

Reality Checking Learning Experience 25:

Changing Unhealthy Thinking

[Self-Management Skills Module](#)

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

If you have not already done so, please review How To Teach Self-Management ([Self-Management Skills 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.

The purpose of these learning experiences is to facilitate the awareness of how our unrealistic thinking affects how we feel (and thus how we behave) and how unpleasant feelings may be caused not because of actual events, situations, or relationships in the present but because of what we are thinking and the assumptions and interpretations we make. These learning experiences give students the opportunities to identify how their inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, and/or irrational thinking affects how they feel and (thus their behavior) and provide them with a process (Reality Checking) to manage, cope with, and overcome unpleasant feelings brought on by negative thinking.

Reality-checking is a complex and more advanced skill that takes time to master. However, I have taught this skill to students as young as sixth grade. Before beginning these lessons, students need to be competent at identifying their feelings and why they feel this way. It is helpful if students are able to determine the depth of their feelings, why they feel that way, and to understand what interpretations and assumptions they are making. To fully understand the depth of their feelings, you may decide first to teach the Focusing process ([Self-Awareness Module](#)). It is also a more complex and advanced skill. See the Jealousy ([Self-Awareness Module](#)) example for an illustration of how the Focusing and Reality Checking processes can be used together. The Feelings Change and Conflicting Feelings/Mixed Emotions learning experiences ([Self-Awareness Module](#)) can also be used to introduce how our thinking affects our feelings. Managing Unrealistic Thinking ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)) is an excellent follow-up activity, although it can also be done as a standalone learning experience. In addition, I suggest you become competent in using these skills before teaching them to students.

Often, we experience unpleasant feelings not because of actual events, situations, environments, or relationships in the present but because our thinking (interpretations and assumptions we make about ourselves, others, past events, or things we imagine may happen in the future (when they may not), and that these events will have bad consequences. Although trying to process past events and thinking about and planning for potentially stressful situations in the future can be a healthy activity, if our thinking is incomplete, inaccurate, irrational, or based on assumptions, it is unhealthy.

We can make inaccurate, unrealistic, incomplete, prejudicial, and irrational assumptions about:

1. Interpretations and assumptions we make about things that may happen in the future (when they may not) and that future events will have bad consequences for us (when they may not).
2. Interpretations and assumptions we make about our current situation that are causing unpleasant feelings in the present.
3. Interpretations and assumptions we make about ourselves, and negative self-labels and self-talk.
4. Interpretations and assumptions we make about other people, their behavior, or their intentions.

To manage, cope with, and overcome unpleasant feelings caused by inaccurate, unrealistic, incomplete, prejudicial, or irrational thinking, we can use a process called Reality Checking. The steps in the process include:

1. Be aware of what we are feeling, why we are feeling that way, how our thinking may be 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, and identify the evidence that proves that they are accurate, realistic, and rational.
4. Let go of interpretations and assumptions that are inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, or irrational.
5. Replace inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, or irrational interpretations and assumptions with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.

General Procedure for Teaching Reality Checking:

1. Below are the steps for each of the four categories of reality-checking, as well as examples of the process for each one. Although you may start with any of the four categories (interpretations and assumptions we make about the future, our present situation, ourselves and our self-labels/self-talk, and relationships), it may be easier for students to identify and discuss situations they imagine in the future. In addition, the Shark example works well for teaching the reality-checking process.
2. After reviewing the steps in each process and the example, ask students for additional situations they may have experienced.
3. Provide copies of the process and have students complete it for a project. Give them sufficient time to complete it since they may not be experiencing that type of feeling/thinking at the time you assign the project.
4. Before you begin, remind students that mastering the reality-checking process may be challenging to master. The process must be used repeatedly and in multiple situations to feel comfortable and to become proficient. The key is to make progress and to understand why we are effective and what we need to do to become more effective in the future. Review the Stages In Learning a New Skill.

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.

Processing Their Examples:

When students have ample time to complete their projects, ask volunteers to share their examples. Make sure to ask them if and how this has changed their thinking and how they feel as a result of going through this reality-checking process. When possible, summarize or have them summarize similarities in the inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, and irrational interpretations and assumptions they make about the future, their present situations, themselves, and others that cause unpleasant feelings.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences

1. It would be helpful for students to keep a log of their unhealthy thinking, how it makes them feel, why, and what, if anything, they can do to change their thinking.
2. If students want to change their behavior in a specific way as a result of doing one of the reality-checking learning experiences, you may have them develop a goal to manage their thinking in healthier ways using the My Goals Log LE and the My Goals Log ([SES 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.
3. Managing My Unrealistic Thinking ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)). This learning has students identify specific examples of negative thinking, negative labels, and negative self-talk that can affect how they feel about themselves and, thus, how they behave.

Possible Assessment & Grading Procedures:

1. Teacher grade and/or student self-evaluation of the completeness and depth of their answers to the reality-checking questions. See the Generic Rubric For Assessing Self-Awareness below.

Reality Checking: How to Change Our Thinking Reading

Often, we experience unpleasant feelings not because of actual events, situations, environments, or relationships in the present but because of our thinking (interpretations and assumptions we make about ourselves, others, past events, or things we imagine may happen in the future, and/or that these events will have bad consequences). Although trying to process past events and thinking about and planning for potentially stressful situations in the future can be a healthy activity, if our thinking is incomplete, inaccurate, irrational, or based on assumptions, it is unhealthy. We can make inaccurate, unrealistic, incomplete, prejudicial and/or irrational assumptions about:

1. Interpretations and assumptions we make about things that may happen in the future (when they may not) and that future events will have bad consequences for us (when they may not).
2. Interpretations and assumptions we make about our current situation that are causing unpleasant feelings in the present.
3. Interpretations and assumptions we make about ourselves, and negative self-labels and self-talk.
4. Interpretations and assumptions we make about other people, their behavior, or their intentions.

To manage, cope with, and overcome unpleasant feelings caused by inaccurate, unrealistic, incomplete, prejudicial, or irrational thinking, we can use a process called Reality Checking. The steps in the process include:

1. Be aware of what we are feeling, why we are feeling that way, how our thinking may be 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 or rational, and identify the evidence that proves that they are accurate, realistic, and/or 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.

Procedure for Teaching Reality Check for What We Imagine May Happen in the Future

Distribute copies of Reality Checking: How To Change Our Thinking Reading above and Doing a Reality Check for Interpretations & Assumptions About The Future below and discuss the concepts and steps in the process. Next, explain that you will describe a situation and that they will use it to begin learning the steps in the reality-checking process. Explain that there are 6 different beaches, and they will work in small groups using reality-checking to decide whether to go into the water at one of the beaches. First, use the Reality Checking process with the whole class to decide whether to swim in the lake.

The situation:

It is a very hot and humid summer day, and you and your friends are going to your favorite beach. You hope there are waves so you can body surf and use your boogie board. The problem is that you are afraid of being bitten by a shark. Over the last several years, there have been more and more shark sightings, and last summer, sharks bit three swimmers at three different beaches, and a surfer died after a shark bit off his leg. You must decide whether to go in the water and/or ride the waves. You are going to one of the following beaches located at:

1. An ocean beach that has never had a shark sighting
2. An ocean beach that had several shark sightings over the last several years but none this year.
3. An ocean beach with multiple shark sightings this year but none this week.
4. An ocean beach with a warning sign posted that there were multiple shark sightings earlier in the week.
5. An ocean beach with a warning sign posted that swimming is prohibited because of recent shark sightings the day before, but you don't see any sharks.
6. An ocean beach with a warning sign posted that swimming is prohibited because of recent shark sightings, and you see sharks swimming 20' off the shore.

Before I assign you and your group a beach, we will use the Reality Checking process to decide whether to swim in the lake. Using either a slide or a copy of the steps of Reality Checking for Interpretations & Assumptions About the Future below, take the whole class through the steps in the reality check process for things we imagine may happen in the future. Use example # 1 above to decide whether to swim in the lake. (I was sitting on a beach at a small lake many years ago when one of the two women sitting in front of me turned to her friend and said that she wasn't going into the water because she was afraid of being bitten by a shark).

For this example, tell students they fear swimming in the lake because they don't want to be bitten by a shark (you answer questions # 1 and 2: "What am I imagining and how do I feel). Thinking they may be bitten by a shark in a lake is irrational, even though the consequences of being bitten by a shark can be horrible. Discuss how inaccurate, unrealistic, and irrational thinking can prevent us from meeting our needs and short and long-term goals; in this case, it could prevent them from going into the water and having fun.

See An Example of Reality Checking for an Anticipated Future Event: Shark Example below.

After processing this example, divide the class into six groups. Give each group one of the remaining six beaches (#s 1-6) to do a reality check on whether to go into the water and/or ride the waves. Provide each group (or each group member) with a copy of Doing a Reality Check for What We Imagine May Happen in the Future. After each group has completed the reality check for their beach, bring the class back together and discuss their answers.

How to Process the Shark Example:

Ask a representative from each group to share their group's decision (whether to go into the water and/or to body surf/boogie boarding) and why they made the decision they did. Ask if everyone in their group agreed with the group's decision and if there were dissenting opinions. Ask those students to share why they disagreed.

Reality Check for Interpretation & Assumptions About The Future

Sometimes, we imagine that something may happen in the future (when it may not) and may have bad consequences for us (when it may not). It is our thinking (imagining that something is going to happen in the future and that the consequences will be bad for us) that is causing unpleasant feelings, not because of something that happened in the present. Although it is healthy to anticipate, think about, and plan for stressful situations that may or will occur in the future, becoming too stressed about something that may not happen or have terrible consequences is not healthy. Below are the questions to use when doing a Reality Check to determine the probability of something happening in the future and the extent of the consequences.

1. What am I imagining may happen in the future?
2. What unpleasant feelings am I experiencing, and why am I feeling this way about this event that I imagine may happen in the future?
3. What interpretations and assumptions am I making about what I imagine may happen in the future?
4. What are the probable short-, intermediate, and long-term consequences if this event happens? How devastating would these short-, intermediate, and long-term consequences be for me and others?
5. Describe the evidence that my interpretations and assumptions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational and that this event that I imagine may happen. Be very specific and give every detail.
6. If, after answering question # 5, I still believe this event I imagine may happen, what is the probability (high, medium, low) that this event will happen in the future?

An Example of Reality Checking for an Anticipated Future Event:
The Shark Example

Sometimes, we imagine that something may happen in the future (when it may not) and may have bad consequences for us (when it may not). It is our thinking (imagining that something is going to happen in the future and that the consequences will be bad for us) that is causing unpleasant feelings, not because of something that happened in the present. Although it is healthy to anticipate, think about, and plan for stressful situations that may or will occur in the future, becoming too stressed about something that may not happen or have terrible consequences is not healthy. Below are the questions to use when doing a Reality Check to determine the probability of something happening in the future and the extent of the consequences.

7. What am I imagining may happen in the future?

A shark will bite me.

8. What unpleasant feelings am I experiencing, and why am I feeling this way about this event that I imagine may happen in the future?

I am feeling afraid that if I go in the water, I will be bitten by a shark and that I will be severely injured or die.

9. What interpretations and assumptions am I making about what I imagine may happen in the future?

If I go in the water, I will be bitten by a shark, and I will be severely injured or die.

10. What are the probable short-, intermediate, and long-term consequences if this event happens? How devastating would these short-, intermediate, and long-term consequences be for me and others?

11.

If I go in the water, I will probably worry that a shark will bite me, and it will be hard for me to relax and have a good time. If I were to get bitten by a shark, I could lose my foot, a leg, or die. The consequences would be very devastating if a shark bit me.

12. Describe the evidence that my interpretations and assumptions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational and that this event that I imagine may happen. Be very specific and give every detail.

My fear is irrational because sharks don't exist in lakes. There is no way I could be bitten by a shark in a lake.

13. If, after answering question # 5, I still believe this event I imagine may happen, what is the probability (high, medium, low) that this event will happen in the future?

There is no chance I will get bitten by a shark.

14. Based on my answers above, write an accurate, realistic, and rational statement that now summarizes your feelings and thinking (interpretations and assumptions) about this situation that you imagine may happen in the future. Discuss the evidence you have that this event may occur, the probability that it will happen (high, medium, low), and how devastating the short-, intermediate-, and long-term consequences would be for you and others. Replace any inaccurate, unrealistic, and/or interpretations and assumptions with those that are accurate, realistic, and/or rational. Based on this information, describe what you have decided to do, why you have decided to do it, and how you are now feeling.

Although the consequences of being bitten by a shark could be devastating and life-threatening, there is no chance I will get bitten by a shark in this or any other lake because sharks don't live in lakes. My fear is irrational, and because of that, I am going in the water. I am now feeling relieved and happy, and excited to be going in the water with my friends.

Procedure for the Personal Example for Reality Checking for What We Imagine May Happen in the Future:

After students understand how to do a reality check for things they imagine may happen in the future, distribute and have students complete (either in class or for homework) Reality Checking for Interpretations & Assumptions About the Future above for something they imagine may happen in the future that is causing them unpleasant feelings in the present. For some, this may be a longer-term assignment if they cannot identify an anticipated future event causing unpleasant feelings in the present.

Processing Their Personal Examples:

When students have had ample time to complete their examples, ask volunteers to share them. Ask them if and how this has changed their thinking and how they feel due to using this reality-checking process. When possible, summarize or have them summarize any similarities in the things they imagine may happen in the future that are causing unpleasant feelings.

Doing a Reality Check for Interpretation and Assumptions in the Present Moment

Often, we experience unpleasant feelings not because of actual events or situations but because of what we are thinking and the assumptions and interpretations we make about our current situation. Below are the questions to use when doing a Reality Check to determine the validity of our thinking, assumptions, and the interpretations we make about events and situations in the present.

1. What unpleasant feelings am I experiencing, and why am I feeling this way?
2. What interpretations and assumptions am I making about this situation?
3. Describe the evidence that my interpretations and assumptions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational. Be very specific and provide every detail.
4. If, after answering question # 3, I believe that my assumptions or interpretations are not accurate, realistic, and/or rational, discuss the reasons why and/or why the situation may not be as bad as I first thought. Replace inaccurate, unrealistic, and/or irrational interpretations and assumptions with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.
5. If, after answering question # 3, I still believe my assumptions and/or interpretations are accurate, realistic, and/or rational, what is the worst of it? What's so bad about this? What's the main thing that is making me feel bad? What is the worst of this situation?
6. Based on my answers to question # 5, what, if anything, do I need to do (or say to myself) so I no longer have these unpleasant feelings?

Example of Doing a Reality Check for Interpretation and Assumptions

In the Present Moment: **Doing Poorly on the First Test**

Example: You got a poor grade on your first test and, as a result, believe you will do poorly in this subject for the whole year.

1. What unpleasant feelings am I feeling, and why am I feeling this way?

I feel frustrated and angry with myself for getting a bad grade on the first test. I am feeling defeated because this means I will do poorly in this subject for the whole year.

2. What interpretations and assumptions am I making about this situation?

I am going to do poorly in this subject for the whole year.

3. Describe the evidence that my interpretations and assumptions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational. Be very specific and provide every detail.

I wish I had done better on the first test, but doing poorly on the first test doesn't necessarily mean that I will do poorly for the remainder of the year. Based on one test, I don't have any evidence that I will do poorly in this subject for the whole year.

4. If, after answering question # 3, I believe that my assumptions or interpretations are not accurate, realistic, and/or rational, discuss the reasons why and/or why the situation may not be as bad as I first thought. Replace inaccurate, unrealistic, and/or irrational interpretations and assumptions with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.

Getting one bad grade doesn't mean I will do poorly all year. One bad grade is not the end of the world. I probably didn't spend as much time studying for the test as I should have. I like this subject and have gotten good grades in the past, so there is no reason for me to believe I cannot do well in it this year.

5. If, after answering question # 3, I still believe my assumptions and/or interpretations are accurate, realistic, and/or rational, what is the worst of it? What's so bad about this? What's the main thing that is making me feel bad? What is the worst of this situation?

I don't think my initial assumptions are necessarily accurate.

7. Based on my answers to question # 5, what, if anything, do I need to do (or say to myself) so I no longer have these unpleasant feelings?

I need to look more closely at the test to see why I did poorly. And I need to do a better job of keeping up with the readings and taking the homework more seriously than I did. I need also to pay more attention in class. A lot of the test questions came from the homework assignments and the discussions in class. I probably need to spend more time studying for the tests in this subject.

Procedure for the Personal Example for Reality Checking for Interpretations and Assumptions in the Present Moment

After students understand how to do a reality check for interpretations and assumptions in the present moment, distribute and have students complete Reality Checking for Interpretation and Assumptions in the Present Moment above (either in class or for homework). For some, this may be a longer-term assignment if they cannot identify interpretations and assumptions in the present moment.

Processing Their Personal Examples:

When students have had ample time to complete their personal examples, ask volunteers to share them. Make sure to ask them if and how this has changed their thinking and how they feel due to going through this reality-checking process. When possible, summarize or have them summarize any similarities in the interpretations and assumptions they make in the present moment that are causing unpleasant feelings.

Doing a Reality Check on Negative Self-Labels and Negative Self-Talk

We often experience unpleasant feelings not because of actual events or situations we are in but because of negative self-labels or negative self-talk. Below are the questions to use when doing a Reality Check to determine the validity of our negative self-talk and negative labels.

For each negative label or negative self-talk, answer the following questions:

1. What negative labels do I give myself? What negative self-talk?
2. How do these negative labels/self-talk make me feel?
3. Where did these negative labels/self-talk come from? Who initially told me I was this way? Who continues to label me in this way (other than myself)?
4. Describe my evidence that these negative labels/self-talk are accurate, realistic, and/or rational. Be very specific and give every detail.
5. If, after answering question # 4, these negative labels/self-talk are not accurate, realistic, and/or rational, discuss the reasons why. Replace the inaccurate, unrealistic, and/or irrational negative labels/self-talk with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.
6. If, after answering question # 4, I still believe these negative labels/self-talk are accurate, realistic, and/or rational, what is the worst of it? What's so bad about this? What's the main thing that is making me feel bad? What is the worst of these negative labels/self-talk?
7. Based on my answers to question # 6, what must I do to change myself or my situation so these negative labels/self-talk are no longer accurate, realistic, or rational? What, if anything, do I need to do (or say to myself) so I no longer have these unpleasant feelings? Or, if changing is not important to me, write an accurate, realistic, and rational statement that now summarizes my feelings and thinking about these negative labels/self-talk.

Example of Doing a Reality Check on Negative Self-Labels and Negative Self-Talk: Doing Poorly in Math

We often experience unpleasant feelings not because of actual events or situations we are in but because of negative self-labels or self-talk. Below are the questions to use when doing a Reality Check to determine the validity of our negative self-talk and negative labels.

Example: You do poorly in math. As a result, you call yourself stupid and put yourself down.

For each negative label or negative self-talk, answer the following questions:

1. What negative labels do I give myself? What negative self-talk?

I call myself stupid when I do poorly in math. I think of myself as being stupid because I don't understand it.

2. How do these negative labels/self-talk make me feel?

I get down on myself. I feel frustrated and angry that I don't do better in math.

3. Where did these negative labels/self-talk come from? Who initially told me I was this way? Who continues to label me in this way (other than myself)?

My father is very critical of me when I do poorly in math. He is a scientist who uses math a lot and thinks it is important for me to be good at math. He is always coming down on me for not doing better in math.

4. Describe my evidence that these negative labels/self-talk are accurate, realistic, and/or rational. Be very specific and give every detail.

I have always had trouble understanding math and have done poorly. I mostly get C's in math with an occasional B-

5. If, after answering question # 4, these negative labels/self-talk are not accurate, realistic, and/or rational, discuss the reasons why. Replace the inaccurate, unrealistic, and/or irrational negative labels/self-talk with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.

Indeed, I don't do as well in math (mostly C's) as my other subjects, but that doesn't make me dumb or stupid. C's aren't all that bad. I do well in all of my other courses, especially the ones I am interested in. I plan to major in journalism with a minor in history, and I am an excellent writer and researcher. I get straight A's in English, journalism, and history courses, and I am on the school newspaper. I do very well (am very smart) in the courses I enjoy and seem to have an aptitude for and the ones I see using in my future.

6. If, after answering question # 4, I still believe these negative labels/self-talk are accurate, realistic, and/or rational, what is the worst of it? What's so bad about this? What's the main thing that is making me feel bad? What is the worst of these negative labels/self-talk?

The worst part of doing poorly in math is that it upsets my Dad. But I don't have an aptitude for math like he does, and I don't care if I get C's in math. I probably have all the math skills I will ever need.

7. Based on your answers to question # 6, what must I do to change myself or my situation so that these negative labels/self-talk are no longer accurate, realistic, or rational? If changing is unimportant to me, write an accurate, realistic, and rational statement summarizing my feelings and thoughts about these negative labels/self-talk.

There is nothing I need to change except to stop this negative self-talk and stop labeling myself as stupid because I get C's in math, a subject I don't care about. And I need to realize that C's in math at my high school is not that bad. I need to realize that I wouldn't put others down like I put myself down, so why would I talk to myself like this? And I wouldn't allow anyone else to say these things to me (except my father), so why do I speak to myself this way? Maybe I need to talk with my father about how his criticism makes me feel. At the very least, when my father is critical of me, I need to tell myself that what he is saying is not true (that I am not dumb) and that I am smart. And I need to realize that spending more time on math to please my father would take time away from other things I value. I feel better now, realizing that I am not stupid because I get C's in math and am smart in the subjects that are important to me. My father is wrong. I am smart.

See the [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) and [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for the skills needed to successfully share your feelings with others, be assertive, and work through misunderstandings, conflicts, and impasses in relationships.

Procedure for the Personal Example for Reality Checking for Negative Self Labels and Self Talk

After students understand how to do a reality check for negative self-labels and self-talk, distribute and have students complete (either in class or for homework) [Reality Checking for Negative Self-Labels and Self-Talk](#). For some, this may be a longer-term assignment if they cannot identify negative self-labels or negative self-talk.

Processing Their Personal Examples:

When students have had ample time to complete their personal examples, ask for volunteers to share their examples. Make sure to ask them if and how this has changed their thinking and how they feel due to going through this reality-checking process. When possible, summarize or have them summarize any similarities in the negative self-labels and self-talk they apply to themselves.

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

1. What am I feeling, and why am I feeling this way?
2. What interpretations and assumptions are I making about this person, their behavior, and/or their intentions?
3. Describe the evidence that my interpretations and assumptions about this person, their behavior and/or their intentions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational. Be very specific and give every detail.
4. If, after answering question # 3, I believe that my assumptions or interpretations are not accurate, realistic, and/or rational, discuss the reasons why and/or why the situation may not be as bad as I first thought. Replace the inaccurate, unrealistic, and/or irrational interpretations and assumptions about this person, their behavior and/or their intentions with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.
5. If, after answering question # 3, I still believe my assumptions and/or interpretations about this person, their behavior, and/or their intentions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational, what is the worst of it? What's so bad about this? What's the main thing that is making me feel bad? What is the worst of this situation?

If I am still experiencing unpleasant feelings about this relationship after answering the questions above, I will need to check out my assumptions with the other person. The only way to know whether my assumptions are valid is to talk with the person about this situation. See the [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) and the [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for the skills needed to successfully share your feelings with others, be assertive, and work through misunderstandings, conflicts, and impasses in relationships.

Example of Doing a Reality Check on Interpretation and Assumptions We Make About Others, Their Behavior, and/or Their Intentions

Example: I am rushing to class so I won't be late. I see a close friend going in the opposite direction, and you say, "hey," but they walk past me without acknowledging me.

1. What am I feeling, and why am I feeling this way?

I am worried that they are angry with me.

2. What interpretations and assumptions am I making about this person, their behavior, and/or their intentions?

I assume they are angry with me because they did not respond to me.

3. Describe the evidence that my interpretations and assumptions about this person, their behavior and/or their intentions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational. Be very specific and give every detail.

The only evidence I have is that they walked past me without acknowledging me.

4. If, after answering question # 3, I believe that my assumptions or interpretations are not accurate, realistic, and/or rational, discuss the reasons why and/or why the situation may not be as bad as I first thought. Replace the inaccurate, unrealistic, and/or irrational interpretations and assumptions about this person, their behavior and/or their intentions with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.

After trying to figure out why they would be angry with me, I could not come up with a reason. We were together yesterday, and everything seemed fine. I don't know why they would be upset with me. It's very possible that they, like me, were rushing to class and didn't see me. Or maybe they had a lot on their mind and were focused on that, or perhaps they were in a bad mood that had nothing to do with me.

5. If, after answering question # 3, I still believe my assumptions and/or interpretations about this person, their behavior, and/or their intentions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational, what is the worst of it? What's so bad about this? What's the main thing making me feel bad? What is the worst of this situation?

I don't think my original assumption is valid. I could ask them if they are mad at me, but I don't think that is necessary. There is no objective evidence that they are mad at me, so I will let it go unless something else comes up that would confirm my original assumptions. If I get the impression that they are angry with me, then I will ask them if they are.

If I am still experiencing unpleasant feelings about this relationship after answering the questions above, I will need to check out my assumptions with the other person. This is the only way to know whether my assumptions are accurate. Or I may need to talk with the person about this situation. See the [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) and [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for the skills needed to successfully share your feelings with others, be assertive, and work through misunderstandings, conflicts, and impasses in relationships.

Procedure for the Personal Example for Reality Checking for Interpretation and Assumptions We Make About Others, Their Behavior, and/or Their Intentions

After students have an understanding of how to do a reality check for interpretation and assumptions they make about others, their behavior, and/or their intentions, distribute and have students complete (either in class or for homework) Reality Checking for Interpretation and Assumptions We Make About Others, Their Behavior, and/or Their Intentions. For some, this may be a longer-term assignment if they cannot identify interpretations and assumptions they make about others, their behavior, and/or their intentions.

Processing Their Personal Examples:

When students have been given ample time to complete their examples, ask for volunteers to share their examples. Make sure to ask them if and how this has changed their thinking and how they feel as a result of going through this reality-checking process. When possible, summarize or have them summarize similarities in the interpretations and assumptions they make about others that cause unpleasant feelings. After completing a personal example, students may discover that they need to check out their assumption or interpretation with the other person. This may be as simple as asking the person a yes or no question (“Are you angry with me?”). If the answer is no, little, if any, discussion will probably be required. If the answer is yes, or if there is a conflict or misunderstanding, then a more extensive conversation may be needed. These types of conversations require the ability to have difficult conversations and the skills of active listening, I Statements, and interpersonal conflict resolution skills. See [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) and [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for the skills needed to successfully share your feelings with others, be assertive, and work through misunderstandings, conflicts, and impasses in relationships.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences: Applying Relationship Skills In Real Life Situations

It is not enough to have students only use skills in class. They must be given opportunities to apply skills in real life outside of class. The process of using skills in real-life situations, processing the results, and modifying their response is necessary and must be continuous and ongoing. See the Managing My Unhealthy Assumptions Project ([SES Projects Module](#)).