

ACCEPTING REALITY



Sometimes in life we end up in situations that we just can't change. Radical acceptance is all about fully accepting your reality in situations that are beyond your control. This doesn't mean you approve of the situation, are giving up, or that it isn't painful. You are still allowed to (and should!) feel however you feel, but by accepting that it is what it is, you give the problem less power over you and you can begin to move forward.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Notice when you're fighting against reality. The first step in accepting reality is gaining awareness that you're resisting it. It may seem like this would be easy to spot, but there are actually a lot of subtle ways that people push against reality. If you're feeling bitter or resentful, wishing things were different, or thinking about how life isn't fair, you might be fighting reality.



Remind yourself that you can't change what has already happened. Before you can make peace with reality, you have to acknowledge that there's no going back to the way things were. Doing this may be challenging and painful, but by identifying what you can and can't control, you can turn your energy towards coping with the things you can't change.



Embrace your feelings. You might still be angry, scared, overwhelmed, or lonely – that's okay. Accepting reality includes everything that you're feeling, too. When you accept these feelings and let yourself experience them without any judgement, you can work through them in a healthy way.



Pretend that you're accepting reality. Even if you're still struggling to fully accept reality, think about what it would look like if you *did*. How would you act if you simply accepted things as they are? What would your next step be? Changing your behaviors and actions to reflect "pretend acceptance" can help you to actually shift your thoughts.



Relax your body. If you're feeling stressed or are pushing against the reality of your situation, there's a good chance your body is tense. This is often associated with resistance and keeps your mind on high alert. Physically relaxing your body can help you feel more ready to accept what is reality. Try yoga, taking a hot bath or shower, deep breathing exercises, or getting a massage to help you relax.



Use coping statements. These are sentences that remind you that different, healthier ways of thinking are possible. Repeating them can help you get through difficult moments – you can focus on just one or make a long list of your own. Some examples are: *It is what it is. I can't change what has already happened. I can accept things the way they are. I can only control my own actions and reactions.* If it helps, write your coping statements on Post-It notes and put them in places where you will see them multiple times a day, or set an alarm/create an event on your phone with a coping statement to pop up with a reminder every now and again.



Know that it takes practice. Radical acceptance is a great tool to cope with hard situations that we can't control, but it can take a while before it comes easily. Don't get down on yourself if you don't master it immediately. Start by trying it out in smaller situations, like when you're stuck in traffic or your internet is acting up during a call. By practicing radical acceptance on a daily basis, it will be easier to use as a coping tool when bigger, tougher challenges come your way.

FAST FACTS



Practicing radical acceptance has been shown to reduce feelings of shame, guilt, and anxiety.¹



Acceptance coping skills are linked to lower rates of mental illness and suicide.²



Radical acceptance can reduce distress in dealing with negative thoughts or events.³

TAKING A MENTAL HEALTH SCREEN IS ONE WAY TO WORK ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH. VISIT MHASCREENING.ORG TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

- ¹Goerg, N., Priebe, K., Bohnke, J., Steil, R., Dyer, A., & Kleindienst, N. (2017). Trauma-related emotions and radical acceptance in dialectical behavior therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder after childhood sexual abuse. *Borderline Personality Disorder and Emotion Dysregulation*, 4(1), 15–15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40479-017-0065-5>
- ²Li, Ziyao, and Jie Zhang. "Coping Skills, Mental Disorders, and Suicide Among Rural Youths in China." *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 200.10 (2012): 885–890. Web.
- ³Iverson, K. M., Follette, V. M., Pistorello, J., & Fruzzetti, A. E. (2012). An investigation of experiential avoidance, emotion dysregulation, and distress tolerance in young adult outpatients with borderline personality disorder symptoms. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 3(4), 415–422. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1037/a0023703>

PRACTICING RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

Many times bad things happen and we have no control over the situation. We can't change people's behaviors or the reality of what is happening, and these experiences are painful. Radical acceptance is a practice that helps us evaluate situations and work to reduce the emotional burden of the reality of the situation like resentment, anger, hatred, or shame. Use the following prompts to help you practice radical acceptance.

WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU? Use the following lines to write down your thoughts.

UNDERSTANDING REALITY

1. Look at the above statements. Is there something here that is a reality you *have to* accept (vs a judgement or opinion)? For instance - "It shouldn't be this way." Write it here.

2. Think about this reality and just sit with it. For instance - "This is what happened. It can't change. It is what it is."

3. What happened, or what events led to this reality? ("This is how things happened").

ACCEPTING REALITY

1. Think about this reality. Can you accept it in your thoughts? What can you tell yourself to help you accept this reality? Imagine what it feels like to accept it.

2. Imagine how you'd change your behaviors or actions if you accepted this reality? Imagine how the world would feel if you could let go.

3. Think about this reality. Can you accept it in your body? Where are you carrying the resistance to accept this reality? Do you carry that weight in your shoulders or your back? Is there tension or physical pain? Can you practice feeling your emotions in your body and then practice releasing them from your body?

4. Do you feel disappointment, sadness, or grief right now? Sit with that, acknowledge it, allow yourself to feel these feelings and understand it is ok and expected to feel disappointment, sadness, or grief. Write down anything specific about these thoughts and feelings.

5. Despite the pain of this reality, what makes life worth living? Remind yourself of those things here.

6. If you find yourself struggling at this point, write down some pros and cons of accepting or not accepting this reality. Then start back at #1 above for your next troubling situation.

ADAPTING AFTER TRAUMA AND STRESS



We all face trauma, adversity, and other stresses throughout our lives. When people think of trauma, they often think of things like abuse, terrorism, or catastrophic events (big 'T' trauma). Trauma can also be caused by events that may be less obvious but can still overwhelm your capacity to cope, like frequent arguing at home or losing your job (little 't' trauma). Trauma of any kind can be hard on your mental health but working on becoming more resilient can help you feel more at ease.

TIPS FOR HEALING



Process your thoughts. During and after experiencing trauma, it's common to go into survival mode and not have energy to wrap your head around what happened. It may feel safest to bury painful feelings and avoid confronting them, but acknowledging what happened and how it has impacted you is an important part of healing. When you feel ready, take time to think about how you've been affected (and be proud of yourself for pushing through).



Connect with people. The pain of trauma can lead some people to isolate themselves, but having a support system is a crucial part of wellbeing. Emotional support helps us to feel less alone or overwhelmed by what's going on or has happened in our lives. Talking to someone who has gone through a similar experience or someone who cares about you can be validating - and help you feel more able to overcome the challenges you're facing.



Don't compare your experience to others! We often question our own thoughts or experiences, and you may convince yourself that what you experienced wasn't a big deal because "others have it worse." Everyone experiences trauma differently, and no one trauma is "worse" than another. If it hurt you, then it hurt you - and your feelings and experiences are valid.



Take care of your body. Stress and trauma impact your body and physical health just as much as your mind. Listening to your body and giving it what it needs will help you heal. This includes eating a nutritious diet, getting enough sleep, staying hydrated, and exercising regularly. Moving your body is especially helpful in trauma healing¹ - aim to do it every day, even if it's only a few minutes of stretching.



Know it will take time. There is no set timeline for how you "should" heal. Remove the pressure of needing to bounce back quickly and focus on taking it one step at a time. Remember: recovery isn't linear, and it's normal to have bad days and setbacks. It doesn't mean you're failing - it's just part of the process.



Give yourself grace. Dealing with trauma and stress is no easy feat, but it's still common to get frustrated with yourself and what can sometimes be a slow recovery process. Try to catch when you hold yourself to unreasonable standards - instead of angrily asking yourself "why am I acting like this?!", think about how impressive it is that you keep going, despite what you have faced.



Don't feel ashamed to ask for help. It's easy to compare how you're feeling to how you assume others who have been through similar experiences are feeling, and you may get down on yourself because it seems like everyone else is doing just fine. What others experience and how they cope doesn't matter in your journey - if you feel like you need (or want) help, it's important to get that as soon as you can.

FAST FACTS

#2

Among people who took a screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, past trauma was the second most reported cause for mental distress among screeners after loneliness.²

3x

People who have been through trauma are 3 times more likely to experience depression.³

53%

Of people who took a screen at mhascreening.org in 2020 who scored with moderate to severe symptoms, over half (53%) reported past trauma as one of the three main contributors to their mental health problems.⁴

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Sources

¹Ivan de Kamp, M. M., Scheffers, M., Hatzmann, J., Emck, C., Cuijpers, P., & Beek, P. J. (2019). Body- and Movement-Oriented Interventions for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 32(6), 967-976. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22465>

²Proprietary data. [MHAScreening.org](https://mhascreening.org). 2020.

³<https://www.nd.gov/dhs/Info/pubs/docs/mhsa/trauma-statistics.pdf>

⁴Proprietary data. [MHAScreening.org](https://mhascreening.org). 2020.

PROCESSING TRAUMA AND STRESS

After a traumatic experience, it can be helpful to get your thoughts outside of your head. Writing down your experiences can help you gain perspective about your situation and help to reduce how distressing they are. Use the lines below to jot down anything that comes to mind related to your traumatic experiences.

When you've experienced multiple traumatic experiences, or carried trauma for a long time, it can shape the way you see yourself, the world, and others. These changes in beliefs are there to protect you from future harm, even when threats are gone. They can change the way you relate to others, whether or how you take risks, or how you feel positively about yourself.

HOW HAVE YOUR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES SHAPED THE WAY YOU SEE:

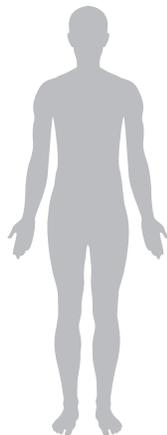
YOURSELF?

OTHERS?

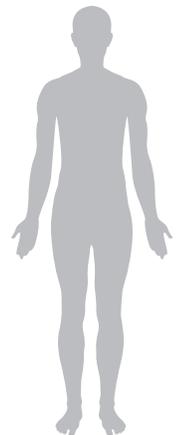
THE WORLD?

Reflecting on your writing experience above, do you notice how your body has changed in response to your feelings? Use the space below to identify the feelings you experience while reflecting on your story and draw lines to the corresponding area of your body where you experience that emotion.

FEELINGS



FEELINGS



Practicing grounding techniques can help you get unstuck from your mind and your body. Use the *Keep Your Mind Grounded* worksheet to learn and practice staying grounded as a coping skill for your unwanted thoughts and feelings. Use the *Stopping Stupid Thoughts* worksheet to reflect on and change the beliefs above.

Both worksheets, as well as others, can be accessed at screening.mhanational.org/diy.

DEALING WITH ANGER AND FRUSTRATION



In challenging times, you may find that you have little patience with other people or get upset over minor things. Anger and frustration are complicated emotions that often stem from other feelings, like disappointment, fear, and stress. Taking some extra steps to decrease your overall tension can prevent your feelings (and the reactions that they cause) from spiraling out of control.

TIPS FOR COPING



Pause before reacting. When you feel yourself getting mad, take a moment to notice what you're thinking, then take a few deep breaths or count to ten in your head. By giving yourself even just a few seconds before reacting, you can put some emotional distance between you and whatever is upsetting you – and you might even realize that you're actually tense because of something else.



Change your surroundings. Anger can make you feel trapped. Whether you're mad at someone in the same room as you or just angry at the world, sometimes physically relocating yourself can help you start to calm down. Go to another room or step outside for a few minutes of fresh air to help disrupt the track that your mind is on.



Get it all out. Keeping your feelings bottled up never works, so allow yourself time to be angry and complain. As long as you don't focus on it for too long, venting can be a healthy outlet for your anger. You can open up to a trusted friend or write it all down in a journal. Sometimes it feels better to pretend to talk directly to the person (or situation) that you're angry at – pick an empty chair, pretend they're sitting in it, and say what you need to get off your chest.



Release built up energy. Anger is a high-energy emotion, and we store that energy and tension physically in our bodies. Exercise is a great way to get rid of extra energy and can improve your mood. Some people find grounding exercises (like meditation or deep breathing) helpful to calm intense feelings, while others prefer more high impact activities like running or weightlifting. Think about what you usually do to decompress, like taking a hot shower or blasting your favorite music and use the tools that you know work for you.



Get organized. When things around you feel chaotic, it's often a lot easier to get frustrated and snap at people. Dedicate a few minutes each day to tidying, planning, or reorganizing. Implementing a routine can also help you feel more on top of things by adding structure and certainty to your daily life.



Eliminate stressors if possible. Sometimes there's no way to completely get rid of a big problem, but there's often more than just one issue contributing to your frustration. Things like an overwhelming workload or unhealthy relationship can make you feel on edge. Pay attention to how and why you're feeling stressed and see if you can make small changes to improve a challenging situation to make it less burdensome.



Manage your expectations. Negative feelings often stem from people or situations not meeting your standards or assumptions. It's frustrating to feel let down but recognize that you can't fully predict anyone else's behavior or how situations will play out. Shift your mental framework so that you aren't setting yourself up for disappointment.



Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you're working to cope with your anger but feel like you can't get it under control, it's time to get some extra support. Anger can fester and become explosive if not resolved. A number of mental health conditions can manifest as anger, so this may actually be a sign of depression or anxiety – treating an underlying condition can help heal your anger as well.

FAST FACTS



Of people who took an anxiety screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 71% felt easily annoyed or irritable at least half of the time or nearly every day.¹



Of people who took a bipolar screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 82% reported being so irritable that they shouted at people or started fights or arguments.²



One poll found that 91% of respondents said that they feel people are more likely to express their anger on social media than they are face-to-face.³

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Sources

¹Proprietary data. MHAScreening.org. 2020.

²Ibid.

³IBM Watson Health-NPR Health Poll. November 1-14, 2018. <https://www.ibm.com/downloads/cas/2YQ8NLD5>

MANAGING FRUSTRATION AND ANGER

Anger and frustration are both common emotional responses that everyone faces. However, if these feelings become too intense, they can lead to both mental and physical distress, and cause problems in relationships. This worksheet can help you identify the emotions and thoughts behind your anger and frustration, and help you determine what you need to feel better.

DESCRIBE THE EVENT AND IDENTIFY SPECIFIC THINGS SOMEONE SAID OR DID THAT BROUGHT ON YOUR ANGER OR FRUSTRATION.

LIST OUT ANY EMOTIONS THAT WERE UNDERLYING YOUR FEELINGS OF FRUSTRATION OR ANGER.

For a list of emotions, visit <http://bit.ly/emotionsunderneath>

WHAT PARTS OF THE DESCRIPTION ABOVE ARE FOCUSED ON FACTS, ACTIONS, OR BEHAVIORS (AND NOT A JUDGEMENT OR OPINION)? WRITE IT DOWN.

Take some time to think about what needs to happen for you to be less angry. Focus on what you can do and what you need others to do.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FEEL BETTER?

WHAT DO YOU NEED SOMEONE ELSE TO DO TO HELP YOU FEEL BETTER?

Remember - we can only control our own actions. However, writing down what you need from others can help you advocate for yourself.

THE NEXT TIME YOU FEEL ANGRY OR FRUSTRATED, WALK YOURSELF THROUGH THESE SAME STEPS TO HELP YOU PROCESS YOUR FEELINGS. ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

WHAT HAPPENED? → WHAT DO I FEEL? → WHAT DO I NEED?

GETTING OUT OF THINKING TRAPS



It's easy to fall into negative thinking patterns and spend time bullying yourself, dwelling on the past, or worrying about the future. It's part of how we're wired – the human brain reacts more intensely to negative events than to positive ones and is more likely to remember insults than praise. During tough times, negative thoughts are especially likely to spiral out of control. When these thoughts make something out to be worse in your head than it is in reality, they are called cognitive distortions.

COMMON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Overgeneralization: Making a broad statement based off one situation or piece of evidence.

Personalization: Blaming yourself for events beyond your control; taking things personally when they aren't actually connected to you.

Filtering: Focusing on the negative details of a situation while ignoring the positive.

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Only seeing the extremes of a situation.

Catastrophizing: Blowing things out of proportion; dwelling on the worst possible outcomes.

Jumping to Conclusions: Judging or deciding something without all the facts.

Emotional Reasoning: Thinking that however you feel is fully and unarguably true. **Discounting the Positive:** Explaining all positives away as luck or coincidence.

"Should" Statements: Making yourself feel guilty by pointing out what you should or shouldn't be doing, feeling, or thinking.

TIPS FOR CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS



Reframe. Think of a different way to view the situation. If your negative thought is "I can't do anything right," a kinder way to reframe it is, "I messed up, but nobody's perfect," or a more constructive thought is "I messed up, but now I know to prepare more for next time." It can be hard to do this when you're feeling down on yourself, so ask yourself what you'd tell your best friend if they were saying those things about themselves.



Prove yourself wrong. The things you do impact how you feel – what actions can you take to combat your negative thoughts? For instance, if you're telling yourself you aren't smart because you don't understand how the stock market works, learn more about a subject you understand and enjoy, like history. If you feel like no one cares about you, call a friend. Give yourself evidence that these thoughts aren't entirely true.



Counter negative thoughts with positive ones. When you catch your inner dialogue being mean to you, make yourself say something nice to balance it out. This may feel cheesy at first and self-love can be hard, so don't give up if it feels awkward in the beginning. Name things you love, like, or even just don't hate about yourself – we all have to start somewhere!



Remember: thoughts aren't facts. Your thoughts and feelings are valid, but they aren't always reality. You might feel ugly, but that doesn't mean you *are*. Often times we can be our own worst enemies – other people are seeing us in a much nicer light than how we see ourselves.

Sources

¹Proprietary data. MHAScreening.org. 2020.

²Ibid.

³Matthews, G., Wells, A. (2000). Attention, automaticity, and affective disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 24, 69-93.

FAST FACTS



Of people who took an anxiety screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 64% felt afraid, as if something awful might happen at least half of the time or nearly every day.¹



Half of people who took a depression screen at mhascreening.org in 2020 felt that they were a failure or had let themselves or their families down nearly every day.²



One study found that 85% of what we worry about never happens at all, and in the 15% of times where worries came true, 79% of people handled the difficulty better than expected, or learned a valuable lesson.³

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DEALING WITH THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Going to the worst-case scenario (aka catastrophic thinking or thinking the worst) is one of the most common thinking traps we fall into. Thinking about the worst-case scenario can help you feel like you're preparing to protect yourself from getting hurt in the future or to imagine what is the worst thing that can happen so you can reflect and know you can survive no matter what.

Unfortunately, problems come up when you have worst-case scenario thoughts and you're not aware of them enough that they control you, vs you controlling them. This pattern of thinking can result in circular thinking (or ruminating) in ways that pull you into a rut, bring your feelings down, make depression worse, cause you to avoid your responsibilities, and increase anxiety.

EXAMPLES OF WORST-CASE SCENARIO THOUGHTS:



Use the lines below to list out any and all worst-case scenario thoughts you find yourself having. Don't worry about whether it's "truly" a worst-case scenario thought...if it's bothering you and you want to jot it down, jot it down.

LOOK AT THE THOUGHTS ABOVE. PICK THREE THAT STAND OUT THAT YOU WANT TO ADDRESS. WRITE THEM BELOW.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

QUESTION EACH THOUGHT BY EXPLORING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

- Are you sure the thought is true or will happen?
- Is there any evidence it is true?
- Is there evidence that it is not true?
- Is the thought more rooted in your feelings or reality?
- If it is reality, are you able to cope with it? Have you coped with it before?

FINDING HEALTHIER THOUGHTS

Looking at the three thoughts above, what do you need to say to yourself or how can you change the above thoughts so that you feel better instead of worse? These are called "reframed thoughts."

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Write your reframed thoughts on paper or post its and put them where you are most likely to struggle with worst-case scenario thinking. Examples include by your bed, in the bathroom, in your car, on your phone, or in a journal.