



**Workshop Description:** This workshop includes activities designed to increase staff knowledge regarding cognitive reappraisal, or changing thoughts about a situation to decrease the likelihood of negative emotional responses and improve positive emotional responses. Activities will include examples of techniques staff can use to help youth develop and strengthen their cognitive reappraisal skills.

This workshop guide will ask participants to examine and improve their own individual cognitive reappraisal skills in order to better understand the internal process of changing thoughts. Participants will develop these skills with the understanding that it will help them empathize with and teach new skills to youth more effectively.

**Preparation Time:** The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website and in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

**Instruction Time:** It will take approximately 90 to 120 minutes to complete all activities within this guide. If you do not have time for the full workshop, only use the most relevant activities to make the workshop fit within your timeframe. Be sure to keep the reflection portion of the activities and workshop as this is where staff should consider how the activities and knowledge apply to their work.

**Materials:**

- Copies of Worksheet: *Fact or Opinion*, Worksheet: *Reappraisal Workshop*, and Handout: *Cognitive Reappraisal Scenarios* for each participant
- Writing utensils for each participant
- A copy of Handout: *Common Cognitive Disorders* printed and cut into strips
- Paper for groups
- Two large blank white sheets of paper or a whiteboard

**Preparation Instructions:** You should read the content related to this topic on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website, specifically the content related to [Emotion Regulation Strategy – Cognitive Reappraisal](#). In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide, gather all necessary materials, and prepare for the activities.

In this series of workshops, youth program staff will learn skills that build on one another in a specific sequence. We recommend you complete this set of workshops the workshops in the following order:

1. *Understanding Emotion Regulation,*
2. *Development of Executive Functioning,*
3. *Understanding Peer Relationships*
4. *Understanding Emotion Regulation – Staff,*
5. *Understanding and Practicing Active Listening,*
6. *Understanding and Practicing Inquiry,*
7. *Understanding and Practicing Acceptance,*
8. *Understanding and Practicing Problem-Solving, and*
9. *Understanding and Practicing Cognitive Reappraisal.*



### Knowledge: Understanding Emotion Coaching and Cognitive Reappraisal

How an individual reacts in a given situation has roots in how they were raised, their family, and the relationships between them and their family and others around them. Many people have figured out ways to manage times when they are sad or very mad, and likely, they have had to figure out ways to control joy and happiness so they don't disturb others or make someone jealous. Youth are no different from adults in that they have also figured out ways to manage their emotions. Sometimes they use healthy (or adaptive) strategies like counting to 10, and sometimes they use unhealthy (or maladaptive) strategies like eating when they are sad. Research has linked positive development with more use of healthy and less use of unhealthy strategies.<sup>75</sup>

Emotion coaching is where one individual helps another to understand and manage their own emotions through several key strategies. Emotion coaching is an important tool youth program staff can use to guide youth toward healthy coping strategies and away from unhealthy ones.

- Adaptive/Healthy Coping Strategies
  - Cognitive Reappraisal
  - Problem-Solving
  - Acceptance
- Maladaptive/Unhealthy Coping Strategies
  - Avoidance
  - Suppression
  - Rumination

Identifying negative emotions is as important as offering solutions, which is why *acceptance* and *cognitive reappraisal*, or changing thinking, are included along with *problem-solving*, or finding ways to manage specific emotions.

Helping youth understand and manage their own emotions through emotion coaching can help them identify their feelings and find solutions to emotionally challenging situations. Youth who learn how to manage their emotions in healthy ways are more likely to participate in youth program activities. Program staff can use emotion coaching to help youth identify emotions and generate solutions to help youth work through challenging emotional situations.

Youth program staff need to practice awareness of their own emotions before they can be truly adept at providing emotion coaching to youth in the program. This self-awareness helps staff be more in tune with youth's emotions and connect with them.

Cognitive reappraisal is a skill where an individual recognizes the negative pattern their thoughts have fallen into and works to change that pattern into one that is more helpful and positive.<sup>84</sup> When we change our thoughts, or how we make sense of things, we can change our emotions. This technique can be especially useful to create a more positive, meaningful perception of an event or situation. Individuals in stressful situations who used cognitive reappraisal had fewer depressive symptoms than those who did not.<sup>85</sup> Youth program staff can help youth use cognitive reappraisal by encouraging youth to give different meanings to situations that create strong emotions. For example, teaching youth to brainstorm alternative reasons why a fight occurred between group participants can help change their perceptions and may help moderate strong emotional reactions. When adults help youth understand



the youth's emotions, they are providing emotion coaching.<sup>61</sup> Staff can use emotion coaching to engage youth in identifying their emotions and how they can properly manage them to achieve their goals in the program.

**Objectives:**

- Identify examples of distorted cognition, or thinking that leads to negative emotional responses, and the methods of reappraisal, or different ways of thinking, that can help youth to manage their emotions
- Understand how cognitive reappraisal skills can help staff to better empathize with and teach new skills to youth
- Identify opportunities for emotion coaching using cognitive reappraisal techniques in the youth program

**Introduction (5 minutes):**

- Describe cognitive reappraisal and how it can aid in positive youth development.
  - What to say: "Today we are going to talk about how cognitive reappraisal, or changing thoughts about a situation to decrease the likelihood of negative emotional responses and improve the chances of positive emotion responses, can be used to support positive youth development. Most people know the feeling of falling into a spiral of doubting or negative thoughts, but few know how to escape those negative thoughts and avoid a spiral of negative emotions. In this workshop, we will learn some techniques for doing so and how to implement them for ourselves and youth."
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
  - What to say: "To start, we are going to gauge how familiar you are with the concept of cognitive reappraisal and where the gaps in your knowledge are."

**Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):**

- Ask the staff to share what they know about cognitive reappraisal. You may need to assist them using the background information provided for you to jumpstart the conversation. Record these responses on a large sheet of paper or white board so staff can see.
- Ask the staff if there is anything they are unsure of in regards to cognitive reappraisal or emotion coaching or if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses.

**Activities:**

**Activity: *Emotion Coaching Review* (5 minutes)**

- Describe the *Emotion Coaching Review* activity:
  - What to say: "We are going to make sure we all remember the three strategies we have covered for emotion coaching. The goal of this exercise is to ensure we are all on the same page."
- Lead the *Emotion Coaching Review* activity:
  - Ask the group if anyone can name one of the three strategies. As the strategies are identified, write them out on a white board or large piece of paper.



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- Strategies should include fostering awareness and reflection (Awareness), suggesting strategies (Problem-Solving), and encouraging reframing or perspective taking (Cognitive Reappraisal).
- Transition to the next activity by telling the participants that the next activities focus on cognitive reappraisal.

### **Activity: *Common Cognitive Distortions* (20 minutes)**

- Describe the *Common Cognitive Distortions* activity:
  - What to say: “We are going to do an activity together that will ask you to brainstorm ways to overcome common cognitive distortions, or sources of negative thoughts. The goal of this exercise is to have you identify problem thinking, create solutions, and discover ways to offer those solutions for youth; in other words, this exercise will help you identify the process of emotion coaching as it relates to changing thinking or cognitive reappraisal.”
- Lead the *Common Cognitive Distortions* activity:
  - Prior to the start of the activity, you should have printed Handout: *Common Cognitive Distortions* and cut out the strips of paper containing the common cognitive distortions.
  - Divide the staff participants into smaller groups of three to four and provide each group with a sheet of paper, a writing utensil, and a cognitive distortion example. If there are many groups, some may have the same example, and if there are few, you may give the groups multiple examples.
  - Instruct the groups to discuss the distortion on the slip of paper you provided and to brainstorm methods of overcoming it. They should write their ideas down on the paper you provided.
  - Once all the groups have had a chance to discuss and write down their ideas, lead a discussion among all staff in order to identify common themes and any alternative solutions that individuals feel should have been mentioned that were not. Take this opportunity to ask staff about their process of developing solutions. Moreover, circle back to emotion coaching, making sure to highlight staff responses that line up with the steps to emotion coaching as they are outlined from the *Emotion Coaching Review* activity.
  - Once you have discussed and reflected on these solutions to cognitive distortions, transition into the next activity by asking staff to think about the difference between fact and opinion.

### **Activity: *Fact or Opinion* (15 minutes)**

- Describe the *Fact or Opinion* activity:
  - What to say: “Now that you are more familiar with cognitive distortions, we are going to practice one way of combating distortions. It may seem simple, but it is one of the first steps in developing strong cognitive reappraisal skills.”
- Lead the *Fact or Opinion* activity:
  - Provide each staff member with a copy of the Worksheet: *Fact or Opinion* and a writing utensil.
  - Ask the staff to fill out the worksheet according to their first instinct. Ask staff to indicate on the worksheet whether each statement is a fact or an opinion.



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- Once everyone has completed the worksheet, come together to discuss the responses to each statement. Explain to staff that this worksheet is just one way of helping someone realize the presence of distortions they may not have known they were employing.
- If there are any volunteers, have them discuss the responses that surprised them. Point out that although the steps to emotion coaching may seem simple (identifying emotions, generating solutions), it is easy for emotions to make us forget the simple strategies to identifying and addressing emotions. Helping youth identify and separate their emotions from facts can be a big help for youth who are unable to identify what they are feeling in the moment.
- Use the Instructional Aid: *Fact or Opinion Answer Key* as necessary.

### **Activity: Reappraisal Workshop (30 minutes)**

- Describe the *Reappraisal Workshop* activity:
  - What to say: “Now that you have learned more about combating cognitive distortions, we are now going to practice cognitive reappraisal from start to finish, using your experiences as an example. The goal of this exercise is to practice changing the way you perceive a situation by walking you through each step of a reappraisal process.”
- Lead the *Reappraisal Workshop* activity:
  - Provide each member with a copy of the Worksheet: *Reappraisal Workshop* and a writing utensil.
  - Use the Instructional Aid: *Reappraisal Workshop Script* to guide the participants through the worksheet.
  - Once everyone has completed the worksheet, discuss the activity as a large group. Questions to ask include the following:
    - How did thinking only about the facts of the experience change how you wrote about the experience?
    - How did thinking about the experience from the point of view of another person change how you wrote about the experience?
    - How did thinking about the experience from the point of view of a year later change how you wrote about the experience?
  - After discussing the process and the participant responses to the questions, say, “When you use this technique, the emotions you experience lose a bit of their intensity and allow you to deal more productively with whatever triggered them in the first place. When you become a little more analytical about the experience, you change your thinking, and when your thinking changes, it affects your emotions.”

### **Activity: Reappraisal and Youth (10 minutes)**

- Describe the *Reappraisal and Youth* activity:
  - What to say: “The goal of this activity is to help us think about the different ways we can use cognitive reappraisal with youth.”
- Lead the *Reappraisal and Youth* activity:
  - Divide the participants into small groups of three or four individuals and provide each group with a large piece of paper and a set of markers.
  - Provide each group with a copy of the Handout: *Cognitive Reappraisal Scenarios*.
  - Assign each group one of the scenarios and ask them to brainstorm three things.



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- Define the emotion
- How do you think the youth in the scenario feels? (Empathy)
- How do you find out how the youth feels? (Clarifying Questions)
  - What questions would you ask?
- How do help the youth to think about and reappraise their feelings? (Coaching)
  - What questions would you ask?
- Ask each group to read their scenario aloud and share their group response to the questions.
- Cover these possible clarifying/probing questions if one of the groups does not mention them:
  - How do you feel about this scenario?
  - What do you think about this scenario?
  - If I witnessed the scenario, what would I have seen?
  - What will you think about this scenario in a year?
  - What are some alternative explanations?
  - If I were in a better mood, how might I be thinking about this situation?

### Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):

- Return to the staff's responses gathered at the start of the workshop (see Prior Knowledge activity). Ask the staff what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information on the same paper or a new blank page if there is no room. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions, such as "What part of the activity made you realize that?" and "How could you use these strategies with youth?"

### Resources:

Handout: *Common Cognitive Distortions*

Worksheet: *Fact or Opinion*

Instructional Aid: *Fact or Opinion Answer Key*

Worksheet: *Reappraisal Workshop*

Instructional Aid: *Reappraisal Workshop Script*

Handout: *Cognitive Reappraisal Scenarios*

### Sources:

The *Common Cognitive Distortions* and *Fact or Opinion* activities were adapted from Ackerman, C. (2017). Cognitive distortions: When your brain lies to you. *Positive Psychology Program*. Retrieved from <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/cognitive-distortions/>

The Worksheet: *Cognitive Reappraisal* was adapted from work created by the Center for Healthy Minds. Retrieved from [https://centerhealthyminds.org/assets/images-general/reappraisal\\_script.pdf](https://centerhealthyminds.org/assets/images-general/reappraisal_script.pdf)



**Instructions:** Print a copy of this handout and cut it into strips with a common cognitive distortion on each strip. Use these strips with the *Common Cognitive Distortions* activity.

Black-and-White Thinking – only thinking of experiences in terms of extremes (utter failure or complete success)

Overgeneralization – extrapolating one or two experiences and thinking of them as a pattern rather than isolated incidents

Mental Filter – focusing only on a negative experience and excluding all positive experiences (one negative comment from a friend superseding all other positive experiences with that friend)

Disqualifying the Positive – similar to Mental Filter, but this distortion takes positive experiences into account and dismisses them or attributes a negative cause to the positive outcome

Mind Reading – believing that you know what someone else is thinking (walking into a room before it gets silent and assuming that people were speaking negatively about you)

Fortune Telling – assuming you know the outcome of an event before it takes place and assuming that outcome to be negative

Magnification and Minimization – seeing minor failures to be indicators of one’s negative attributes (i.e., a single mistake on a test being an indicator of one’s lack of intelligence) and discrediting successes or minimizing their importance (i.e., anyone could have won that award, it just happened to be me)

Emotional Reasoning – taking emotions as facts

Should Statements – imposing a set of rigid expectations on oneself, others, or a situation

Labeling and Mislabeling – overgeneralizing and judging oneself using strong or charged language based on a single instance (i.e., calling yourself an idiot if you fail one test)

Personalization – ascribing blame to oneself with no logical reason to do so (i.e., a friend says they do not like a movie you saw together, and you assume it was your fault somehow)



**Instructions:** Indicate whether you think each of the following statements is a **fact** or **opinion**.

- I'm a bad person.
- Sam told me that she didn't like what I said about her.
- Nothing ever goes right.
- This will be a disaster.
- I'm not as attractive as they are.
- I failed the test.
- I am overweight.
- He shouted at me.
- I'm selfish.
- There's something wrong with me.
- I'm lazy.
- I didn't lend my friend money when they asked.
- My feet are too big.
- I'm ugly.
- No one will ever love me.





- I'm a bad person. Opinion
- Sam told me that she didn't like what I said about her. Fact
- Nothing ever goes right. Opinion
- This will be a disaster. Opinion
- I'm not as attractive as they are. Opinion
- I failed the test. Fact
- I am overweight. Fact
- He shouted at me. Fact
- I'm selfish. Opinion
- There's something wrong with me. Opinion
- I'm lazy. Opinion
- I didn't lend my friend money when they asked. Fact
- My feet are too big. Opinion
- I'm ugly. Opinion
- No-one will ever love me. Opinion



**Instructions:** Follow the facilitator’s instructions to complete this worksheet.

**Step 1 – Document the Emotion**

**Example:** I went swimming in the ocean and got caught in a big wave. The wave swept me off my feet, and I was pushed under the water. While I was under the water I was terrified. I didn’t know which way was up, and I was being beaten into the ground by the waves. I could feel the undertow dragging me out and couldn’t find my footing. Panic set in as I struggled to hold my breath and figure out which way was up.

**Write your experience in the box below:**

In one sentence, describe what you **felt** at the time you had the experience.

**Write your statement below:**

**Step 2 – Analyze the Emotion**

**Example:** I went swimming in the ocean and got caught in a big wave. The wave swept me off my feet, and I was pushed under the water. I didn’t know which way was up, and I was being beaten into the ground by the waves. I could feel the undertow dragging me out and couldn’t find my footing. I struggled to hold my breath and figure out which way was up.

**Write your experience in the box below:**

In one sentence, write what you **thought** at the time you had the experience.

If it helps, think about these questions: How did I look at this experience at the time? What did it mean to me? What did it mean about me? What implications did I think it had for my future?

**Write your statement below:**



### Step 3 – Third-Party Perspective

**Example:** It was a nice day at the ocean until he/she was caught in a big wave. The wave swept him/her off his/her feet, and he/she was pushed under the water. The wave tumbled him/her around, and he/she stood up and appeared shaken but OK.

**Write the third party's point of view in the box below:**

In one sentence, write what the third party **thought** at the time you had the experience. If it helps, think about these questions: What could they observe? What happened before and after the event?

**Write your statement below:**

### Step 4 – Perspective of Time

**Example:** I was on vacation at the ocean and playing in the waves. A big wave knocked me down, and I was pulled under. It was scary, and I remember being afraid I would get pulled out into deep water or not find my footing and drown. But after a few seconds, I got myself realigned and my feet back under me. I was shook up and took a break on the sand.

**Write your memory of the event after a year in the box below:**

In one sentence, write what you **felt** a year after the experience.

**Write your statement below:**



**Instructions:** Provide one copy of the Worksheet: *Reappraisal Workshop* and a writing utensil to each participant. Tell the group that you will read some instructions for each step, and then they will have 3-5 minutes to write. After everyone has completed Step 1, read the instructions for Step 2 and give participants an additional 3 to 5 minutes to complete that section of the worksheet, etc.

### **Instructions Step 1 – Document the Emotion**

Think of an experience the past year or so that was full of a strong emotion. It should be an experience that was difficult or stressful for you. Examples include experiences that involve embarrassment, fear, anger, anxiety, a disagreement or difficult conversation with another person, an embarrassing misunderstanding, a time when you were late to an appointment or event, or troubling news from a family member. Take a few minutes to imagine the experience as it happened. Think of the worst moment in the experience and how it occurred. Write a brief description of the experience you selected below. Focus on the emotion and feelings you had as you write the description.

### **Instructions Step 2 – Analyze the Emotion**

Now think about the same experience, but instead of focusing on the emotions, think of and document the facts. Describe what happened using what you know is true. Avoid statements that describe what you felt emotionally.

### **Instructions Step 3 – Third-Party Perspective**

Now think about the same experience but this time from an observer's point of view. Assume they have all of the facts and information leading up to, during, and immediately after the event, but they don't know what you felt. How would they describe your experience?

### **Instructions Step 4 – Perspective of Time**

Now think about the same experience but this time from the point of view of a year after the event. What do you think about the experience a year after it happened?



### **Destiny**

Destiny is a 16-year-old girl in your program. You often see her sitting alone in the snack area working on homework, listening to music, or browsing her phone. She rarely engages with other youth in the program, and you know she doesn't sign up for any of the activities your program offers. You decide to have a conversation with Destiny to make sure she is OK... After a couple of minutes, Destiny tells you that many of her friends have moved away. She says she doesn't have anyone to hang out with in the program or at school, even eating her lunch alone.

### **Justine**

Today is the day the results of the dance team tryouts are announced. You are eager to hear how Justine, a 14-year-old girl in your program placed. You know she has been hoping to be selected for the dance team for the past two years. When Justine finally arrives, you can see she is withdrawn and not her outgoing and happy self. When you ask Justine whether or not the results were posted, she looks down, mumbles a response, and turns away. You follow her to find out what has happened and learn that she was not selected. She says, "I didn't even get on the list of alternates. I am really bummed."

### **Naveah**

It is almost time to close up the youth center. You walk into the homework area and see Naveah, a 17-year-old girl, sitting at a worktable. Books and papers are piled around her, and she has her head in her hands. You sit down to ask her how she is doing. Naveah tells you that she has a paper due and two mid-term tests in the morning. She doesn't know where to start and is feeling very stressed and anxious about the situation.

### **Nathan**

You hear someone curse and slam the door. You round the corner to find out what is going on and see Nathan standing outside the gym. Nathan is a 16-year-old boy in your program. When you ask him what is going on, he pushes past you. You follow him to make sure he is ok and to see if you can help. When you catch up to Nathan, you ask him to take a couple of deep breaths and remind him of the program rules around respect, specifically about his language and the way he was treating you and the building. After Nathan regains some control, you ask him what is going on. He tells you that another youth made a joke about his height and basketball skills. Basically, even though Nathan is tall, it doesn't seem to help his game. Nathan had enough and was angry. He couldn't understand why they continued to pick on him.



### **Kennedy**

A pair of 13-year-old girls is talking in the hallway. You know they are on the school soccer team and play on a traveling team in the off-season. You hear one, Kennedy, say, “I hope Mariah’s ankle is at least sprained. Maybe we’ll finally have a chance to start.” You decide you need to learn more about the emotions these youth are having and stop to talk. Kennedy tells you that she thinks Mariah has an unfair advantage. Her dad is one of the assistant coaches and played soccer throughout college. Kennedy says that regardless of how good Mariah is that it isn’t fair that she always gets to start.

### **Malik**

Malik is a 13-year-old boy in your program. Today he is the last off the bus, last in the building, and sitting in the back of the room away from his friends and the other youth. You hear a pair of boys talking about an incident on the bus. They make statements like, “I can’t believe he had never...” come from the pair of boys and know they are talking about Malik. You realize Malik is embarrassed and feeling humiliated.