

Building Resilience

Instructions:

Awfulness Scale Exercise

Throughout the course of our lives we will all face challenging situations, many of which are outside our control.

In any situation, we may not have a choice about whether we can change or remove ourselves from the situation, however we always have a choice about how we interpret, feel and respond to the situation. In deciding, in our mind's eye, how to 'score' the situation on the 'awfulness scale', we are choosing whether to trigger our stress response. The higher the score the more likely we are to trigger the neurological reactions in our body associated with our in-built survival instinct.

If we choose a low score, avoiding the survival response, we remain in competency mode, maintaining access to our superior thinking skills that are more likely to identify effective ways of managing the situation to achieve a more favourable outcome.

The process of reflecting on the present moment, choosing how to perceive the situation and then choosing your response, can be developed and, the more you practice, the more likely you are to control your emotions rather than have your emotions controlling you.

Step 1: Prepare your own awfulness scale for the purpose of measuring a situation:

Think of a continuum with 0 – 'everything is OK', and 100 – being the 'worst possible situation you can imagine' – this might be an event such as war, famine, hurricane etc or if you prefer to be able to connect with the score, identify the worst possible situation for you personally eg death of a loved one, living on the streets etc



Step 2: Review the situation you are currently faced with, choose to put your feelings on hold for a moment, reflect on how awful it really is and place it on the continuum

It is sometimes helpful to do this with someone who can help you bring your event into perspective as your own feelings of overwhelm can inflate the 'awfulness' in the moment.

This can be particularly helpful for dealing with common situations that elicit the stress response eg traffic jams, shopping queues, rude interactions, road rage etc

Example: You find yourself in a traffic jam that might cause you to be late for a meeting. A common response is to get angry, panic about the meeting, feel angry and resentful about getting up late or the kids making you late etc. None of these reactions are helpful. They will not get you to the meeting quicker and in fact, they will potentially reduce your performance when you do get to the meeting due to the reactions occurring in your body which naturally reduce your competency level.

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So score it at a maximum of 2 and decide what actions you could take to deal with where you are now:

- What could you do about your meeting eg apologise & keep the other person informed, re-schedule it, cancel it, have conference call in car etc
- How can you enjoy the present moment eg listen to your favourite radio station or CD, call a friend, have some me time etc
- What have you learned from this experience that would help you avoid it in the future eg take a different route, leave earlier, not schedule meetings first thing etc

By bringing the situation into perspective you have allowed your brain to work more effectively, your body has not been pumped with chemicals unnecessary for the current situation and you will have achieved the best outcome for the situation and demonstrated your ability to respond calmly in the face of adversity.

Step 3: Use this exercise as much as possible, whenever you are experiencing stress. This will then develop as an unconscious habit to respond more effectively when faced with a challenging situation.