Cognitive Reframing/Restructuring

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Purpose and Goals

Purpose/Goal

Cognitive reframing/restructuring refers to a method of relieving psychological distress through intentionally redefining, reinterpreting, or altering the way we think about a situation, experience, or behavior (Wolgast, Lundh, & Viborg, 2013).

Essentially, the cognitive reframing helps the client to view and assess their cognitions through a more logical approach- more as hypotheses that can be changed instead of concrete fact (Wolgast, Lundh, & Viborg, 2013).
Cognitive restructuring is comprised of a variety of different objectives (Wolgast, Lundh, & Viborg, 2013):
(A) Understanding the emotional stimuli from an unemotional standpoint
(B) Changing the focus of the cognitive processing from a distress-generating angle to a more neutral, or even positive, focus
(C) Replacing irrational and/or erroneous interpretations or cognitions with more rational options
(D) Distraction
(E) Creating “distance” from the situation to promote cognitive clarity
Cognitive Triangle
Based on our research, reframing is effective for just about anyone! Some example populations include:

Family therapy (Cookston et al., 2014; Reynaert & Janne, 2011)
Adolescents (Cookston et al., 2013)
Older adults (Lachman, M. E. et al., 1992)
Survivors of abuse (Pearson, Q. M. 1994)
Parents (Cookston et al., 2013)
Counseling groups (Clark, 1998)
Contra-Indications

Based on our research, there are not many populations for which cognitive reframing/restructuring would be ineffective. Based on the procedures indicated above, it appears that reframing might be difficult to use with young children or people with low cognitive functioning. When in doubt in regards to using reframing, we suggest introducing the concept to your client, and using his or her reactions as a loose predictor of effectiveness.


Additional Resources