



## **Reframing – thought and language**

How we think about situations in our lives and what words we use to describe others and ourselves has a bigger impact on our health and attitude than we often think.

By recognising then reframing the thoughts we have, by adapting the language we use; we can have a positive impact on our ME/CFS/FM symptoms and our overall happiness.

This reframing is used in CBT, counselling, psychology, by sport, life & health coaches, and finally by healthcare professionals.

### **Let's look at thought:**

Each of us has a "beliefs system" which we have developed over our life-time, this is created and shaped by our experiences & interactions in the world.

These beliefs systems are a set of "psychological rules" which help our mind and nervous system understand and process events on a daily basis. The majority of these rules or beliefs are helpful, "love your family", "don't jump off cliffs", "don't get wet and cold", as we all NEED these rules to feel safe in the world. But as our lives change, take a turn when we become unwell, some of these rules no longer serve us or become limiting / unhelpful beliefs.

### **Example of a belief that maybe limiting or unhelpful:**

"If you are not going to do a job properly, then don't bother doing it at all."

### **The art of the Reframe:**

Reframing is about movement, shifting your perspective on a long-held belief about yourself or the world around you.

To do this you need to have a goal, what do you want? To feel better? To improve your chances of recovery? To reduce anxiety? To be less negative about the world & others?

Once you have chosen your goal you can begin the process of recognising your limiting beliefs. It's helpful to understand all beliefs and thoughts are in fact neutral, we create the emotional response to these by our learnt beliefs system, but we can change this response.

*"If you are not going to do a job properly, then don't bother doing it at all."*

Limiting belief = I must do everything perfectly otherwise you are useless, as I am unwell and unable to do it 'properly/perfectly' means I am doubly useless.

Once you have recognised the beliefs system then you can see if it is helpful or unhelpful to you at this time in your life. If it is unhelpful, then try a more positive and realistic reframe;

*"If you are not going to do a job properly, don't bother doing it at all."*

Limiting belief = you must do everything perfectly otherwise you are useless, as I am unwell and unable to do it 'properly/perfectly' means I am doubly useless.

**Reframed Belief + "It's ok if I give something a go and fail, having a go is what matters, I am enough just as I am right now."**

**Examples:**

"Rest equals lazy."

Limiting belief = You must not rest unless you are working hard and "deserve" the rest, rest is a treat not a right or need.

Reframed Belief + "Self-care is most important to me at this time, I need to rest when my body needs it, it's good to listen to my body."

"You must always take care of others before you take care of yourself."

Limiting belief = You do not deserve care, you are not good enough, others are more important than you.

Reframed Belief + "Self-care is self-responsibility, you are worthy of care and love at all times, you cannot pour from a cup which is empty."

Then we need to **practice re-writing our new rules** by reminding ourselves when we feel/hear ourselves heading back into those unhelpful beliefs, this is a process that takes practice and time, be patient with yourself.

It can be helpful to be aware of our thoughts when we:

Make excuses	Complain about things	Indulge in negative thoughts & habits
Talk to yourself in limiting unhelpful ways		Jump to conclusions or assumptions
Worry about failure or making mistakes		Worry for no real reason
Procrastinate		Indulge in perfectionism

Changing limiting beliefs is complicated, but can be very helpful to reduce anxiety, stress and learning to accept the new normal of our lives.

**How can Language help?**

*"The action of converting sound into meaning takes place in the two well-identified areas of the brain considered vital for human communication, known as the Wernicke's area and Broca's area. And it's the meaning of those sounds when they become expressed as words, that matter most. This is all to say that words matter on a level that's more profound than many of us have even considered. Words touch our mood centers; they affect our emotions and even our bodies."* Peter Himmelman

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterhimmelman/2018/10/21/the-power-of-positive-speech-how-choosing-the-right-words-defines-your-reality/#6b6b1c16ea58>

We all know *hearing* harsh words can hurt, but *thinking* harsh words can also hurt, so the more we can reframe our language into helpful or positive language the better our mood will be. The more positive language we use the more active or pro-active we become as positive language fires up the regions on the brain that are linked to the motor cortex which enables us to take-action. This then shifts our overall perspective, which is more helpful to support change and rewire our brains to having more positive thoughts, words and emotions.

## Word replacement exercise

Write down or think about 3 negative things that annoy you:

e.g.

I will never get better

I am useless

Life is too hard to enjoy.

Now try to use more positive actionable language:

*I will never get better* = My illness is a real challenge that I work on every-day to help myself improve.

*I am useless* = I am important and full of value which I recognise.

*Life is too hard to enjoy* = Life is full of challenge, I embrace those challenges and learn what I can from them to create the best life.

**Reframing thought and language** can be a helpful tool which we can use on our journeys with these conditions.

It is not about being unrealistic about situations in life or forcing yourself to be happy regardless but it is about the choice you have in how you view challenging situations. Is the glass half full or half empty?

### The aim of the Reframe:

Is to shift perspective and move out of one set of beliefs and into another with the help of words.

Here are some more examples of response changes;

Shift from passive to active

For example, "I really doubt that I can do anything about this," response, "What is one small step that I might take?"

Shift from negative feeling to positive feeling

For example, "I don't want to work on that now because it makes me feel sad," response, "What small part of that might I work on for now, that might even leave me feeling a bit more happy?"

Shift from past to future

For example, "I've never been good at public speaking," response, "If I imagined myself to be successful at public speaking, how would that look and feel?"

Shift from future to past

For example, "I can't seem to get started on achieving this goal," response, "Has there been a time in the past when I have achieved a goal and, if so, what did I do back then to be successful? How might I use that approach now?"

Shift from others to oneself

For example, "They don't seem to like me," response, "What do I like about myself?"

Shift from a liability to an asset

For example, "I'm such a perfectionist," response, "How might being a perfectionist help in my job and life, though?"

Some of this awareness raising can be challenging, counsellors and psychologist are trained to help you manage these more difficult conversations so seek out the right help for you.

**With** developments in neurological research we now understand that any brain can change by cognitive re-wiring, consciously choosing another way of thinking. This means we are not “stuck” being or thinking in a certain way regardless of our age or stage in life. This has been used successfully help people make changes to their thoughts and feelings, which then opens the door to a different world view.

### **Reframing can help:**

- identify problems more clearly
- develop an awareness of automatic thoughts
- challenge underlying assumptions that may be wrong
- distinguish between facts and irrational thoughts
- understand how past experience can affect present feelings and beliefs
- stop fearing the worst
- see a situation from a different perspective
- better understand other people's actions and motivations
- develop a more positive way of thinking and seeing situations
- become more aware of their own mood
- establish attainable goals
- avoid generalizations and all-or-nothing thinking
- stop taking the blame for everything
- focus on how things are rather than how they think they should be
- face their fears rather than avoid them
- describe, accept, and understand rather than judge themselves or others

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### References:

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