
SESSION 3

Objectives:

- To understand how people make choices.
- To recognize personal patterns in making choices.
- To identify and recognize how they experience anxiety.
- To learn some strategies for dealing with anxiety.
- To look at personal strategies for dealing with stress.

Session Outline:

- Choices
- Anxiety
- Coping

Updating

Did anyone set any new goals?

How are you working toward those goals?

How do you feel about that?

Today we're going to talk about making choices. We make choices every day of our lives and we are responsible for the choices that we make.

Choices

What is choice?

Why are choices important?

Part of what we're doing in this group is taking a look at what choices we can make to have our lives be more the way we want them to be.

One of the worst feelings in the world is feeling trapped, feeling that you have no choice.

Everyone has felt that way at some time in his/her life, but feeling trapped is just a feeling. There are usually many different choices to be made if you stop and look for them.

Making choices is a little like going into a restaurant.

If you go to a restaurant that offers hot dogs, corn dogs, chili dogs and super dogs, and you order one of them, you'll be filled up and ready to go to the movies. If, on

the other hand, you decide you want chicken or a pizza, you're going to be frustrated, upset and hungry.

Can anyone tell me why deciding to have pizza or chicken at this restaurant may lead you to feel frustrated, upset or hungry?

Making choices isn't picking what you want out of the sky, it is looking at what you want, what is possible and what may happen if you make a particular choice.

At the same time, in reality there are people older, bigger and stronger than you that definitely have some control over your lives. Some of that control is healthy and helps you to grow. Some of it can hurt you. But even in the worst situations, do you think you have choices you can make?

If you understand ahead of time how choices work, you will be smarter about the choices you make.

Some people give their choices away.

For example, letting your parents order your meals, decide what you wear. etc.

People sometimes give their power away by telling someone about a problem and asking that person to suggest the solution. They become helpless and let other people take care of their problems.

Looking to other people for the answers or trying to figure out what someone else thinks is the right answer is something grownups actually teach kids. Some teachers like the kids with all the right

answers, so do many parents. We call that being Answer-centered.

But, when you do this in your life, it puts everyone in control of your life but you — so you feel more and more like you have no choices. You gradually lose the ability to think for yourself.

This group is not about answers, it is about learning to think for yourself, about learning to solve problems your way.

Learning to make choices and solve problems for yourself, with or without the help of others is an important part of learning to have more control in your life. That can be a little scary — to think you have to look inside yourself for the answers to your problems. Most of us would rather look outside, to other people.

Let me tell you a story about that approach and maybe you'll discover something about problem-solving.

STORY : Once a traveler and his donkey were entering a small village in a faraway country. As he trudged down the dusty road, he saw an old man looking for something in the dirt by the road. The traveler came closer and asked the man what he was looking for. The old man looked up and said he was looking for his key. The traveler offered to help and pretty soon they were both looking in the dusty road for the key.

After a few minutes, when they had not found the key, the traveler asked, "We should have found the key by now. Where were you when you lost it?" The old man answered him, "Oh, I was over there in my hut,"

pointing to a small house a few yards away. "Then why are we looking for the key out here?" asked the traveler? "Because, it's dark inside the hut," replied the old man.

What do you think about the old man's way of solving his problem? Do we do that when we look outside ourselves to other people to solve our problems?

Learning to solve problems for yourself does not mean you have to solve them alone. Just like the old man, there are many people available to help solve problems. You need to look inside yourself to explore the options that other people help discover. You can listen to the ideas of others and accept their help, but you are the only one who can really decide what's right for you.

Having control in your life is partly looking at what choices you have, making those choices and then realizing there will be consequences that follow from your choices. It doesn't mean you'll like all of them or that they will be easy, but choosing feels better than letting things happen because you didn't know how to make a better choice.

Anxiety

There's a feeling we didn't talk about last time that is important to understand.

When you see someone you don't want to see, or have to do something you don't want to do, what happens in your body?

Allow for discussion, coming up with things like a nervous stomach when going to the doctor or dentist, being sent to the principal's office, etc.

What is that feeling of uneasy anticipation called?

Anxiety. It is also one of the feelings associated with stress.

Feelings affect your body because your mind and body are part of you just as your feelings and thoughts are part of you. You can't separate them.

Does anyone know what anxiety feels like in your body?

Flip chart 9

Common signs of anxiety include:

- ✓ heart pounding, sometimes loudly;
 - ✓ feel warm, cheeks flushed, ears get pink;
 - ✓ headache or feeling of pressure in your head;
 - ✓ mouth gets dry;
 - ✓ stomachache; and
 - ✓ sweating and clammy hands.
-

What triggers or causes anxiety for you?

Anxiety is a tip-off from your body. It is a sign that you need to pay attention to what is going on. But anxiety is also a very powerful emotion and it is important to remember that it is only a part of you, even when it feels bigger than you. You want to resist the urge to run away

from it, to ignore it or to give in to it by withdrawing. You want to learn ways to understand it, to look it in the face and to respond to in such a way that your anxiety becomes a useful tool for managing your life.

What are some ways of dealing with anxiety and stress?

Get their ideas first.

1. Breathing

Breathing is one of the most effective ways to manage anxiety and stress at the time one or the other is happening.

Breathing is nature's simplest way of slowing you down, helping you to relax and bring things back into focus. Have everyone close their eyes and focus on their breathing for one minute.

Since you breathe every minute of your life, it is a relaxation skill that you carry with you every minute, that you can use without anyone noticing. You can do it with your eyes open, walking, sitting, whenever. One minute of breathing when things aren't going well can make a difference. One of your Selfwork assignments this week is to do this once a day, whenever you choose.

2. Coping

Who can tell me what "coping" means?

Discuss.

Coping is another way people handle stress and anxiety.

Coping is a stopgap or short-term way of handling whatever is going on. It doesn't solve problems or make things better in the long-term. It gets you through the day.

Some ways people cope are sleeping, eating, exercise, drinking alcohol, using drugs, withdrawing into a book or television or music. Some of these are obviously more healthy than others.

How do you cope with stress and anxiety?

Sometimes we deal with anxiety in ways that are destructive, or not good for us.

Can you think of a time when you felt uncomfortable or anxious and did something destructive?

Did it make you feel better?

What other choices did you have?

Overall, do you think coping mechanisms that are hurtful to you or others are helpful or do you think they might continue the cycle of anxiety and stress?

Discuss with the group some specific constructive and destructive coping mechanisms (See handout).

3. Action

A third way to deal with anxiety is to take action.

For example, if you are feeling anxious about talking to someone about a problem and you know you have to do it sooner or later, take action.

Decide how to begin, actually script out for yourself the first sentence or two.

Think through the rest of what you want to say and then do it. This is never easy, but once you begin, your anxiety about doing it is over.

Who can think of other examples, perhaps something you're feeling anxious about and avoiding doing. The group may be able to help you choose whether or not taking action is the thing to do.

Discuss examples brought up by participants and work through some them, developing a plan of effective action. Roleplay with group members what the action might look like and afterward how they felt during the process.

Relaxation

One of the most effective ways to lower your overall level of stress is through relaxation exercises including breathing and visualization

Let's try a little visualization. Close your eyes, get comfortable and let your attention go to your breathing.

Correct breathing technique: Breathe in through your nose to fill your lungs to capacity, pause only as long as is comfortable, slowly release the air through your mouth, emptying your lungs completely. When ready, breathe in again. Repeat this cycle three or four times, each time letting your

body melt deeper and deeper into relaxation and quiet. Walk the group through this process.

Now see yourself as your mother or father are talking to you about a problem.

Feel how hard it is to hear criticism and see yourself continuing to listen, to think about what is being said.

See yourself saying, "Thank you, this is hard to think about but I will think about it and look at what I might do differently."

See yourself giving your mom or dad a hug or thanking them for loving you even when it is hard.

Now see yourself receiving a compliment from a teacher or friend.

Feel how warm and wonderful it feels to have someone like you and think you are wonderful.

See yourself saying thank you and giving that person a hug.

Now see yourself as a powerful person, someone you really like.

Feel how good it feels to like yourself, to know you can do things well, to know people like you and want to be around you.

Now take all of those thoughts and store them in your mind to draw upon all this next week as you go about practicing all the things we have talked about.

Now bring your consciousness back into the room, move around a bit in your chair and when you are ready, open your eyes.

We've talked a lot this session and covered a lot of new ideas. We discussed choices, making choices, anxiety and stress and how to deal with it. This week I'd like for you to look at the ways you make choices and how you manage stress and anxiety and consider any changes you might want to make.

Session 3 — Self-work activities

1. Be aware of the times that you make choices this week and the times when you give your choices away. Notice how both feel.
2. When you know you're going to be asked to do something — like making your bed or doing your homework — choose to do it before you are asked and see how that feels.
3. Do "Coping, Relaxation, Negative" activity sheet.
4. Practice relaxation and breathing when you're in situations that are uncomfortable for you.
5. Notice how often you do things that are effective coping and taking action versus the number of times you do things that are ineffective or destructive.

Coping, Relaxation, Negative Activities

While there are many kinds of relaxation skills, they have to be learned and practiced in order to have value. They can help you if you use them to feel less torn apart, to understand yourself more fully, to help you settle down and think and act more clearly. And they feel GREAT!!

Earl Hipp, in *Fighting Invisible Tigers* uses an exercise to begin to differentiate between coping, relaxation and things which do not do any good, or are destructive.

Put a C (for coping), R (for relaxation), or an N (for negative choice) next to these activities. Put a * by each of the things you could do when you feel stressed:

Watch TV	Go for a walk
Throw rocks at a bottle	Listen to some music
Go to sleep	Cut your hair
Eat something	Play an instrument
Breathe; focus attention	Read a book
Tease your baby brother	Play basketball
Lie down and daydream	Talk to a teacher
Have a soda and some doughnuts	Do your homework
Go visit a friend	Run away
Clean up your room	Go shopping
Call your grandmother	Write in a journal

You may notice yourself doing other things that are not on this list. Feel free to add them and place a C, R, N, or * next to any of them. Think about whether or not you want to alter any of your behavior. The first step is becoming aware and you've already done that with this activity.

Dear Parents,

Welcome to Session 3 of the CHALLENGE Program.

Making choices is an important part of taking responsibility for our lives and being in control of our lives. This week we are exploring a wide range of possible choices available in life situations; when you do or do not have choice, and anticipated consequences of the choices we make.

In addition to exploring a wide range of feelings, anxiety is one that we focused on as a group, discussing what it is, how it feels, what it is telling us, and understanding what can be done about it. This led us into exploring the various ways people handle stress and anxiety.

These include:

- breathing

- coping

- taking action

- relaxation

Please take a moment to look at the Coping, Relaxation, Negative Activities Worksheet. Consider how your family handles stress and what kinds of choices you make to relax.

Sincerely,

Common signs of anxiety include:

- ✓ heart pounding, sometimes loudly;
- ✓ feel warm, cheeks flushed, ears get pink;
- ✓ headache or feeling of pressure in your head;
- ✓ mouth gets dry;
- ✓ stomachache; and
- ✓ sweating and clammy hands.