Exercise 12a: Challenging thoughts that intensify emotions

Why?

By practicing the analysis of different situations, you can learn to recognize the thoughts that affect your emotions. This allows you to adjust your thinking and behavior before you end up in unpleasant situations.

With this exercise, you can identify and question your thoughts.

How?

Analyze a recent situation in which you experienced strong and unpleasant emotions. If you can, choose a situation where your emotions led you to behave in a way you later regretted.

1. Identifying the situation

Write down your situation here as accurately, but as neutrally as you can. What actually happened?

Example: I woke up feeling very tired. My partner slept through the alarm clock. I prepared breakfast for both of us. My partner had gotten up and gone to the bathroom to take their time there. I needed to get to the bathroom myself. I felt annoyed that I had helped the other person, and they didn't think about me.

2. Identifying your own thoughts

Write down the thoughts that went through your mind in the situation—even the funny ones.

Example: “I thought that they take me and my effort for granted. They always think only about themselves and don’t help at all.”

3. Questioning thoughts

Are the thoughts mentioned above true? Do they contain exaggeration or absolutes affected by emotion? How could they be rephrased? Write down new, more calmly considered thoughts about the situation here.

Example: “He quite often cooks and does the laundry. He also takes care of paying the bills. I don’t have to do everything.”

4. Modifying thoughts to be more realistic

Example: “Sometimes they don’t remember to thank me or realize that I’m busy. Still, they don’t take me for granted.”

Do you notice how changing your thoughts alters your attitude toward the actual event? Does it also affect how you relate to other people?

If recognizing and analyzing situations feels difficult, you can try doing it together with someone close to you.