

Managing Unrealistic Thinking LE 2021

[Self-Management Skills Module](#)

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

If you have not already done so, please review the Introduction To Teaching Self-Management ([Self-Awareness Module](#)) for suggestions on teaching SES Skills, processing learning experiences, and applying skills in real-life situations. See the [Assessment & Grading Module](#) for tips and examples of assessing, evaluating, and grading SES learning experiences.

This learning experience aims to facilitate the awareness of how unrealistic and inaccurate thinking about ourselves and our possibilities affects how we feel about ourselves and how it negatively affects our behavior and relationships. It examines nine specific examples of unrealistic and inaccurate thinking and the skills to overcome these types of unrealistic and inaccurate thinking. The [Feelings Change LE](#) and [Conflicting Feelings/Mixed Emotions LE](#) ([Self-Awareness Module](#)) may be used to introduce how our thinking affects our feelings. [Reality Checking LE](#) ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)) is a more complex skill to manage, cope with, and overcome inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, and irrational thinking.

Procedure/Directions:

1. Discuss with students how unpleasant feelings and negative attitudes about ourselves can be caused not because of actual events, situations, or relationships in the present but because of what we think and the assumptions and interpretations we make about ourselves and our possibilities. Discuss how we can overcome negative thinking about ourselves by determining whether these interpretations and assumptions are accurate and realistic, and if they are not, by replacing them with those that are accurate and realistic. See [Managing Unrealistic Thinking Concepts](#) below.
2. Determine how long students have to complete this learning experience. You may decide to have students complete the entire learning experience in one sitting, over time (where students are asked to select 1-3 of the unrealistic ways of thinking that most pertain to them at that time), or they could identify the two ways of unrealistic thinking they use most often.
3. Distribute copies of the [Unrealistic and Inaccurate Thinking Examples](#) below and explain the directions.
4. Explain the grading procedures. Outlined below are different ways to assess and grade this project.
5. Review the [Stages of Learning a New Skill](#) outlined below.
6. Using the [Processing Questions](#) below, ask volunteers to share. You may decide to start each class by asking volunteers to share.

Stages in Learning a New Skill

It is helpful if students understand that learning social-emotional skills is not easy and that they will go through different stages when learning these skills. The stages in learning a new skill include:

1. Feeling self-conscious and awkward when using the skill.
2. Feeling phony while engaging in the skill. When teaching these skills, my students would constantly say: “No one talks like this,” or no one does these things. My response was that, unfortunately, not enough people talk like this, and that is a major reason why so many people are unable to successfully work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships, or maybe the reason so many people are unsuccessful at reaching their goals is that they don’t.
3. Their use becomes more skilled but it is still mechanical.
4. They master the skill, and its use becomes natural and automatic, fully integrated into their behavioral repertoire. They can use the skill without thinking about it.

Possible Assessment & Grading Procedures:

1. Teacher grade (and/or student self-evaluation) of the completeness of student answers on their My Unrealistic & Inaccurate Ways of Thinking. See the Generic Rubric For Assessing Self-Awareness below.

Processing Questions:

When students have had ample time to complete their examples, ask volunteers to share. Questions include:

1. An unrealistic and inaccurate way of thinking you have used recently
2. A specific example of when you used it recently
3. An example of a more realistic and accurate statement.
4. As a result of writing a more realistic statement, how has this process changed your thinking, and how do you feel about yourself, your situation, relationships, and your possibilities.
5. Whenever possible, summarize, or have them summarize, any similarities in their unrealistic thinking, the same or similar examples, and the same or similar types of more realistic and accurate statements.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences

1. Students continue to use the My Unrealistic Thinking Log to track the types of unrealistic thinking they use, specific examples of their unrealistic thinking, and their more accurate statements.
2. If they have not already done so, have them complete the Reality Checking LE ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)). Reality-checking is a complex, advanced skill that takes time to teach and for students to master. Reality checking is a process that helps students identify unhealthy interpretations and assumptions about themselves, things that may happen in their future, situations in the present, or other people and their behavior or intentions. Once students identify these unhealthy ways of thinking, they identify accurate, realistic, rational, and non-prejudicial statements to counteract them.
3. Students develop a goal to manage their thinking in healthier ways using the My Goals Log LE and the My Goals Log ([Social-Emotional Skills Projects Module](#)). Using the My Goals Log allows students to change their behavior and develop goals that do not require much analysis or the exploration of alternatives and choices. The My Goals Log can be used to have students develop goals and evaluate their success at the midpoint and again at the end of the project.
4. Managing My Unhealthy Thinking Project. ([SES Projects Module](#)). This project is a follow-up learning experience for students who have completed the Reality Checking LE ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)). It would be difficult for students to complete this project without completing the Reality Checking LE. The purpose of this project is to provide students with additional experience over time to identify their inaccurate, unrealistic, irrational, or prejudicial interpretations and assumptions that are causing unpleasant feelings and then provide the opportunity to replace their inaccurate, unrealistic, irrational, or prejudicial interpretations and assumptions with accurate, realistic, rational, or non-prejudicial ones.

Managing Unrealistic Thinking Concepts

We may experience unpleasant feelings about ourselves, our possibilities, and our relationships not because of actual events or situations but because of what we think and our assumptions and interpretations. We often make inaccurate, unrealistic, incomplete, prejudicial, and irrational assumptions about ourselves and our possibilities. To change unpleasant feelings caused by inaccurate, unrealistic, incomplete, prejudicial, and irrational thinking, we need to:

1. Be aware of what we are feeling, how our thinking is causing those feelings, and how our thinking and feelings affect our behavior.
2. Understand the interpretations and assumptions we are making.
3. Determine whether the interpretations and assumptions are accurate, realistic, and rational.
4. Let go of interpretations and assumptions that are inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, or irrational.
5. Replace inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, and irrational interpretations and assumptions with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.

My Unrealistic and Inaccurate Thinking Examples

Read the questions below and place a check (☒) on the number that best describes the extent to which you use this type of thinking. If you use this thinking at least sometimes, try to identify a time when you did and how it made you feel. Then, read the solution to this type of thinking and write a statement to replace the inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, or irrational thinking you identified.

All or Nothing Thinking

All or Nothing Thinking: I look at things in absolute, black-or-white categories (good or bad, happy or unhappy, right or wrong, all or none, etc.).

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Used All or Nothing Thinking and How I Felt:

Solution: Think in Shades of Gray. Instead of thinking about my problem or situation in all-or-none extremes, evaluate things on a range from zero to 100. When things do not work as well as I had hoped, I consider the experiences a partial success rather than a complete failure. See what I can learn from the situation.

Write A More Accurate, Realistic and/or Rational Statement About A Time When I Used “All or Nothing Thinking.” What Did I Learn As a Result of This Experience?

Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization: I view an adverse event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. I do poorly on a test, so I generalize that I am dumb. I do something wrong, and I generalize that I am a terrible person. My love interest breaks up with me, and I generalize that I will never find anyone else.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Overgeneralized and How I Felt:

Solution: Instead of assuming my generalization is true, examine the evidence to see whether it is true. For example, am I dumb because I did poorly on one assignment? Am I a bad person because I did something wrong? In addition, see Reality Checking: Doing a Reality Check on Negative Self-Labels and Negative Self Talk.

Write A More Accurate, Realistic and/or Rational Statement About A Time When I Overgeneralized

Mental Filter

Mental Filter: I dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives, even when the situation is mostly positive (e.g., I got an 87 on a test, and I dwell on the fact that I didn't do better).

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Dwelled on the Negatives and Ignored the Positives and How I Felt

Solution: Look for the positives in the situation (e.g., I got an 87).

Write A More Accurate, Realistic and/or Rational Statement About A Time When I Dwelled on the Negatives and Ignored the Positives

Discounting the Positives

Discounting the Positives: I insist that my accomplishments and positive qualities don't count because I dwell on the negative.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Discounted the Positives and How I Felt

Solution: Ask myself, why don't my accomplishments and positive qualities count? Why do I feel so bad about myself that I discount my positive qualities and accomplishments? Does this relate to a poor self-concept or the belief that I must be perfect?

Write A More Accurate, Realistic and/or Rational Statement About A Time When I Discounted the Positives

Should Statements

Should Statements: I criticize myself or other people with "should" or "should not," "must," "ought," and "have to statements."

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Criticized Myself Using Should or Shouldn't Statements and How I Felt

Solution: Substitute language that is less colorful or emotionally loaded. This method is helpful for "should" statements. Instead of telling myself I shouldn't have made that mistake, I can say: "It would be better if I hadn't made that mistake."

Write A More Accurate, Realistic and/or Rational Statement About A Time When I Criticized Myself Using Should or Should Not Statements.

Beating Myself Up for Past Events

Beating Myself Up for Past Events: I beat myself up for things I did or did not do in the past.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Beat Myself Up for a Past Event and How I Felt

Solution: Remind myself that the event is in the past, and I cannot change the past. It is over. If need be, I can apologize if I have wronged another person, try to regain their trust, or make it up to them. I can try to learn from the experience so I do not do it again in the future. Then, I need to move on and not dwell on something I cannot change because we cannot change the past.

Write A More Accurate, Realistic and/or Rational Statement About a Time When I Beat Myself Up for a Past Event.

I Judge Myself Harshly and Put Myself Down

I Judge Myself Harshly and Put Myself Down: I call myself names like “dumb”, “stupid”, or make other harsh judgments about myself. I constantly question myself for what I did or did not do. I don’t allow myself to make a mistake.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Judged Myself Harshly and Put Myself Down and How I Felt

Solution: I wouldn’t judge others or speak to others like this, so why do I do it to myself? I also wouldn’t allow others to talk to me this way, so why do I allow myself to speak to me this way? Instead of putting myself down in a harsh, condemning way, I will talk to myself in the same compassionate way I would speak to a friend with a similar problem or a friend who had made a similar mistake. Try being as forgiving to myself as I am to others. Or say: “Stop It! Don’t talk to yourself like that!”

Write A More Accurate, Realistic and/or Rational Statement About a Time When I Judged Myself Harshly and Put Myself Down.

Wanting Total Love and Approval From Everyone

Wanting Total Love & Approval From Everyone: I believe I must be loved, liked, and approved of by everyone all the time, or I will be unhappy and feel worthless.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Was Unhappy and Felt Worthless Because I Was Not Loved, Liked, and/or Approved of by Everyone

Solution: Remind myself that although it may be nice, it is unrealistic to expect that everyone will love, like, and approve of me. Remind myself that it is more important for me to be loved, liked, and approved of by the people I care about and with whom I have close relationships and that it is more important for me to be loved, liked, and approved of for being myself instead of trying to please everyone.

Write A More Accurate, Realistic and/or Rational Statement About Wanting Total Love and Approval From Everyone:

Jumping to Conclusions

Jumping to Conclusions: (A) *Mind Reading*: I assume others react negatively to me without definite evidence. (B) *Fortune Telling*: I arbitrarily predict that things will turn out badly.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Never Sometimes Frequently

A Time When I Assumed That Others Are Reacting Negatively to Me When There Was No Definite Evidence of This (Mind Reading):

Solution: See Reality Checking: Doing a Reality Check on Interpretation and Assumptions We Make About Others, Their Behavior, and/or Their Intentions

A Time When I Arbitrarily Predicted That Things Will Turn Out Badly (Fortune Telling):

Solution: See Reality Checking: Reality Checking for What We Imagine May Happen in the Future

Using the information from the preceding pages, answer the following questions.

My Unrealistic Ways of Thinking:

List two unrealistic ways of thinking you currently use, starting with your lowest scores. List what is outlined in bold. Put your score in parentheses next to the way of unrealistic thinking. Next, write how you plan to overcome this way of unrealistic thinking in the future.

For example, if you scored a “1” on **I Judge Myself Harshly and Put Myself Down**, you would write:

I Judge Myself Harshly and Put Myself Down (1). When I judge myself harshly and put myself down, I will say: “Stop It! Don’t talk to yourself like that!” I will also remind myself that I wouldn’t talk to others like that and ask myself why I am talking to myself like that.

1. My Unrealistic Way of Thinking # 1 & How I Will Overcome It in the Future:

2. My Unrealistic Way of Thinking # 2 & How I Will Overcome It in the Future:

Generic Rubric For Assessing Self-Awareness, Self-Insight, & Self-Knowledge

To earn a grade of 90 or higher, you must meet **all** of the criteria in the 90-100 range listed below. To earn a grade of 100, your work must be perfect. To earn a grade of 80-89, you must meet **all** of the criteria in the 80-89 range listed below. Even if one question was not answered, if the answers are incomplete, or if you hurried through parts of the assignment to get it done, the highest grade **you** can give yourself is a 79. Based on the quality of your work, I may give you a higher grade, but do not give yourself a grade higher than a 79 if it is incomplete.

90 – 100 = Advanced: Above and Beyond. My answers demonstrate deep and complex self-awareness, self-insight, and self-knowledge.

- Best Effort, Best Work
- All the Questions Have Been Answered
- The Answers are Complete and Fully Supported in Great Detail
- Answers Show **Deep & Complex** Insight: I Thought Very Deeply About The Answers to **Each** Question.

80 – 89 = Proficient: At Standard. My answers demonstrate significant self-awareness, self-insight, and self-knowledge.

- Good Effort, Good Work, but Not My Best
- All the Questions Have Been Answered
- The Answers are Complete and Supported
- Answers Show **Significant Insight**: I Thought Deeply About The Answers to **Most** of the Questions.

70 – 79 = Needs Improvement. My answers demonstrate some but incomplete self-awareness, self-insight, and self-knowledge.

- This is Not Good Work or Good Effort for Me
- Some of the Questions Are Incomplete or Have Not Been Answered
- Some Answers are Not Well Developed: I Didn't Think Deeply About the Answer to Some of the Questions
- I Hurried Through Parts of the Assignment to Get It Done
- Answers show **Incomplete** Self-Awareness, Self-Insight, & Self-Knowledge

60-69 = Needs Significant Improvement. My answers demonstrate a lack of self-awareness, self-insight, and self-knowledge.

- Poor Effort and Poor Quality of Work for Me
- Many of the Questions Are Incomplete or Have Not Been Answered
- Many Answers are Not Well Developed: I Didn't Think Deeply About the Answers to Most of the Questions, and My Answers Lack the Necessary Details and Support.
- I Hurried Through Large Parts of the Assignment to Get it Done
- Answers show a **Lack** of Self-Awareness, Self-Insight, & Self-Knowledge

50 = Not Acceptable. The Task Needs to be Completed or Done Over.

40 = The Assignment Wasn't Turned In