

Worksheet 01.05 Describing

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Describing is the experience of putting into words the things that you observe. You can describe things external to you (the environment in which you find yourself) or you can describe things internal to you (your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and beliefs).

When you are observing and describing your thoughts, feelings, behaviors and beliefs you may find it helpful to label them and put them into categories. Some of these categories might include:

- Anxious thoughts
- Worry thoughts
- Planning thoughts
- Critical thoughts
- Judging thoughts
- Happy thoughts
- Sad thoughts
- Fearful thoughts
- Angry thoughts
- Ruminating thoughts

There are no right or wrong category labels as long as the labels are useful to you.

The reason that we put labels on thoughts and feelings is so that we might learn to distinguish thoughts and feelings from facts. Thoughts and feelings are not facts. They are merely processes of the mind.

Here's an example to illustrate:

Suppose I have an important test coming up, and I think to myself, "I'm going to fail that test." This thought is not a fact, because I haven't taken the test yet so there is no way I could know whether or not I am going to fail the test.

It is perfectly natural that I might worry about failing the test, but if I believe it to be true that "I'm going to fail that test," I've just substantially increased the likelihood that my thought will come true. If I go into the test thinking I'm going to fail, I'm going to give up on myself and not put my best foot forward. In doing so, I have a much greater chance of failing.

If, on the other hand, I have the thought, "I'm going to fail," and I am able to recognize it as just a thought and not a fact, then I will still be able to make my best effort to pass the test.

Not also that if I do have the thought, "I'm going to fail," I'm not going to tell myself not to think about it, because every time I tell myself not to think about failing, I'm thinking about failing. Instead, I'm going to tell myself that it's perfectly natural to worry about failing, but the thought, "I'm going to fail" is not a fact; it's just a thought.

To successfully recognize the difference between thoughts and facts, I will need to describe only what I observe, without adding to it or making interpretations.

For example, suppose I'm walking down the hall at work and someone frowns at me. Further suppose I have the thought, "I wonder what I did to make this person mad?"

The fact in the situation is that the other person frowned at me; however I have no reason to suspect that the reason that person frowned at me was because she was mad at me. Maybe she was having a bad day. Maybe she had a fight with her partner last night. Maybe her shoes are too tight. There are dozens of reasons why this person might have frowned, and only one possible reason is, "This person is mad at me."

If I assume that my conclusion is correct, and then I act on that conclusion, I may be causing a lot of trouble for nothing.

By simply describing the situation to myself in the present moment I can avoid adding interpretations that may not be true.

To gain practice describing, complete the worksheet on the next page.

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Go outside on a sunny day and find a tree or other plant. Observe it in detail. If you cannot go outside, you may use a house plant or any other object that you have handy. Imagine you are an artist about to draw what you have observed. After doing this for a few moments, in the space below, describe in detail what you saw.

Now that you have gained some experience in describing what you observed, we are going to practice describing thoughts and feelings. To do this, first take a few deep calming and cleansing breaths. Now notice the first thought or feeling that comes to mind and focus on it. Avoid the temptation to go on to the next thought or feeling until you have observed and described your experience with the current thought or feeling in the present moment. After doing this for a few moments, describe what you saw in the space below.

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Now attach a label to the thought or feeling you just observed and described. Is it a happy thought? A sad thought? A planning thought? A worry thought? Some other type of thought? Why did you choose this label for this thought? Explain below.

NOTE: Avoid the temptation to add or subtract from what you observed and described about the thought. Don't try to interpret the thought; just stick to the facts.

Did observing and describing your thoughts and feelings in this manner change the way you experience your thoughts and feelings? If so, how? If not, why not?
