



Thinking, Feeling and Coping in Challenging Scenarios

Introduction - For this activity you will be reading some scenarios and you will be asked to try to do your best to answer some self-examination questions about thinking, feeling, behaving, and later, coping. When reading the scenarios, keep in mind not every detail is provided, so try to use your imagination to fill in the story in a way that best matches your real life. Feel free to discuss how these scenarios can be different depending upon these different details. This activity is a way to practice the following important skills for self-improvement:

1. Accurately identifying **emotional triggers, as well as related thoughts and feelings**
2. Deciding on appropriate vs inappropriate **behaviors and reactions** to trigger situations

Directions – As a group discuss the following scenarios. The counselor can choose which ones to cover if there is not enough time for all of them. Remember when processing each one, try to identify these areas:

- **Thoughts** – What is going through your mind? – (Your cognitions)
- **Feelings** – This goes a little deeper: Can you describe what is going on with you, using feeling words?
- **Actions** – What do you think you would do or say? What are your likely behaviors and choices?

Also – Make these scenarios even more interesting by adding some “what if” details in the discussion

Scenarios:

1. **Left Out** – You show up at work or school and everyone is talking about a great time they all had together over the weekend. People are laughing and sharing stories with enthusiasm and joy. As time passes you see that even more people were there, but you were not – You were not invited, and you have no clue as to why. You find out who was behind putting the event together
2. **Strange Connection** – You are out somewhere with your significant other (If you don't have an SO, use your imagination based on your experience) You notice that there is someone else there who your SO seems to have a connection with. They seem all too familiar with each other. There is no overt flirting going on however you get the sense they know and like each other more than you had realized.
3. **Something's "Off"** – Your close friend introduces you to the new person who they are dating, telling you that they think they may have finally found “the one”. It does not take long until your instincts tell you something just is not right with this person. You do not have any specific proof or examples yet as to how you know that there are probably some red flags with this person, but you can just sense it based on your experiences and your instincts.
4. **Trash Talker** – You unexpectedly make a new acquaintance. You meet someone who is interesting, fun, has a lot in common and who just clicks with you in all the right ways as a potential friend. However, there is one downside. This person gossips and talks negatively about just about everyone that comes up in conversation the whole time.
5. **Triggered** – You meet someone new at work or school and you are engaging in conversation. The person does not say anything overtly offensive, but your instincts just tell you that this person is ignorant and insensitive and has values that are not in agreement with your own. You know that you will have to be around this person at times for the foreseeable future, possibly even working on projects together



6. **Forgive or Re-live?** – You get into a disagreement with a close family member and some words are exchanged and you both end up walking away from the argument before things get too heated. The next time you see this person, they offer you an apology and they say that they just want to drop it. However, in your mind it's not over, you just don't feel satisfied with the apology and big part of you does not want to let it go just yet.
7. **Ganged up on** – You are involved in some kind of group project (whether it be at work, school or planning something together with friends) where everyone had different responsibilities and tasks assigned that they agreed to. When you meet up with the group everyone seems like they are complaining that you did your part of the assignment wrong. In your own head you feel so sure you did everything right and you did a good job, but the group is unanimous that you screwed up your part of the project
8. **Out of the Loop** – You are in a conversation with people who aren't strangers, but they aren't close friends either. Everyone is talking about something and as the conversation goes on you realize you just don't know what they are talking about. You find yourself smiling and nodding to be polite, but you fear at any point they may ask you to give your thoughts or opinion on this topic you know little or nothing about.
9. **Stoned Contractor** – You hire a contractor to do work in your home and when the crew gets there you can tell that one of the guys is high on something. He is functioning as far as you can see but you can tell that something is off by looking like his eyes and listening to the way he speaks and other telltale behaviors. He is going to be coming in and out of your house for at least the next day or two.
10. **Fun at First** – You are introduced to someone new and you hit it off with this person very quickly – Instant friendship! – However, the more you talk to this person, you can tell that this is the type of person who was fun for you to hang out with in the past but usually lead to trouble. So far in the conversation everything is innocent, but your instincts are telling you that this person, although entertaining and fun, is probably bad news for you especially if you want to stay on the right path with your own goals
11. **Against the Crowd** – You are with a group of people and everyone is getting along and connecting and there is just a good vibe in the room with this group of people as you all seem to just “click” together as a group. After a while of having innocent fun, things start to take a turn. The group unanimously wants to do something that you know is not a good idea. You don't want to be a “downer” and ruin the fun, but you also know there is potential risk involved with what you think may be about to go down
12. **Social Media Stress** – You post something meaningful to you on social media and someone makes a comment that just does not sit right with you. It is not overtly hurtful or mean however at the same time the more you think about what is said, it is not supportive and can be even be interpreted as a little bit condescending or passive aggressive
13. **Jealous Jerk** – Someone in your social life seems like they are always trying to “one up” you and show how their life is better than yours. They are very subtle about it, but you can't help but notice how they always try to paint themselves in such a good light and they seem to always tell their stories making it out so that they are either the hero or the victim.
14. **Indirectly Insulting** – Someone who you have to interact with regularly seems to at times be condescending and at times even a little bit rude or dismissive but in a very subtle way. They aren't doing or saying anything in particular that alone is something inappropriate but it is just the overall way they seem to speak to you and treat you that you just do not like



Process: *Three Principles to Follow for Coping with Awkward or Challenging Situations and Feelings*

1- Think before acting – Surely, you have heard this one before, probably since you were a kid, but that is because this principle is so important and so valuable. It is often a good idea to really ask yourself “Reacting or behaving this way may feel good now, but how will I feel about this later, especially if I make things worse?” – At times doing or saying nothing and waiting until later is the best, other times it is not

Discussion questions:

- Is thinking before acting an area of strength for you or something you need to work on? How do you know? (Did anything ever happen to you that taught you this lesson?)
- Can anyone share a personal example of how thinking before acting made a difference for them?
- What helps you think before acting? (Do you have any tricks or specific ways to remind yourself?)

Thinking before acting is a way to prevent impulsive decisions and your first impulse can often be misguided by emotions which leads to the next principle:

2- Try not to make decisions based on emotions – Just because something feels “good” does not mean it is a good idea. For example, if someone does something that triggers your anger, in the moment it may feel good to act out and break something but later that often becomes something you may regret. Telling someone off is another example as you can’t take your words back once you put them out there.

Discussion questions:

- What emotions are most likely to trigger you? (If it is anger, dig deeper, what feelings may be behind the anger such as feeling hurt, afraid or insecure)
- Can anyone share an example of how avoiding an emotion-based reaction paid off for them?
- What helps you cope with challenging emotions in the moment and also later on?

It is so important to develop the skill of knowing when to act or speak up and when not to, which leads to the next principle:

3- If you do decide to do or say something, learn to do it respectfully – Unless there is an immediate safety issue, it pays to be respectful with your words or actions. You can be firm and assertive and stand up for yourself without losing your cool or behaving or speaking aggressively or in a way that is out of control. This is a skill that can be learned and practiced with time. Remaining respectful and assertive often pays off in the long run as there are fewer burned bridges in life.

Discussion question

- Is being assertive (communicating in a firm but respectful manner) an area of strength or an area that you may need to work on?
- As a group discuss what is involved with being assertive – what do you know about assertiveness – *Might this be a useful topic for a future group?*



Additional quotes for discussion (optional)



Once you have a major success with assertiveness, you learn that it's a much healthier path than being a doormat to the insensitive folks. You gain respect for yourself, have more time for your priorities, and develop authentic and healthier relationships.

Dereen Virtue - QUOTESSTATS.COM

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the courage to be ourselves and show the world our likes and dislikes, our thoughts, feelings, and shortcomings. It's about **communicating** honestly with family, friends and colleagues. As we become more **assertive, we drop** the mask and show our true selves. We proclaim: "This is who I am, this is what I feel, and these are my needs."