Slow down and look around you
Reframing feelings before acting on them

Sometimes our emotional reactions are *reflexive* – like a habit – rather than *reflective* of the reality of a situation. This can cause us to misinterpret a situation and react in ways that are not helpful or make the situation worse. Stepping back and thinking about a situation allows you to figure out if your emotional response matches the situation. If it doesn't, you can adjust your response to your new perspective. First, you need to take time to stop and think. When reflecting on your reaction to a situation, consider the following:

- **Is there another way to view things?**
  Most of us pay more attention to negative things than to positive ones. We tend to remember the one bad thing that occurred during our day, instead of taking into account all the good, "normal" events that happened. The downside of this way of thinking is that it can get the brain stuck in a negative rut, preventing us from recognizing and valuing what's going well in our lives.

  Here are some examples of over-focusing on the negative:

  ➢ Thinking, "I'm so dumb in math," after you do poorly on a math test
  ➢ Thinking, "No one likes me," after a classmate doesn't say "hi" in the hall
  ➢ Thinking, "Today is the worst day of my life…I hate school," after making the junior varsity team instead of the varsity team.

  Are there any alternative ways of viewing the examples described above? Here are examples of some alternative responses:

  ➢ "I got a bad grade on the test, which makes me feel really dumb in math. I didn't really study for the test and haven't been putting much effort into my homework. Maybe it's not that I'm dumb in math, but that I need to pay more attention and prepare more for tests."

  ➢ "She didn't say 'hi,' but she was talking with a friend and the hall was crowded, so maybe she didn't see me."

  ➢ "At least I get to play on the team. It was a competitive year and I did well to make the team. Plus, I got an A on my English paper – maybe school wasn't all bad today."

  See Attachment 1 to learn about common reflexive emotional reactions, and what you can do to take back control of your reactions.

- **Ask yourself, what is the worst that could happen?**

  While at first a bad situation may seem really awful, often it is not really as grim as your first reaction supposes. Thinking through the logic of your assessment may help you see that the situation may not be so terrible after all.

  Here's an example of a first reaction followed by a logical assessment of the situation:

  > **First reaction:** "If I don't do well on this test, I'll never get into a good college, or get a decent job."

  > **Logical assessment:** "In reality, if I don't ace this test, I can probably retake it, do extra credit, or make it up with other grades. Plus, I've never actually heard of anyone being unable to find a good job just because they failed one test in high school."

- **Think of pro's and con's and consider the consequences**

  It can be very helpful to take a moment to think of, or even make a list of, advantages and disadvantages before deciding what to say or do. Taking time to decide whether what you're about to do is worth the consequences can potentially save you from a lot of trouble. For example, suppose you're mad at your friend…

  > **Problem:** He posted a picture of you the day after you got that horrible haircut.

  > **Possible response:** "I have some pictures of him, too, where he looks pretty bad. I'm going to put them up on Facebook and it'll be really great because everyone will see them."

  > **Pro's:** It might feel really good to get even. Maybe he would learn that he needs to respect any photos of you, or else…

  > **Con's:** There's the risk that the situation will continue escalating and you'll find additional pictures of you on his Facebook page that you like even less. Will he still study with you tonight? What if he decides he doesn't want you as a friend anymore? Maybe he'll tell everyone you're a jerk for not being able to take a joke.

  > **Alternative response, after considering pro's and con's**: Send him a private message with an attached photo that you like better and suggest a caption for it. "If you want to post a picture of me, how about this one? You could call it "Slam dunk." Can you swap this one for the picture you've got up there now?"

- **Consider the "big picture"**

  Try to put things in perspective. Here are a few ways you might go about it:

  > ➢ Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Recognize that other people have their own difficulties, and the way someone is treating you, or reacting to you, may

have nothing to do with you but may instead reflect their own problems or concerns.

➢ Try to find meaning in a difficult situation – no matter how bad a situation is, we can always learn and grow from it. As a result of getting through the difficult situation, think about what you've learned that will help you in the future.

➢ Decide whether the situation is worth being aggravated about. Sometimes the things you're going through seem hugely important in the moment, but in the grand scheme of things, they are really not worth the pain and effort. Imagine yourself looking back a year from now: will all the worry, anger, fear, sadness, or agitation have been worth it?

➢ Realize that in your life there are many things for which you are grateful, even if you might not think about them too often. Recognize the ways in which the situation could be worse. In that context, how crucial is the current problem?

- **Consider the effect of changing your own thinking**
  If you change the way you think about this situation, how will your life go better? For example:

  Before: "I feel terrible that my French teacher didn't ask me to join the French Club. I must not be as good at French as I thought. Now I'm not sure I should stick with it. I never wanted to take French, anyway."

  After: "Maybe the French teacher doesn't realize I'm interested in French Club. I'll ask about the club after class today, wonder aloud with her if it might be a good activity for me, and see what she says. If I stop being so down on myself about French, maybe I can get what I want."

- **Use self-talk**
  Tell yourself soothing or positive messages in place of negative messages that stick in your mind and make you upset. For example:

  Instead of: "This problem is ridiculous. It's so complicated, there's no way I can answer it."

  Try thinking: "If I can break down this math problem into parts, I can probably answer each part."

  Instead of: "Everyone hates me. No one wants to be with me."

  Consider: "I don't really know most of these kids, but I can have some fun with one kid in this room."

- **Accept that you may not be able to get what you want**
  Sometimes even if we feel justified or right, life is not always fair. There might not always be an ideal solution to a situation. If you are unable to change a situation, it can be helpful to work toward accepting the situation for what it is rather than continuing to struggle to change a situation that cannot be changed. Accepting the situation as it is helps make it feel less miserable by allowing you to move on.