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## When People And Situations Cause You Anxiety: Stress And Expectations

Situations and/or persons you encounter can at times be a source of duress and what you can do about it so that they do not contribute to your anxiety.

These situations or even memories of them can cause you worry (even after considerable time has past) which leads to anxiety, which may in turn develop into a panic attack.

Here's the process in a nutshell:

When situations arise that upset you (whether it be a specific situation or an individual's behaviour), you are likely "making should statements."

You may recall from previous installments that the definition of **making should statements** is: "Concentrating on what you think 'should' or ought to be rather than the actual situation you are faced with, or having **rigid rules** which you think should always apply no matter what the circumstances are."

Fortunately you no longer need to suffer.

Now I'm not suggesting that all aspects of your anxiety are caused from making should statements, but taking control of your should beliefs can get them in check and allow you to move forward with far less anxiety about the situations.

You do so by substituting healthier beliefs about the situation.

I've developed a strategy for you to utilize when you are struck with situations of painful memories or times when should statements are impeding your optimum well-being; which, by the way, they really do!

I would like to suggest a new Strategy: What I call the "**Questioning Technique.**"

The "**Questioning Technique**" can be used whenever someone's behaviour or something bothers you.

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There's a caveat: the technique requires you to be honest with yourself.

The steps are below.

**Ask yourself:**

1. Did you cause or contribute to the existence of the negative event or behaviour of the person?
2. If yes, what could you have done differently? If no, might there have been a better way to handle the situation, now that you have the benefit of hindsight?
3. Regardless of whether you've answered yes or no above, analyze your thinking and locate the "Should" rules that are driving your frustration about the event. Then replace these should rules with more realistic statements. Should rules might apply to how you process your behaviour and/or the other person's behaviour.
4. Finally, what are the general lesson(s) or take-home-ideas that you can use for future reference?\*

If applicable, the idea(s) / lesson(s) generated from step #2, will serve as a lesson that can be integrated into future conduct, if similar enough situations arise.

The idea(s) / lesson(s) generated from step #4 will form part of your life lessons which can be used for future reference at any time.

\*The idea is that if something or someone bothers you, there is a lesson or take-home-message to get, regardless of who's to blame. This does not necessarily assume any responsibility on your part for causing the event; rather, the idea is that a lesson, or take-home-idea, can be taken from every life experience and thus every experience is valuable.

When you think about it, there's only really one benefit of worrying: self-reflection of your behaviour, which, if possible, allows you to go back and make amends, or, in future have a different approach to the same situation, if it arises.

The best way to get these benefits of worrying without the worry, is, in my opinion, by following the **"Questioning Technique"**

The above technique works to replace a negative encounter into a positive one because:

1. You now have a clear alternative strategy that actually allows you to gain advantages from the negative experience.

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2. You can move forward and truly live the life you wish to live without being inhibited by the negative experience.

**Some points to keep in mind:**

- If you've followed the above steps and negative reflection reoccurs for the same event, remind yourself: A. that it is already resolved, and B. what the lesson(s) were.
- Perhaps a future event might seem to generate the same lesson; however, it serves to strengthen/reinforce the lesson or "take-home-message" which will serve you moving forward.
- A continual theme of lessons will be that people are individuals and "should" rules cannot be applied unanimously. (This is due to the fact that "Should" beliefs are a cognitive distortion.)
- Diversity / contrast exist, and will always exist. There is nothing you can do about it. Putting more healthy thoughts and beliefs in place of problematic "should" rules can develop a more useful perspective.
- Utilizing the Questioning Technique allows you to turn a negative event into a positive one, feel better, be more productive and move forward to lead the life you really want to lead.

I urge you to start processing events using the Questioning Technique on a consistent basis and I think that it'll be a beneficial addition to your repertoire of techniques for dealing with anxiety.

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