



## Changing Our Lenses

*Instead of seeking new landscapes, develop new eyes.  
-Marcel Proust*

Most people want to be happy. We would like to feel good, avoid pain, and achieve our goals. For many, though, happiness seems to be an elusive dream. In fact, it appears that we humans are much better at disturbing and defeating ourselves! Instead of feeling good, we are more likely to worry, feel guilty and get depressed. We put ourselves down and feel shy, hurt or self-pity. We get jealous, angry, hostile and bitter or suffer anxiety, tension and panic.

On top of feeling bad, we often act in self-destructive ways. Some strive to be perfect in everything they do. Many damage relationships. Others worry about disapproval and let people use them as doormats. Still others compulsively gamble, smoke and overspend – or abuse alcohol, drugs and food. The strange thing is, most of this pain is avoidable! We don't have to do it to ourselves. Humans can, believe it or not, learn how to CHOOSE how they feel and behave.

### **As you think, so you feel.**

People feel disturbed not so much by people or situations, but by the views they take of them. Events and circumstances do not cause your reactions. They result from what you tell yourself about the things that happen. Put simply, thoughts cause feelings and behaviors. Or, more precisely, events and circumstances serve to trigger thoughts, which then create reactions. These three processes are intertwined. The past is significant - but only in so far as it leaves you with your current attitudes and beliefs. External events – whether in the past, present, or future – cannot influence the way you feel or behave until you become aware of and begin to think about them. To fear something (or react in any other way), you must be thinking about it. The cause is not the event – it's what you tell yourself about the event

### **Anti-Awfulizing**

So how awful is AWFUL? How terrible is TERRIBLE? It is helpful to put events into perspective, actively and consciously expanding our focus to see life realistically. We often say something is "awful" and get a feeling like it is 100% awful. But how can that be? You can say, "I can't stand this!", and yet somehow you are continuing to do it.

How can you begin to manage your thoughts and perspectives, so you can also manage your feelings and behaviors as well? This does not mean to "sugar-coat" or even to minimize the situation. There is real distress and discomfort in this world. It's okay to recognize that this real distress is important and it's happening. However, while recognizing the real distress in situations, we can AT THE SAME TIME assess it clearly and factually by considering where it lies on the spectrum of distress and that we can –

and are – able to stand it. Here are a few steps to help see your situation clearly and factually – in order to gain perspective.

### **Steps to REALize Reality**

- 1. Rate your current troubling situation** *Key: 1 (feels manageable) to 10 (feels unbearable)* How would you rate your feeling of distress from 1 to 10?
- 2. Ask yourself:** “How terrible is this?”, “Is it really as bad as it feels?”, “Is there anything good happening to add balance to this situation?”, “Can I get through this?”
- 3. Now ask yourself for a bit of perspective:** “Is it as bad as a hurricane or earthquake – or famine or war?”, “Could it be worse?”
- 4. Look for something good:** “Is there nothing occurring at this same time that is good?”, “Is there anything I can do to make something good happen at the same time – even if it has nothing to do with making the current troubling situation better?”

It is in these simple and factual ways that we realistically manage and develop a reality-based perspective on life.

*Material adapted from: SMART Recovery Family & Friends Handbook. SMART Recovery, 2012.*