or I can say to myself, "Why am I reacting this way! I really wish I didn't feel this way, but I do. I know it will pass soon." The content of what I am saying to myself is very different in each case and will have a different effect on my subsequent feelings and behavior. Always, shouldn't and terrible are cognitive distortions. If we can hear what we say to ourselves in our efforts to make sense of the world, especially the cognitive distortions we use, we can harness that ability in order to be more accurate and flexible in service of reframing our thoughts<<https://my.happify.com/hd/how-to-stop-negative-thoughts-from-getting-you-down-infographic/?et=0b62255e-5ebd-4e1d-878b-6793d48f8dcc>> or challenging our beliefs.

Unfortunately most of us are sorely unaware of what we are telling ourselves, which can be problematic especially during times of adversity. If we aren't aware of what we are saying to ourselves, it's hard to change our thoughts. When this happens, when we can't hear our self-talk, we can at least try to be aware of the cognitive distortions we are using. While cognitive distortions can be automatic, we can usually listen for certain words - shoulds, terrible, always, never, etc, which signal a cognitive distortion. Once we notice these words we can begin to challenge the thoughts which encase these distortions<<https://healthypsych.com/psychology-tools-challenging-cognitive-distortions/>>.

The goal of challenging our cognitive distortions is to find a more realistic, balanced way to explain to ourselves why something happened. It's like being the judge of your own thoughts - are these thoughts

fact or opinions. If our thoughts are just beliefs that we make real then we can replace <https://www.csamsandiego.com/blog/tag/cognitive+distortions> one belief for another one, we can look for a more accurate balanced thought to replace it with. When we challenge our cognitive distortions we are making our thinking more accurate. When we think more accurately we tend to feel less bad. Please note - we are not going for thinking positively, we are going for thinking more accurately and feeling less bad. This is a very important distinction, the objective is a more balanced and helpful way of thinking. It's important to emphasize that we will not eliminate all difficult emotions when we challenge our cognitive distortions, that's not what well-being is about. What we are going for is accurate, realistic thinking, the kind of thinking that is in your own best interest.

Wishing you accuracy of thought,
Susan