

Responding to a lapse

A lapse can often lead to feelings of failure, shame, embarrassment and even relief at not having to maintain the hard work anymore. Reframing this experience is crucial. Instead of a failure, a lapse can be seen as a normal part of recovery and an opportunity to learn more about triggers and how to deal with them, in order to avoid a lapse in the future.

How do you stop a lapse becoming a relapse?

The *Abstinence Violation Effect* is also known as the 'f***k it' response.

Have you ever told yourself something like "I've had a pipe/drink and I've failed so I may as well keep using" or "Once a user, always a user"?

Thinking Errors & Irrational Beliefs

Thinking errors are like filters, through which we understand the world and interpret events. These thinking errors and beliefs can lead to feeling like we might as well just go back to our old habits because everything is just too hard.

These interpretations are distorted – as our filter is flawed and warped by our experience and our underlying core beliefs.

Remember, we all experience thinking errors!

When our irrational beliefs are not borne out by events, we can feel depressed, frustrated, and anxious and so on.

It may seem your irrational belief is not irrational at all (like the belief that the world is always fair). However, no matter how desirable something is, when we argue with reality we become unhappy and anxious.

Below is a list of common thinking errors – how many of them apply to you?

1. All or nothing

You see in black and white. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.

2. Overgeneralising

You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

3. Filtering

You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that everything becomes negative and you cannot see the positives.

4. Discounting the positive

You reject positive experiences by insisting they 'don't count' for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.

5. Jumping to conclusions

You make a negative interpretation even though there are no facts that convincingly support a negative view.

6. Mind reading

You automatically think that someone is reacting negatively to you without bothering to check this out.

7. Fortune-telling

You can anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.

8. Magnifying or minimising

You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your mistakes or someone else's achievements), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or someone else's imperfections).

9. Catastrophising

You exaggerate the likelihood that catastrophes will happen. Not getting a particular job at interview, for example, will mean that you will become destitute and homeless.

10. Emotional reasoning

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true".

11. Should statements

You try to motivate yourself with should and shouldn't, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. 'Musts' and 'oughts' are also offenders. The emotional consequences are guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration and resentment.

12. Labelling and mislabelling

This is an extreme form of overgeneralisation. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: "I'm a loser". When someone else's behaviour rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: "he's a stupid f*ckwit".

13. Personalising

You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event, for which, in fact, you were not primarily responsible.

14. Unreal ideal (comparisons)

You unreasonably and unfairly compare yourself to others who have a specific advantage that you do not.

15. 'Can't stand its'

Things or activities that are not enjoyable (but perhaps necessary) are seen as unbearable. You tell yourself "I can't stand" whatever it is and make yourself miserable and resentful, instead of simply acknowledging that you don't particularly enjoy it.

Common Irrational Beliefs

"I must be loved and approved of by everyone"

"I must be competent, adequate and achieving in every respect"

"It's awful when things don't go the way that I would like"

"People should have the same values and beliefs as me and they should do things the way I would do them"

"When I do something badly, I am a bad person, a failure and an idiot"

"Certain people are bad, and they should be blamed and punished for their misdeeds"

"It's easier to avoid problems than to confront and deal with them"

"The world is a fair place and I will be always be treated fairly"

"If there is a chance that something bad might happen, I need to think through the implications of that right now"

"There is a correct solution to every problem and it's awful if I can't find it"

Human unhappiness is caused by life circumstances, and it's impossible to be happy when things are not going well for me"

Disputing Irrational Thoughts

Disputing (challenging) your irrational thoughts can be broken down into 4 parts:

1. Reality testing
2. Looking for alternative explanations
3. Putting it into perspective
4. Using goal-directed thinking

1. Reality testing

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this true?
- What is the evidence for and against my thinking?
- Are my thoughts factual, or are they just my interpretations?
- Am I jumping to negative conclusions?
- How can I find out if my thoughts are actually true?

2. Looking for alternative explanations

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there any other ways that I could look at this situation?
- What else could this mean?
- If I were being positive, how would I perceive this situation?

3. Putting it into perspective

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this situation as bad as I am making it out to be?
- What is the worst thing that could happen?
- How likely is it?
- What is the best thing that could happen?
- What is most likely to happen?
- Is there anything good about this situation?
- Will this matter in 6 months' time?
- Will this matter in 5 years' time?

4. Using goal-directed thinking

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is thinking this way helping me to feel good or achieve my goals?
- What can I do that will help me solve the problem?
- Is there something I can learn from this situation, to help me do it better next time?