

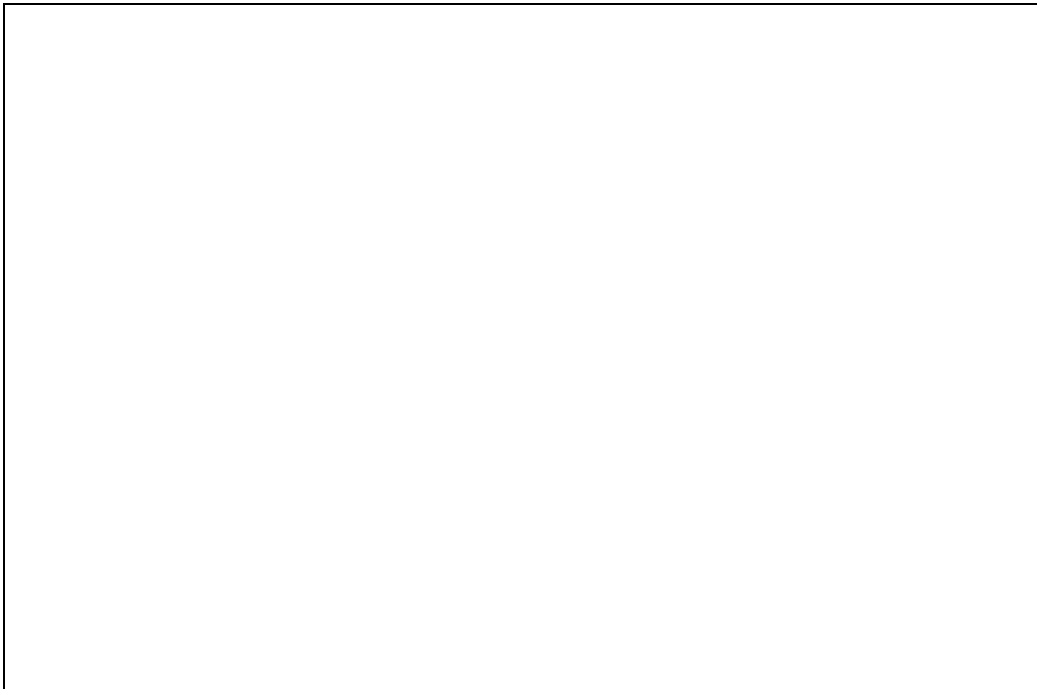


## Overreaction: Putting Things in Perspective with Gratitude

Most people have heard of catastrophizing but sometimes the prevalence of catastrophizing can be overlooked. For anyone who doesn't know what it means to catastrophize, here is one simple definition:

**Catastrophize** – verb: To view or talk about an event or situation as worse than it actually is, or as if it was a catastrophe <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/catastrophize>

Just about everyone catastrophizes at one time or another. Catastrophic thinking (thinking that something is worse than it really is) often results in an emotional or behavioral overreaction. A simple example that many people have witnessed is to view the common reaction someone may display when they drop their food.



*Depending upon how hungry you may feel, dropping the food you that you think you may be about to enjoy can bring about a catastrophic overreaction. **In the box, draw a picture of your face right after you dropped a tray of food that you just bought. Share your picture with the group.***

Fortunately many of us have strengths when it comes to preventing overreaction as there are likely some things that we can handle calmly without losing control of words or emotions. Still it is important to be self-aware of life areas which may provoke an overreaction that we may later regret. When we increase our self-awareness of these sensitive triggers for catastrophizing, this can help us to know ahead of time to take a step back and cool down before going overboard with our reaction.



**Question for Discussion** – What was one time when you may have catastrophized a situation in your own mind (blew it out of proportion) that resulted in an overreaction that you later regretted:

Example:

*“I was sitting in my car in traffic at a red light not paying attention and then someone behind me beeped their horn to tell me the light turned green because I wasn’t moving but instead of just going forward I immediately started screaming and cursing out the window and then I realized it was my kid’s school teacher in the car behind me”*

We all have sensitive areas where we may be prone to overreacting. **Discuss the following:**

**Being forced to wait** – *Some people are naturally patient and can calmly wait, but others may freak out when lines or wait times are much longer than expected – How about you?*

**Listening to others opinions:** *Can you calmly handle listening to someone outwardly profess views that you strongly disagree with or do you find yourself losing your cool and wanting to argue or fight?*

**Criticism** – *Can you accept being told that you did something wrong, without getting overly upset, sad, defensive or angry?*

**Rejection** – *How are you at handling disappointing situations like breakups, not getting a highly desired job after an interview, failing a test, etc.? Does it ever feel like it’s the end of the world in those instances?*

**Other:** *Honestly using your own perceptive powers of insight and self-awareness, identify any other situations or life areas which you may overreact and share them with the group*

***“It is not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it”*** (Hans Selye, Endocrinologist)

**What is the solution for dealing with catastrophizing?** There are several ways to keep oneself from catastrophizing. Some of these include: Getting the right amount of sleep, rest and exercise, practicing acceptance and optimism (looking at the bright side especially in a seemingly negative situation.)

Another excellent way to deal with catastrophizing is “Putting things in perspective” which is the follow up group exercise for this topic:



## Putting Things in Perspective

To avoid catastrophizing and overreacting to situations, it is extremely helpful to practice putting things into the proper perspective. A good place to start is to recognize thoughts and statements that may be the result of catastrophizing or overreacting. **Consider and discuss the following:**

### Catastrophic Statement

"I can't believe \_\_\_\_\_!" (Fill in the blank)

"I can't take it when \_\_\_\_\_!"

"Why is this always happening?"

"Now my life is ruined because of this!"

### What is the Truth?

(Putting things in proper perspective)

**Truth:** "I can believe it, it just stinks"

**Truth:** "I **can** take it, I just don't like it"

**Truth:** "It happens more than I want it too, but it doesn't *always* happen"

**Truth:** "This situation will be difficult for a while but I will survive and get through it eventually"

**Do you ever find yourself making any of the above statements or other similar forms of overreaction? – If so, come up with some examples from your own life and discuss them:**

### Some Examples:

- "When I come home from a hard day's work and the kids all trashed the house and made a mess I find myself saying "***I can't believe*** you made a mess again, ***why is this always happening!***" Then sometimes I let my emotions get the best of me and overreact by yelling, complaining and stomping around the house instead of just dealing with the situation calmly"
- "***I can't take it when*** I have to sit there and listen to one of those ignorant people who have such stupid political views! It gets me so mad sometimes I have a hard time falling asleep at night because I keep replaying the arguments in my mind over and over and it can drive me crazy"
- "I was putting so much effort into getting into a really good relationship but then suddenly I got dumped for no reason and "***now my life is ruined because of this!***"

**Your example:**



## Putting Things in Perspective – Looking at the Big Picture with GRATITUDE

If you find yourself thinking catastrophic thoughts or overreacting, it can be helpful to look at things from a global “big picture” perspective followed with gratitude. The process is simple:

1. Catch your own **thoughts** and recognize when you are catastrophizing or overreacting to a situation
2. Consider the ‘**Big Picture**’ – Consider things outside of your immediate view of the world
3. Instead shift focus to reflect on what you are **grateful** for in this instance

*Examples:*

**Thought** - “I just got a flat tire, my life is completely awful”

**Big Picture** – “If a flat tire is the worst thing that happens to me today, does that really mean this is such a bad day? I can remember when I didn’t even have a car or a license and I always had to walk or take a cab”

**Gratitude**- “Flat tires, happen! I’m grateful that I have a car and places to go to and good friends to drive to and meet up with.

—

**Thought** – “I can’t believe I have to do a presentation in front of everyone, I am going to make a complete fool of myself”

**Big Picture** – “Millions and millions of people all over the world do presentations at one time or another and just about everyone gets nervous so really what is the big deal?”

**Gratitude** – “Even though this may be a challenge, I am appreciative I was chosen for this opportunity and it’s a great opportunity to better my skills for the future by doing this presentation”

—

**Thought** – “I thought I was doing so well with this addiction issue and then next thing I know, I relapsed. Why does this keep happening to me?”

**Big Picture** – “I am surely not the first person to ever relapse, it can take many tries to get this right”

**Gratitude** – “Just because I relapsed doesn’t mean that all is lost. I’m still alive and I can still build upon what I’ve learned and continue to make progress even if I have to deal with some consequences for a little while”

—

**Now try your own example from your own life.** Try to come up with something meaningful in your life that you may need to work on. Take turns discussing each one as a group\*:

**Thought** -

**Big Picture** –

**Gratitude** -

*\*(If you are up to it, as you share your example ask the group for feedback about the issue you chose)*



## Closing Exercise: *Exploring Gratitude*

Being grateful, thankful and appreciative and expressing gratitude is a scientifically proven way to improve your life. Consider some scientifically researched benefits of gratitude:

- 1. Gratitude opens the door to more relationships.**
- 2. Gratitude improves physical health**
- 3. Gratitude improves psychological health.**
- 4. Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression.**
- 5. Grateful people sleep better.**
- 6. Gratitude improves self-esteem.**
- 7. Gratitude increases mental strength.**

Taken from “7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude That Will Motivate You To Give Thanks Year Round” – Amy Morin:  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/amymorin/2014/11/23/7-scientifically-proven-benefits-of-gratitude-that-will-motivate-you-to-give-thanks-year-round/#415ed922183c>

### **Closing Activity- Exploring Your Gratitude:**

#### **Directions:**

Start by creating a gratitude list as a group by **brainstorming** at least 20-30 things that a person can feel grateful for and appreciate in life. Anything goes, even the simple things in life can go on the list just like the deeper, more meaningful things. Try to include some of both on the group brainstorm gratitude list. Someone write the list somewhere for everyone to see (like on a whiteboard)

Once the group gratitude list is complete, everyone in the group pick two or three things in each category below that you feel grateful for today. Pick 2 or 3 more meaningful things that you highly value in your life today and also pick 2 or 3 simple things that you have in your life today that you feel grateful for.

**“Today, I am grateful for these meaningful things in my life” –**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**“I am also grateful for the following more simple things in life” -**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**“We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorns have roses.”**

– Alphonse Karr