

## Contents

### Family Life

- Bombarded with questions
- A silent dinner
- Ex-husband & girlfriend
- First Xmas minus Mom
- Mother's birthday
- The spiked cherries

### Home Life

- Alarm clock
- Broken glass
- Let's play cards
- Out of apple juice
- You do too much

### Life

- A wedding toast
- Changing therapists
- I'm in a setback
- Panic attack
- Habitat house
- Trip-Car trouble

### Work

- Are you finished
- Irregular break times
- No orientation
- The boss is late
- Working with the disorganized

### Holiday

- Don't like gift



## Family Life... Bombarded with questions

### **Situation:**

Last night I stopped by to see my parents. While we were having dinner they bombarded me with questions. "How's your job? How's the car running? Did you get the brakes checked like you said you were going to? Are you taking your medication every day? When is your next doctor's appointment? Have you talked to your sister lately? At first I didn't think much about the conversation. The question about my meds did bother me. I felt like they were invading my privacy. I got worked up about the questions and even though I got a little moody with them, the visit went pretty good.

### **Symptoms:**

On the way home is when I really got steamed up. I replayed every question they asked and replayed all my answers. I thought I about what I should have said instead. I don't like them drilling me for information. It's as if I couldn't think of anything else. "Why are they always picking on me? I hate it! I really hate it!" I got so tense that my heart started palpitating, and it felt like there wasn't enough air in the car.

### **Solution:**

The physical symptoms were starting to scare me, so I pulled over into a parking lot, shut the radio off, and got my copy of *Peace of Body, Peace of Mind* out of the back seat.

I opened it to page 213 – The Primary Formula, that's always helped me in the past. At first it was hard to concentrate, but I kept looking at the page. I had to command my eye muscles to keep reading. Then I read out loud to myself:

*To eliminate feeling insecure or unsafe (fear) - The situation is distressing but not dangerous;*

"OK – my symptoms are the direct result of my fear and anger – they are distressing, not dangerous. I am uncomfortable, but I am safe."

*It is a triviality compared to my mental health; it is average. My feelings and sensations are average; they are distressing but not dangerous."*

"This is only stress and I'm OK."

*To eliminate the judgement that I am wrong (fear): I am not wrong, I am average.*

When I thought about it, I was thinking I was wrong for how I acted and how I answered my parent's questions. I wanted to tell them that it was none of their business. I didn't though, I was nice. I acted with dignity. I didn't upset them by showing my anger. So, I could say that I controlled my impulses. And, every act of self-control produces a sense of self-respect. Rather than being mad at myself for how I acted, I could be proud of myself. I don't need to be perfect.



*To eliminate the judgement someone else is wrong (anger): The other person is not wrong, he or she is average; I cannot control outer environment.*

Right, they're outside me and all I can really control is me – my thoughts and my behavior. And they are not wrong. They are average. Everybody's parents ask those kind of questions. Average. Average. Average.

Maybe the questions were a little probing, but I can remember one of my Mom's favorite lines: "What I do, I do with love." She does love me. Both my parents do, and they both care about me and my future. They are not picking on me. I felt like they were picking on me, but feelings aren't always facts. They are showing they care. I am really blessed that they have always been so supportive, even during the chaotic times when I went off my meds because I thought I didn't need them any more.

***In the past:***

Not too many months ago when I felt as if I was being grilled I either got upset vocally, or I'd sulk. Now I know that sulking is a non-verbal expression of my anger. Either way, when I acted out, my parents would get upset right along with me. Everybody lost, me included. Now we all win. We don't have a perfect relationship, and probably never will have. An average relationship will do for me. Now that I am more stable emotionally, I can see that before I really wasn't too stable. It helps that now I see that my medication manages the symptoms of my diagnosed mental condition, and that it's up to me to manage my life with the Taking Charge Tools. It's amazing what I've learned. Now it's up to me to keep practicing. And I will, because when I do, every area of my life is smoother. Not perfect. But a whole lot smoother.



## Family Life... A silent night

### **Situation:**

Our son came to visit last night. During dinner he wasn't very talkative. We tried different subjects and asked a few innocent, general questions about how he was doing, and just about all we got back were one word answers.

### **Symptoms:**

After Josh left and I was straightening up the kitchen all I could think about was how uncomfortable dinner had been. I was thinking: "He's so secretive. He's never seems to be at ease with us. We're his parents, if he can't be comfortable with us, he'll never be comfortable around other people. Families are supposed to be close. We're not, and that bothers me. I wish I could do something about it." The thoughts kept swirling around and then I noticed that my dinner wasn't settling well. I could feel the familiar acid twinge in my stomach. That was my signal to do something to calm down. I sat down, picked up a magazine and started to read. That didn't really help, thoughts about dinner kept coming up in my mind.

### **Solution:**

I've learned that doing something to distract myself is not the final solution. If I don't get rid of this frustration, another one will pile on top of it, or the same one will keep replaying until a new one comes along. And, that's not healthy for me.

So I went to work working on my mental health.

Everyday life is full of irritations, frustrations and disappointments, and this visit was a disappointment in a sense. Of course I was glad to see Josh. He had called earlier in the day to say he was coming over, and I was hoping it would be a good visit – by that I mean that he'd communicate more than he did the last time he was over to see us.

So it didn't work out the way I wanted it to – that's where the disappointment came in. It wasn't an emergency – something I had to fix. It was a disappointment. Period. The event was distressing, not at all dangerous. My symptoms, the racing thoughts and acid stomach, were distressing, not dangerous.

It was anger, me judging Josh wrong for not being talkative and fear, me judging me wrong for not coming up with a topic we could talk about, which were causing my tension and the tension was causing my symptoms.

Josh isn't wrong, he is average for not talking a lot. And, I'm not wrong, I'm average for being disappointed. And I'm not wrong for trying to come up with something to talk about.

Although I wish things could be different, I know that Josh, and everyone else for that matter, is my outer environment. I can't control people or things outside of me. I may influence them sometimes, but I can't control what they say, do, don't say, or don't do.

The key word that helped me recognize that I was accusing Josh for being wrong was when I described his behavior as “secretive.” The fact is, lots of people aren’t very talkative for lots of reasons. Josh just happens to be one of them. My interpretation, my insecure interpretation, was that “quiet” equaled “secretive.” When I substituted “Josh was quiet” for “Josh was secretive,” that removed the hint of danger that I was attaching to the event.

I also realized that I was thinking that Josh was “never” at ease with us – another insecure interpretation. The truth, and the secure interpretation, is that sometimes he appears very at ease around us. Not as often as I’d like, but “never” wasn’t totally correct. Again, my use of the word “never” was adding a hint of danger to what had happened. Realistically Josh was acting average for Josh.

Insecure, unrealistic thoughts are what rob my inner peace. Secure, realistic thoughts are what calm me down.

***In the past:***

Once upon a time Josh chose not to visit. Other times we’d get into big arguments, him accusing us of things that he believed were true. He’s more stable now than he’s been in a long time. For that I’m grateful. And that’s the secure thought I need to keep in my mind.

In the past I would have stayed a lot more upset over a trivial incident like one dinner. I would have talked, no, I would have complained to my wife about Josh’s behavior. I would have continued to blame him for the way he was and tried to think of what we were doing wrong. I would have insisted that we had to do something to fix the situation.

So many times before I’d let the little irritations, frustrations and disappointments build up and build up. Work stress piled on top of the stuff that was happening in our family. I didn’t know that I could or should de-stress and handle each incident as it came along. Now I know that my mental health is as important as Josh’s mental health. Because if I’m not emotionally healthy, I won’t be able to help him if he needs me.



## Family Life... Ex-husband & girlfriend

### ***Situation:***

Saturday I had my two children for the day and about 7:30 their Dad (my ex) and his girlfriend were coming to pick them up. The closer it got to 7:30, I found myself getting more and more uptight.

### ***Symptoms:***

I was tense, had a headache, and it was on it's way to being a really bad one. "I don't want that woman in my apartment. She's going to look around and see my trashy furniture. I haven't got any pictures on the walls. Things really look pretty bare." Then I started thinking about the situation with the kids. Todd has full custody and I get Sara and Stevie every other weekend. "That's just not normal. Mother's should have their kids. It's not fair."

### ***Solution:***

I knew for my sake and the kid's sake too that I needed to calm myself down. "This situation is distressing, not dangerous. It's a triviality, not an emergency. " My fear was one of social reputation – what's she going to think? The fact is, even though I don't have much in this little place, it's clean. And I do have everything I need. I can't control what his girlfriend thinks. That made me laugh to myself. I was trying to make her think that I was OK. I can't "make" anybody think anything! What's more important is my self-image – what I think of me. I know I'm doing so much better than I was before. I recognize it. So do my professionals. That's more important than what girlfriend thinks.

### ***In the past:***

In the past I would have gone off on "I've lost my children." I would have obsessed about it for at least the next week and made myself miserable. The fact is: I have not "lost" my children. I know where they are. My children live with their Dad. It took a lot of practice for me to be able to say that without feeling ashamed, without having to hang my head down and cry when I thought about it. Right now our children are living in a caring supportive environment. It helps me to think and say "our" children instead of "my" children. After all, they're not just "mine." Todd is responsible for them too.

## Family Life.. First Christmas without my Mother

### ***Situation:***

Last Saturday after I pulled some boxes of holiday decorations from the attic, I found myself sitting in the living room staring at the “mess” and found that I was feeling really down. Part of me wants to decorate and another part of me says, “Who cares! It’s too much work. Nobody appreciates it anyway.” I can’t seem to get into the spirit of things.

This is the first Christmas since my Mother passed away, and we were close. Holiday family gatherings have been at my house for about the last 7 years. They used to be at Mother’s house but then all the cooking and baking got to be too much for her to handle, so I gladly took it on. In the past I would always fix things up really nice. My sisters would bring over some of our traditional favorite foods and ooh and ahh at all my handiwork. It was a joy. I was happy to do it. It felt good. It’s not that way this year.

### ***Symptoms:***

Because I’ve had problems with depression in the past, I’m scared that this “I don’t care about things” mood is going to linger on, long after the holidays have passed. Is this the beginning of a long downward spiral for me?

My sister Jane seems to be her old bubbly self. I talked to her just the other day and she was all excited about the gifts she bought for her first grandchild and the neighborhood party that she and her husband were going to. Mom not being here, doesn’t seem to bother her at all. What’s wrong with me?

### ***Solution:***

After about fifteen minutes of sitting and staring into space, I decided I needed to do something to help myself. Feeling down, is for me, a good indication that I need to stop and think about what I’m thinking.

I’m missing Mom right now this minute. It’s average to miss Mom more at some times and less at other times. I am not wrong, I am average. It’s OK to feel sad about the fact that Mom won’t be with us this year. Millions of people are go through the same thing, facing the first holiday dinner without a loved one. It may be distressing, upsetting, unsettling, but there really is no danger to it at all. I’ve learned that you can’t be comfortable in an uncomfortable situation, and I’m going to rate these holidays as potentially uncomfortable at times.

I recognized that I was a little angry at Jane because it seemed to me that she didn’t miss Mom as much as I did. I told myself that when I was talking to her the other day she wasn’t missing Mom that particular minute. Her mind and her conversation were on her new granddaughter. Jane’s not wrong, she’s average. I can remember other conversations when Jane and I both cried about Mom not being with us anymore.



As for my thoughts about my low feelings turning into a long-lasting full blown depressive state, first I told myself that I didn't know if it would. It may, or it may not. I know that right now I have to be more conscious of my mental health and I'm very, very fortunate that I have verbal tranquilizers to use, when other people in the same situation don't have a clue what to do to help themselves. As much as I want everything to be nice for the family dinner, my mental health comes first. And that's not selfish, it's realistic.

I made a firm decision to do some decorating and even though I still didn't feel like it, I commanded my muscles to move, take the stuff out and put it around the house. When I finished a couple of hours later, I noticed that even though I didn't feel great, I felt better than I would have if I had just sat around.

***In the past:***

Before I would have talked myself into an even lower mood. I would have complained to my husband about how bad I was feeling. In fact I probably would have called a friend and wasted precious time and energy talking to her about how bad I felt, never knowing that I was actually working myself up. This time I put my time and energy to good use, first in consciously changing my thoughts, then in deliberately moving my muscles.





## Family Life... Mother's birthday & money

### **Situation:**

I was sitting in my office at home thinking about the last phone call I had from my sister. Our Mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday is coming up and Susan wants all of us to chip in \$200 apiece for a big party.

### **Symptoms:**

The problem is that not all of my sisters and brothers can afford to spend \$200. I know that for a fact. I can, and I don't mind at all. But in the past when not everyone would or could contribute, they'd expect me to take up the slack. The more I thought about the details of the lavish affair Susan was planning, the more tense I got. "I know they're going to ask me for more than \$200. I just know it! And this time I'm not going to give in, because when I do, then I find myself not able to provide for my immediate family. Susan's inviting over 100 people and she wants to get Mother a fancy new outfit when she's already got plenty of very nice dress clothes. What do they think I am? Rich?"

### **Solution:**

The more I thought the more confused I got. I knew I had make the effort to calm myself down or else this would keep coming up. I told myself, "Look for the causes, look for the fear, and look for the anger."

The fear was that I didn't want to have to contribute more than \$200. When I examined that thought, I saw the "have to." The fact is, that I don't "have" to give more than my share – no matter what my brothers and sisters think, no matter what I've done in the past. If they're disappointed in me or my behavior, that's their disappointment they'll have to deal with.

I don't need to be all things to all people. And, I truly can't be all things to all people. It's impossible. The fact is, I do have a better job than any of them do, so they probably do think I'm rich by their standards.

I got rid of my angry attitude against Susan by saying to myself: she's not wrong, she's average. Average – not right – average. Lots of women plan grand parties for all kinds of reasons. And lots of people don't take everyone's financial situation into consideration.

I made a firm decision that I was only going to contribute the original \$200 amount and not more. If I was asked for more, I could simply say, "I'm sorry I can't." I didn't have to add a big explanation and justify my decision. It might be uncomfortable saying No, but I could do it.

I even recognized my slight anger at my siblings who really couldn't afford the \$200 for not speaking up for themselves. They're not wrong, they're average. If they have to do

without to do what Susan's planned for the birthday celebration, that's their business and not really any of mine.

I was finally able to look from their point of view – If I was in their financial positions, I would probably expect the “rich brother” to contribute more too.

***In the past:***

Previously I have chosen to give more than my fair share - just to keep peace, to make everyone in the family like me. And I'd resent it and blame myself for not doing what I really wanted to do. I was afraid to speak up. It's a big thing for me to start saying No.



## Family Life... The spiked cherries

### **Situation:**

When I was talking to my sister on the phone last Sunday afternoon she mentioned that she made some more Vodka spiked cherries and took them to a party and everyone just loved them. This is the third or fourth conversation in a row where Vicky has told me about something to do with alcohol. To me, it's an indication that she's drinking more than usual.

### **Symptoms:**

When I got off the phone it seemed like all I could do was think about Vicky and her drinking. I was trying to rationalize her situation. She was going through a rough time for a while with noisy neighbors, but that's been resolved. I thought maybe she was drinking to help her get some sleep. So maybe she got back into the habit of drinking and she's stayed with it. I hope not. Years ago Vicky was into recreational drugs, from what I could gather, back then she did it pretty often. The recent past three or four years have been different. Even when we'd spent a week together she never smoked any marijuana. I thought she had left all that behind her.

I was so worried it was as if my thoughts were stuck in replay. "What if she has a car accident? What if she loses her job? What if her drinking gets to be a real problem? Will she know enough to go for help?"

### **Solution:**

It didn't take too long for me to figure out that I was playing therapist – for her, when in fact I needed to be working on me!

There is a definite difference between concern and worry. I know that. I can be lovingly concerned about my sister. I can't afford to worry about her. She's 45 years old. She's done OK in the past, and she will most probably do OK in the future. She's not wrong, she is average for drinking and making spiked maraschino cherries. She's not right, she's not wrong. She's average.

I'm not right because I don't care to drink. And she's not wrong for liking to drink. I'm not better because I don't care to drink, she's not worse because she likes to drink. Period.

I was blowing things way out of proportion. When Vicky was into drugs before, she was romantically involved with a bum. He's been out of the picture for more than eight years. The secure thought is that she's left drinking alone in the past for long stretches of time, and if she chooses to I'm sure she can do it again.



The fact is, I don't really know how much she's drinking now. She lives 2000 miles away from me. It could very well be that the times she mentioned alcohol to me in the last two months were the only time she had any.

Vicky is my outer environment. I can't control what she does. I can't control what she doesn't do. All I can control is my thoughts and my behavior.

***In the past:***

If I got worried in the past, I'd call our other sister Beth and talk to her. First I'd hint around that Vicky might have a problem, then I'd probe: "How many times have you talked to Vicky? How many times did she mention booze?" On and on I'd go. If Beth didn't think Vicky had a problem, in other words if she didn't agree with me, I'd talk to a friend about the situation. I'd keep talking to people until I found one or two who would agree with me. I had to prove I was "right."

I would always make a big deal out of everything. Then I'd wonder why I was so tense. I'd make up problems where there were none.



## Home Life... Everyone's alarms goes off at different times

### ***Situation:***

I have three roommates and most of the time in the morning they get up before I have to. Thursday morning the first alarm went off at 5:30 and it woke me up too. I managed to get back to sleep and the second one went off at 6:00 and I heard it. The third one rang out at 7:00 and you guessed it, that one woke me up again. I'd say that's when I began to work myself up. But the truth is I worked myself up the first time and the second time, and the third time. I think you could say this was a series of IFD's, Irritations, Frustrations and Disappointments.

### ***Symptoms:***

First I smacked my pillow, then turned over in a huff and put the pillow over my head to block out the noise – even though the alarm had already gone off and was shut off and it was really pretty quiet at that point. My thoughts: "I wanted to sleep in! All this noise is driving me crazy. They're going to have to do something about it. I was up very late last night and now I haven't had enough undisturbed sleep. I'm going to be tired today. I won't be able to go to that meeting I was planning on going to at 7:00 tonight. This stinks. All I want to do is sleep and I can't. This is not going to be a good day." I tossed and turned a little more trying to find a comfortable spot and was listening for more noise.

### ***Solution:***

That was the key – when I realized that I was listening for more noise so that I would be even more justified in being angry. That's when I decided to do something for me. I really didn't want to have a bad day. It may have started out not so great, but I could make things better inside of me. I don't like feeling cranky and crabby.

It still takes me a little time to figure out that I'm angry. The first time someone else's alarm woke me up, I was, let's say annoyed. By the second time I was aggravated. By the third time I was close to furious.

I'm learning that all those are different degrees of being angry, but they all come down to the same thing: I'm judging them wrong, and me right. It's been like that with me. If I'm uncomfortable, somebody must be wrong. Either them or me. It's not easy to give up sometimes, but I know that maintaining good mental health is my first and most important goal.

So I while I was still in my bed I said to myself: "They're not wrong, they're average for setting their alarm clocks and getting up earlier than me. And, I'm not wrong I'm average for not liking to hear their alarms go off. Saying they're not wrong and I'm not wrong doesn't mean that we're right, it just means that it's not wrong.



Having more than one person in one living area means that people are going to get up at different times. And if those people have to get up at certain times, they don't have much choice but to set their alarm clocks.

I changed the insecure thought, "I didn't get enough sleep," to the secure thought and fact, "I did have enough sleep. Maybe not all I wanted, but certainly enough to get me through today."

Since I knew that this type of thing would probably happen again I took the time to figure out what I could do the next time the first alarm went off, and I wrote it down.

1. This situation is upsetting, it's not dangerous. Nothing bad is going to happen to me.
2. The people and the alarm clocks are my outer environment. I can influence them, I can't control them.
3. A response has four parts, feelings, sensations, thoughts and impulses. Out of those four I have direct control over only two, I & T – Impulses and Thoughts. If I change my thoughts and excuse the people, my angry feelings will run their course.
4. If I control the impulse to heave my body around my bed and show my anger (even if I'm the only one who sees my behavior) I'll get more calm. If I don't take care of this now, other upsetting things that might happen during the day are just going to pile on top of this and I will have a miserable day.

***In the past:***

In the past I would have either told everybody about my "bad" morning and my inconsiderate roommates, or I would have replayed what happened in my mind, keeping it alive and keeping my symptoms up at a high pitch. Now I know that to talk it up is to work it up whether I'm talking to other people or talking it up in my own mind.



## Home Life... Broken glass

### **Situation:**

My younger sister and I live together. Yesterday after I wiped off the kitchen counter I went to throw the paper towels into the trash and I noticed pieces of glass in the trash bag. That's when I started up.

### **Symptoms:**

"Oh boy, something else broken! Again. What did she do now? I wonder if she cut herself in the process? She's not as careful with things like I am. I can't remember the last time I broke a glass. It seems like every time I turn around, Debbie's knocking over something. Just last week she knocked over a can of Coke and it got all over the kitchen floor. What a mess." I was feeling light headed, my heart was pounding, I felt short of breath.

Feeling so anxious that I think I'm not getting enough oxygen is a sign to me that I need to do something to relax. I used to find something to distract me. Now I know that's only a temporary fix – like a band aid. If I'm going to feel better I need to get to the bottom of things.

### **Solution:**

I went and sat down. That was commanding my muscles to be still and motionless. I've learned to take a time out to stop and think about what I'm thinking. I've found that with practice, it only takes a few minutes of my time.

A broken glass is distressing, but not dangerous. I realized it was my imagination when I was thinking that maybe my sister cut herself. True, she is my younger sister. And, she is an adult, quite capable of taking care of herself, even if she gets a cut. I recognized that my excessive sense of responsibility was showing. I can't prevent her from ever getting hurt, even though I'd like to.

I was lumping together what happen, with other things that had happened on the past, other things that went "wrong." I realized I had left over anger from other incidents. So I let myself think about today's broken glass and said to myself, "She's not wrong, she's average." Things break. Period.

When I thought back to the incident with the Coke can I said, "She's not wrong, she's average." When I thought about the mud she tracked on the kitchen floor last spring I said, "She's not wrong, she's average." I must have sat there for a full five minutes thinking of all the little things from the recent and not-so-recent past. And every time I said, "She's not wrong, she's average."



Finally I got tired of thinking and replacing my thoughts and kind of laughed to myself. She really is average! Things break every day. Sometimes it's from carelessness. Sometimes things just happen.

***In the past:***

Before there would have been nothing humorous about it. I had this idea that material things should last forever. I guess I got that from our Father who didn't like to spend money, even on necessities. Now I can lower my standards, for my sister and myself. Neither one of us has to be perfect, and mistakes, like breaking things, are part of every day life. People do things "that" irritate us, not "to" irritate us. I'm sure she didn't throw a glass on the floor, sweep up the mess and dump it in the trash on purpose just to see how riled up I could get about it. Whatever happened it was average, an honest mistake. Most important it was a trivial incident compared to my mental health. I made a firm decision that I would control my speech muscles and not even bring the subject up. Before I really expected everything in life to be perfect and stay perfect. Now I know that's not reality.





## Home Life... Let's play cards

### ***Situation:***

Last Sunday afternoon five of us were just sitting around doing our own thing and Susan suggested that we play cards. We talked about it a little, and I know that most card games only take four people, so I told Janet that if she wanted, she could play because I didn't care if I did or not. I played last time.

Janet got real quiet, said no she didn't want to play and right away she went outside. This is when I started feeling funny, like I had said something wrong. The rest of us talked about Janet walking out and then we couldn't agree on what card game to play. So we ended up not playing. It was pretty quiet again, as if everybody was mad.

### ***Symptoms:***

I kept thinking that maybe I should not have asked Janet if she wanted to play. I was trying to figure out why she was so gloomy. It seemed to me like she was making a big deal of the whole thing. In fact I was a little mad about how she acted. I was just trying to be nice. She's so sensitive.

I was trying to read a magazine to keep my mind off of Janet and what had just happened, and it worked for a little bit and then I couldn't concentrate on the words I was reading. It was like I was just staring at the page. Thoughts about what had just happen kept popping into my brain. Then I got afraid because I couldn't concentrate.

Then I realized that I was making a big deal of the whole thing too. I can see that about me when I can't let go of something that happened.

### ***Solution:***

So I told myself:

The fact that I can't concentrate now is distressing, it's not dangerous.

The whole situation is distressing, not dangerous. We've had things like this happen before in the house. In fact, my sister was telling me about something that happened to her like this when her friends wanted to rent a movie and they couldn't all agree on which one to rent. So that makes it average. Average means things like this happen.

The fact is, sometimes a group of people will agree and sometimes they won't. It's uncomfortable when they don't agree, but it's just part of life. It can make you feel tense, but that's OK.

I'm not wrong for asking Janet if she wanted to play. Janet's not wrong, for not wanting to play. So nobody's wrong, and nobody's right.

Plus Janet is my outer environment. I can't control what she says or does.



All I can control are my thoughts and my muscles.  
Even though I try to be nice to other people, I can't make them be nice back to me.  
I don't know why Janet acted the way she did. And I don't have to know.  
The whole thing isn't worth me staying upset over it.  
Once I took the time to stop and think about what I was thinking and replace the thoughts, I started feeling better – more calm.

***In the past:***

Before I would have really thought I did something wrong. And I would have been more mad at Janet and a whole lot more nervous around the group for maybe a few days. I might even think I was no good and get real moody. I thought it was part of my job to look after the others and make sure they didn't get upset or anxious. Now I know that each individual is in charge of their own mental attitude.

This time I felt better after I changed my thoughts. I didn't make a big deal of it, and none of the others did either. Later on that night we all watched TV and had a good time. Most important is that I felt better.



## Home Life... Out of apple juice

### **Situation:**

I live in a family care facility and there are three residents along with the two people who own the home and pretty much take care of things for us. Yesterday when I came home from the drop-in center I wanted some apple juice. It was about 4:30 and I knew supper wouldn't be ready until 6:00. When I went to the refrigerator, the bottle of apple juice that was there in the morning wasn't there anymore. Then I looked in the cupboard and couldn't find any either.

### **Symptoms:**

I started to get upset inside. I just didn't feel good. I got mad and went to my room. One of the other guys, Bobbie came by and asked what was wrong. I said: "Nothing!" I didn't want to talk about it. But the more I thought about not having any apple juice, the more upset I got. So I just laid on my bed listening to my Walkman with the headphones on.

### **Solution:**

It took a while, but I started to think about what I was thinking. I took out a piece of paper and wrote some things down.  
I don't like it when Mrs. Jones doesn't buy enough of stuff that I like. Like apple juice. I deserve to have what I want and when I want it.  
I wonder who it was that drank what was left in the bottle from this morning. I bet it was John. He's always doing things that I don't like.  
I'm really mad about this.  
My stomach is starting to feel funny. And my hands are shaking.

Once I had my thoughts down on paper, the next thing I did was to make up new thoughts. I knew it was a way for me to calm down and start feeling better.

For: I don't like it when Mrs. Jones doesn't buy enough of stuff that I like. Like apple juice.

I wrote: It's OK for me to get mad about something, but it's not good for me to stay mad about it.

I wrote: Sometimes at the drop-in center we don't have any hot chocolate when people want it. So it's average not to have a favorite drink when you want it.

I wrote: Not having apple juice when I want it is No BIG deal. It's distressing – but it's really not dangerous at all.

I wrote: I know my mental health is more important than whether I have apple juice right now.

For: I deserve to have what I want and when I want it.



I wrote: Apple juice is a want – not a need. I'm not going to starve. Dinner is only an hour away now.

For: I wonder who it was that drank what was left in the bottle from this morning. I bet it was John. He's always doing things that I don't like.

I wrote: I don't know who drank it. Maybe it was more than one person. Even if I ask John if he drank the last of it, there still won't be any apple juice for me right now.

For: I'm really mad about this.

I wrote: I don't have to "stay" mad about it. If I keep telling myself it's not a big deal, I'll calm down. And when I calm my thoughts down, my stomach will calm down and my hands will stop shaking so much.

***In the past:***

Before I had any training and learned that my thoughts had a whole lot to do with how I was feeling and that I could change my thoughts, I would have got mad and stayed mad. I probably would have stayed in my room and pouted. When the other people had dinner, I wouldn't got out there to eat with them, because my stomach would be really upset. Even the next morning I might have had an attitude. I'd just be sulking around, not being angry on the outside, but still being all upset inside and feeling kind of depressed.

This time I did what I could to help myself calm down and I feel good about me.



## Family Life... You do too much

### **Situation:**

Working in a school cafeteria requires some pre-preparation. It was the day before a seven day holiday break and I was tired and decided to skip the pre-prep on Thursday and do it the following Tuesday when I had to come in and check the freezers.

When I got home I talked to my husband about how tired I was and how ready I was for some time off and mentioned my decision to skip the pre-prep. He said, "you're always doing things that you don't have to do."

### **Symptoms:**

His remark bothered me. "He doesn't understand. In his job if something doesn't get done, somebody on the next shift will pick it up. It's not that way in the day to day, one-shift world of child nutrition. I'm tired and cranky already. Why does he have to add to it?"

My whole body was tense, especially my shoulders. I felt like I was going to start crying. "Why is this happening to me again?"

### **Solution:**

It wasn't until I talked to a good friend later that evening that I took the time to work on this incident. With her help I was able to see that I was questioning my decision to put off the work and that I was looking for my husband to say in effect: "That's OK honey, whatever you did was all right."

Once I told myself that I wasn't wrong, I was average for my decision, I didn't need outer approval for what I did, or in this case what I didn't do. The truth is that it is perfectly acceptable to do the pre-prep on Tuesday instead of the previous Thursday. The fact is that it will get done before the next scheduled in-session school day. Lots of people put off doing things when they're tired and when the can be done at a later time.

With the fearful thoughts, "I'm wrong," out of the way, I knew I also needed to work on the angry ones. My husband is not wrong, he is average for what he said. In his opinion, "I do too much." In my opinion, I do what needs to be done. With the temper gone, the insight arrived: "He's never worked preparing institutional meals on a daily basis. How could he know how things work?"

Once I excused him, I thought to myself that because of the tired, down mood I was in, probably nothing he said would have been the "right" thing. That's when I caught myself smiling to myself.



I also realized that I just didn't casually mention what happened at school that day, I was in fact complaining to my husband. What I was doing was increasing my agitation by sharing it with somebody else. By talking about it I was reliving it and working it up, one more time.

***In the past:***

Before I would not have seen anything humorous about the situation – then or ever! I'd go on for weeks, not just second guessing everything I did, but third, fourth and fifth guessing. Lots of times it would get to the point where I get really down about everything – work life, family life. I'd even start wondering if I should change jobs, or change churches. I'd burst into tears a lot. I'd feel trapped. Something had to change. Now I know I may not be able to change things outside me, but I can change my thoughts.



## Life... A wedding toast

### **Situation:**

A friend and I are supposed to go another close friend's wedding in two weeks. It's a fair size wedding and I know from hearing about the details that there will be a champagne toast to the bride and groom. It was last Friday night when I heard first heard about it and that night I had trouble getting to sleep.

### **Symptoms:**

"A champagne toast – what am I going to do?" Because I'm a recovering alcoholic, a relatively new one too, I've sworn off all drinking. And I'm serious about it. "It's going to be uncomfortable sitting at a table with nine other people and when they do the toast, what should I do? It's been a while since I've been close to any kind of spirits. I have to let them pour a glass of champagne for me. It will look strange if I don't. If I do that, what will other people think when I don't drink it and it's just sitting there in front of me?" I actually pictured in my mind what was going to happen, and it wasn't pleasant. I don't like being embarrassed. I thought about canceling out, just not going at all.

Needless to say, with all those thoughts racing around my mind, I wasn't falling asleep and it was already after 1:00 a.m. My whole body felt tense as if I was already at the wedding and facing the whole situation.

I knew that if I didn't make a firm decision, even if I did get to sleep that night, that the issue would just come up in my mind again. And again. And again. Better take the time now to consciously change my thoughts and come up with a plan.

### **Solution:**

First off, facing a glass of champagne is distressing, not dangerous. Even to me who is a recovering alcoholic. I'm not wrong I'm average for being alcoholic. And they're not wrong their average for having an alcoholic toast. Once I dropped that fear and anger I could think a bit more clearly. Everyone who has chosen not to drink faces a first time when they're more or less expected to drink. It is average, and it is uncomfortable.

That's the key: it's just uncomfortable. I've faced other discomfort and made it through. I can again this time! Discomfort is discomfort is discomfort. It doesn't matter where or when it comes up. This may be a new situation, but it's just discomfort. If I bear the discomfort, comfort will come. If I don't face it, there will be another time down the road when I'll have to face it.

With that I made a firm decision: "I will go to the wedding."

It was silly for me to think that I would be the center of attention. It's a wedding. During the toast everyone will be looking at the bride and groom and whoever does the toast. When everybody else raises their glasses, I will too. And when everyone takes that first

sip, I can just hold my glass and then set it down on the table. It may be uncomfortable, but I'm going to practice at home before with a glass of water. I could rehearse!

If someone at the table does notice the full glass in front of me, I can smile and just say something like, "Alcohol and I don't get along." Which is true. It's bad for me. The fact is, lots of people don't drink, for lots of different reasons. The whole thing is a choice, and I'm entitled to that choice too.

***In the past:***

Before I didn't know I had choices. I didn't know that I could face being uncomfortable. When I was anxious, I'd drink to take away the anxiety. I did that for a lot of years.

I understand that there is no right or wrong if I go to the wedding or not. I'm not right for going and I wouldn't be wrong for staying home. For me, I am going against an old habit pattern. My mental health is at the top of my list and this will be a prime time CTP – Chance To Practice.





## Life... Changing therapists

### **Situation:**

I found out this morning that my therapist is leaving. He told me at the end of our session. Next time I go, I'll be seeing someone else in the same office.

### **Symptoms:**

As I was walking to go out of the building I was feeling lost and abandoned. I knew where I was going but I felt disassociated from everything. I was confused. I pressed the up button on the elevator instead of the down button. I thought, "Here we go again. I have to start all over with someone else. It's so uncomfortable seeing a new therapist. It's not fair. Why is Mr. Gregory choosing to move away? I know, I just won't come back. Ever. Then they'll be sorry! Why didn't he tell me at the beginning of the session?"

### **Solution:**

When I got home I was still upset and confused. I tried to watch TV, but that didn't help. I tried to read the newspaper and all the stories I read were gloom and doom. That made me feel worse. Finally I decided that I need to do something constructive to get in touch with what I was thinking. The longer I pushed the issue aside, the longer I was going to feel bad. So I went through my Taking Charge handouts.

"This is distressing, but not dangerous." I didn't believe that for a second. But I kept repeating it to myself, because that's what I was supposed to do. After I kept it up for a few minutes I started thinking straighter.

Feeling lost and abandoned was a feeling, not a fact. There was a change going on. A change, that's all. No one was abandoning me. Mr. Gregory was choosing to move away because he got a better job. Period. People move to different places all the time. And I was going to have a new therapist. Period. He's not wrong, he's average. Period.

I knew that my earlier thought that "I just won't ever go back to the office" was an overreaction. "My" overreaction. It was just an overreactive thought. I could accept it or reject it and replace it. I didn't have to follow through on it.

I'm not wrong I'm average for not liking the change. I can have an original, first response to the situation, and it's up to me to work at working it down and dropping it. Anybody would feel insecure at first having to change professionals.

And Mr. Gregory isn't wrong, he's average for telling me at the end of the session. I probably wouldn't have felt any better if he told me at the beginning.

### **In the past:**

This same thing happened to me about three years ago, I had to change psychiatrists. I felt totally lost and helpless. Totally hopeless. Everything that

happened to me was an emergency, a big deal that I couldn't handle. My thinking was what made everything a huge deal.

It was little things like this that built up and built up until I thought suicide was the only alternative. Things can be rough sometimes, but now I know there's absolutely nothing bad enough to end my life over. Nothing!



## Life... In a setback

**Situation:**

I'm in a setback and I don't like it at all. I was doing so well and now some of the old symptoms are back.

**Symptoms:**

Yesterday morning I didn't feel like getting out of bed. It seemed like I didn't get any sleep. I was tired and felt drained. Didn't feel like facing the day. It's been about two weeks since I've felt this way again and I'm worried about it. I can't face going to the hospital again.

Even though my doctor adjusted my medication, it doesn't seem to be working. I still feel dull and lifeless. And I was doing so well for a few months – going to work, seeing friends, going to the gym twice a week. Now everything is such an effort and I know that I'm getting into an avoidance pattern. I'd love to just stay home today, curl up in a little ball and pull the covers up over my head. What's the use practicing if this is where I end up.

**Solution:**

I call this a rerun, because I've worked on it before. Move the muscles, move the muscles, move the muscles. So I got out of bed, fixed the covers and took a shower. While I was fixing my cereal, I thought back to what our Taking Charge instructor told one of the other students when he was in a setback: Setbacks are average, everybody has them. That's a secure thought. I'm not the first person, or the last, to go step sideways on the path of wellness. I like that picture – stepping sideways. Before I would think that I was sliding straight down, and fast.

You never go back as far as you were. That's a secure thought.

Endorse for all you do. Rather than concentrating on how I'm feeling, I could be telling myself "good job" for getting out of bed, taking a shower, getting dressed. And I could look back at yesterday and the day before, and applaud all the different things I did those days too. I had to change my focus, and the only way to change my focus was to change my thoughts.

My medication may not be working as fast as I expected. The doctor did say it would be a few weeks and it's only been two. If I want, I can call the office and explain how I'm feeling.

I don't want to have to go back to the hospital, but if I do, it won't be the end of the world. It might be distressing, but it won't be dangerous. I may not want to go, but it might work out that way, and might be the best thing for me.

What's the use of practicing? That was a fear thought. Discouragement. Actually I know that practicing my mental fitness tools does work. I've made a lot of progress. The key

thing here is for me not to compare myself to other people. I need to only compare me, to how I used to be.

Setback time is back to basics time. I don't want to practice so hard again, but I've promised myself that my mental health comes first.

***In the past:***

In the past when I started feeling this way, I would stay home. I'd spend my days in bed or on the couch with the TV going. I'd go through eating binges, or I wouldn't eat at all. I wouldn't answer the phone. If I did pick up the mail I wouldn't open it. I didn't want to face the bills. I wouldn't even open cards that friends sent to me. I didn't care that other people cared. I didn't care that they were trying to be thoughtful and kind.

There was a time when I would spend the entire day in my sweats and wear them to bed. It would get so bad that I wouldn't take a shower or comb my hair. I didn't feel like doing anything, so I didn't. Now I command my muscles – move! And I do move. I may not be feeling great right now, but I am functioning.

I'm proud of the progress I've made. Nobody's done it for me. It was my efforts – me changing consciously changing my thoughts and me deliberately moving my muscles. Just moving muscles isn't enough. I have to check my thoughts and replace them.

I remind myself that I'm going "through" a setback, I 'm not "stuck" in one.



## Life... At the edge of a panic attack

### ***Situation:***

Wednesday morning we were out of milk. I told my wife that I would go to the store, and now I wasn't so sure I wanted to. I've suffered from panic attacks. Even though I'm on medication that takes care of the severe symptoms, I find that I still hesitate a lot about going away from the house.

### ***Symptoms:***

I knew I was having anticipatory anxiety. That was all explained to me before. When I thought about getting into the car, the picture of my worst panic attack came back into my mind. Instantly, like a flash, those old feelings were creeping in – the lightheadedness; I thought about how horrible it felt when my heart was racing out of control, and then I took my pulse to see if it was normal. The lightheadedness was getting worse, so I sat down. Then I got back up to see if my legs felt weak. That was another strong symptoms in the past. Then I sat down again because I was scared.

I started thinking about times in the past when I made a decision to do something and then backed out. Remembering those times didn't make me feel good about myself.

### ***Solution:***

I realized that I had the choice of two discomforts. I could go to the store and be uncomfortable. Or, I could stay at home and be uncomfortable because I was chickening out of something that I said I would do. I've spent hours beating myself up when I don't follow through.

With that stood up and walked around the house. I was testing to see if my muscles would in fact show my brain that there was no danger. I didn't feel 100% at first, but then it got better.

I changed my thoughts: Comfort is a want not a need. I can go shopping even if I feel discomfort. What I'm feeling is distressing, it's real. But it is not at all dangerous.

I was worried about the symptoms getting worse when I was away from home. I told myself that I didn't know if they'd be better or worse. Chances are they'd run their course if I didn't attached danger to them. No danger, no danger, no danger. I kept repeating it over and over.

It's hard for a man to admit that he's scared. But plenty of men have this illness. We sure didn't ask for it. I needed to face my fear – move my muscles and change my thoughts.



We need to do the things we fear and care not to do. It's the only way to get over the fear.

I realized too that I was spying on my body. That's a no-no. If I ever want to be strong enough to go to see my favorite cousin in Seattle, I've got to start with these small steps.

***In the past:***

Before if I was at home and started feeling bad, I'd stay home. No two ways about it. If I was out, I would instantly head for home. And I mean instantly. There have been many times we went out and we'd have to leave to come home. Once we drove to church and left before the service even started. We've left the movie theatre 20 minutes before the show ended because I couldn't take feeling the panicky feelings.

Now I'm taking charge of my life.



## Life... The Habitat House

### ***Situation:***

On Saturday morning I got up early and headed to the Habitat for Humanity site where some of our church members planned to help. This is something I've always wanted to get involved in, it's seems like such a worthy program. When I got there, things were, let's say, more than a bit disorganized. It seems that the person who was supposed to deliver the paint wasn't there yet. And there were six of us standing around with our hands in our pockets because all the other jobs that could be done were already being worked on. When it got to be a half hour later, I found myself getting worked up.

### ***Symptoms:***

Racing thoughts were whipping through my mind: "I've got better things to do than just stand around. My grass needs cutting, my car needs washing. I could be catching up on all kinds of things around my house. Boy, I made the wrong decision coming out here! If they want volunteers, they ought to be more organized.

I felt restless inside and started shuffling my feet, kicking in the dirt.

"If they ask us to come back tomorrow, I'd like to, but my Sunday's are usually pretty filled. Then it's a half hour drive to get here and another half hour back, if the traffic's OK. This isn't at all as I expected it to be."

### ***Solution:***

As soon as I caught the thought, "This isn't at all as I expected it to be," is when I realized that what this whole thing was about was a disappointment. In my mind I had pictured getting coming over and getting straight to work. I figured they'd hand me a gallon of paint, a brush and a ladder and I'd be set! Expectations and disappointments happen, even on Saturdays when you're trying to do something to help people who are less fortunate.

I knew that I couldn't change the situation, but I could change my attitude about it, by changing my thoughts. I knew that once I tossed out the right, wrong – the good, bad I'd feel better.

They're not wrong, they're average for the paint not being there. And, I'm not wrong, I'm average for not liking it.

Once I excused them and me, my thinking cleared. Supplies don't get to regular construction sites some times – why should this be different. It's average! Not right, wrong, good or bad – just average.



Waiting around is uncomfortable for some people, and I am one of those kind of people. I'd rather be busy.

As for me thinking I had made the wrong decision in coming over, that just wasn't so. It's something I wanted to do. It was my choice. It wasn't a bad choice, it was just a choice. No one could have predicted this delay. The people in charge probably aren't happy about it either

Once I stopped to change my thoughts, I didn't feel quite as anxious, impatient or uncomfortable.

***In the past:***

In the past, I would have never volunteered to work with people I didn't know, even people I knew casually from church. I would have never driven half an hour and gone somewhere I didn't know where I was going. To be honest – I was afraid: afraid I'd get lost, afraid people wouldn't like me, afraid I'd make some huge mistake like drop a can of paint.

Thinking about how my life was, I realized that had come a long way, a long way! And whether I got to work on this house or not, I could give myself a lot of silent applause for all my progress, and for the fact that I made the effort to volunteer. With that thought I got a smile on my face.





## Life... Planning a trip + car trouble

### ***Situation:***

Last night my husband I were driving to the store and we heard a strange whistling sound. At first it sounded like it was the car next to us. When we stopped at a red light, the sound went away. Then about a few minutes later it was back again. This is when I got upset.

### ***Symptoms:***

We've planned a trip to Pennsylvania next weekend to attend our niece's christening. "Oh, why does this have to happen now? The trip is costing us extra money and we don't need a major car repair bill right now. What if they can't find the trouble before we leave?" Immediately pictured us stuck someplace off I-95 with car trouble, having to call AAA and having to find a good mechanic. Our second vehicle has more than 110,000 miles, so taking it is not an alternative.

When we go to the store I was so pre-occupied with the car problem that I wasn't concentrating on shopping. My husband could tell that even though I was quiet on the outside, that I was working myself up on the inside.

### ***Solution:***

As soon as he said, "Christy," and I looked in his direction, I could see that knowing grin on his face. Kurt knows that travelling is not one of my favorite things. We both laugh about the fact that I'll never ever accumulate enough points to sleep or fly anywhere for free!

His little gesture reminded me that I was making an emergency out of a triviality. A noise in the car is a triviality compared to my mental health. The situation was distressing, I didn't like it. But, it wasn't dangerous at all. Not too many people really enjoy having to get their car fixed. It's one of those universal irritating situations.

At that point I had no idea what the noise could be. It might be major, then again, it might be something minor. I just didn't know. Even if car did break down on the trip, it would still only be irritating and frustrating, not dangerous.

As for the money that it might cost... of course I'd rather spend money on something I planned for, not something unexpected. Most people would. So it's average. Money has been a big link with me in the past.

### ***In the past:***

Before I would have convinced myself that the problem was going to be something major and something expensive. Now I truly know that even though I don't like spending money on large car repair bills, no amount of money is worth



my mental health. Even if it turned out to be a \$450.00 repair, it's not worth me getting or staying upset about it.

I would have worked myself up to the point where I wouldn't be able to fall asleep. Or I'd get to sleep, and wake up at 3:00 a.m. and worry and worry. I'd be convinced I would not get enough rest and that'd be tired at work the next day. In fact a long time ago I worried so much about what could happen, I would be anxious and have restless nights for all of the two weeks before a trip.

Although I still get flashes of negative scenes in my mind about bad things that can happen, I know those negative scenes are the result of my insecure thoughts. I can change my thoughts – one at a time if I have to.



## On the job... Are you finished?

### ***Situation:***

On my job at the sheltered workshop last Tuesday morning we were working on letters that had to be mailed out. The person before me was folding the letters, then my task was to put the paper into an envelope, stick on the address label on and seal it. About 11:25 the man in charge, Nick, came over and said to us, "Are you finished with those letters? They need to go to the post office today." That's when I started to get worked up.

### ***Symptoms:***

Right away my face got hot and I could feel myself trembling inside. I was upset. In my mind I said, "Who does he think he is? I'm going as fast as I can. It's not like it was me who was holding things up. If Judy would fold faster, I could stuff faster." We still had about 50 more to go. "Why doesn't he get someone else to help fold? This is too much work for two people to do. I don't want to come back here tomorrow!" The more I thought, the more upset I got. When I noticed my stomach feeling funny, I knew I had to work to calm myself down.

### ***Solution:***

The first thing I did was tell myself that irritations, frustrations and disappointments are part of everyday life. And this was one of those moments. This was distressing, but not dangerous, both the situation and my symptoms.

I know that fear and anger are what cause my tension and my symptoms. I realized that I was angry at Nick, I was judging him wrong for what he said. And he wasn't wrong, he was average. All he did was ask if we were finished and he mentioned that the stuff had to get out to the post office. He didn't sound angry. He just asked a question. He was doing his job.

And as I looked at what I was thinking, I realized that I was a little mad at Judy too. The fact was, Judy was folding as fast as she could. So she wasn't wrong either, she was average. And as for me, I wasn't wrong I was average, I was keeping up with my task. Once I calmed down I thought, "I can help Judy fold some of the letters." So I did.

### ***In the past:***

Before I would have got upset and stayed upset. I would have talked to Judy about what Nick had said, all the time thinking he was wrong and we were right. In the past my talking about what happened would have made Judy more upset too.

This time because I made an effort to be calm, I think Judy was more calm. With all my fear and anger thoughts before I would have never thought to help Judy out.



And I probably would have not gone back to the job the next day. I would have made some excuse or say that I just didn't like the work. Before I really thought it was the work I didn't like, when it was really that I didn't like feeling uncomfortable. Now I know what to do when I'm uncomfortable. I like the way I handled myself this time.



## On the job... Irregular break times

### ***Situation:***

Let me start by saying that I'm a rookie when it comes to mental fitness. And this has happened more than once. I know I'm supposed to pick one incident, so I'll pick yesterday afternoon. It was 3:21. I know because I was watching my watch. We're supposed to have a break at 3:15. That's what they told us – 3:15.

Usually the man who is in charge of two other departments comes over and tells us it's time to break. He was nowhere around. And I found myself getting more and more upset.

### ***Symptoms:***

I was thinking: "I need to use the rest room. And pretty soon, I'm going to need to use the restroom really bad. Where is that man? He's always late when it comes time to giving us our break. This isn't fair.

I'm going to go to his boss and tell him what I think: that they ought to stick to the rules around here. I want a cold drink. By the time he gets here I'm going to have to choose between the restroom and the break room where I can get a Pepsi."

Physical symptoms? All I can remember is that I felt tense. All over – head to toe. In fact I felt my feet cramped up in my shoes.

### ***Solution:***

Like I said, I'm just starting this business of changing my thoughts and the only thing I could think of was Rose's favorite: "This is distressing, but not dangerous." I repeated that over and over and over again in my mind. When I stopped repeating it, the negative insecure thoughts came back.

So I just started up again, "This is distressing, but not dangerous. This is distressing, but not dangerous." I have no idea how many times I said it.

And I did remember one more thing, about not always looking to see what time it was. I knew that would be hard for me, so I took my watch off and slipped it into my pocket without even looking at it. That wasn't as hard as I thought it would be.

I calmed myself down enough to concentrate on what I was supposed to be doing. And the time seemed to pass faster. Before long, the manager came by and told us to take our regular 15 minute break.

### ***In the past:***

Before – well before I would have been really miffed. When the man finally came I would have told him he was late again. And I wouldn't have been nice about what I said. Then later on, I would have played things over in my head and gotten

mad at myself for not handling things like I wanted to. And I'd be worried about what the man thought about me because I sort of told him off. And worried if I'd lose my job. This time even though I basically used only one tool, I calmed myself down.

I'm learning that I do have control over my behavior – what I say and when I say it.



## On the job... No orientation on a new job

### **Situation:**

Last Monday I started a new job and the first day was tough. They told me what I was supposed to do and didn't go into a lot of detail. There are three other people doing the same work and they're right there near me. It seemed like every few minutes something different would come up and I'd have to ask somebody a question. I really felt like I was in over my head because I didn't know all the procedures.

### **Symptoms:**

At lunchtime when I went outside I realized that I was really not feeling well. My stomach was upset, I almost felt like crying. It was as if the whole world was against me. "I can't do this. I should just go home now and call them to say I quit. I can't do that – I need the money. But I can't keep asking all those questions. Those people are going to think I'm dumb. I've got to keep this job!"

### **Solution:**

When I get worried, it's hard for me to think straight. So I got out my list of mental fitness tools and went through them one by one. By the time I was half way down the page, I started feeling better. They all seemed to fit!

Here's what I can remember telling myself: "Asking questions is uncomfortable, and I don't need to be comfortable to function." In fact, once I told myself that I realized that all the people who were answering my questions were nice about it.

I expected to know everything about the job the first day. That's the perfectionist in me. The fact is, no one knows all about any new job when they first start – especially their first day.

So I lowered my standards. I'm not wrong I'm average for asking questions. Instead of beating myself up for asking, I could be giving myself a pat on the back for asking. It takes self leadership to make the effort to ask.

Instead of thinking insecurely, thinking the people would think I was dumb for asking all the questions, I turned it around. They might be thinking that I was interested in doing well, that's why I was making sure I knew the correct procedures. I actually got a smile on my face when I thought about that.

I also remembered that you can't be comfortable in an uncomfortable situation – and the first few days on a new job are somewhat uncomfortable for most people. Knowing it was average helped.

It was easy to recognize the fear, and I decided to keep going. Then I realized the subtle angry temper I had. I was mad that they didn't give me more training or explanation. And for that: They're not wrong they're average. That statement doesn't make them right. But



it cut into the anger I was having that was contributing to my worry, my tension and my symptoms. I never knew that worry was a symptom and that it came from my thoughts.

I saw that I was lumping everything that happened that morning into one event. I made the decision that in the afternoon each time I asked a question would be a separate triviality that I could choose to work down by changing my thoughts.

***In the past:***

Before if I felt like leaving at lunchtime I probably would have. In fact I've done it in the past. Most of the time I would stay at a job for a while and end up being so anxious or depressed that I would quit. I thought I didn't have what it took to be in the work world. Now I have my mental fitness tools wherever I go. And if I'm still at the point where I have to look at the list of tools to help me out, that's OK too. I know that I am making a business of my mental health.





## On the job... The boss is late

### **Situation:**

Yesterday we were supposed to get to work early, for 8:00 a.m. I got there about three minutes to eight and the door was still locked. At ten after eight there were three of us employees standing outside and the manager with the key still wasn't there. Everybody was getting worked up.

### **Symptoms:**

We were talking about where she could be, if something happened to her. One person was complaining that we were there on time and she wasn't. I thought the same thing. "This isn't fair! I wonder how long it's going to be? There's no way to call anyone, besides none of us has a cell phone." I started getting fidgety. I was kind of pacing around. I felt jittery inside. I wondered out loud to the others if they'd pay us for the time that we were standing outside because it wasn't our fault that we weren't starting work on time. We were locked out. I could tell everybody was getting more tense.

### **Solution:**

Then I remembered, calm begets calm. Rather than help everybody stay nervous about the situation, I could help calm us all down. So I said: "This is distressing, but it's not dangerous." Someone else said that it might end up being dangerous – what if she never showed up? So I told them that right this minute it was not dangerous. And even if she didn't show up at all, it would be only uncomfortable, not really dangerous. I know that the other people are like me, we like to stay on a set schedule. We could practice being flexible instead.

The anger was against the manager for being late. We were judging her wrong. And, she's not wrong, she's average. Everyday across the world people are late for work. That makes it average. And, for sure, we weren't the first people in the world locked out from where they worked. When I look at the averageness of a situation, that helps take the danger away from it for me.

The fear was that we might have our pay docked, but at that point we really didn't know for sure. Another fear thought was, "What are we supposed to do?"

Even though it might be a little complicated finding a phone to call from, realistically there are offices and stores around. If we went to one and explained the situation, they'd let us make a call. It's not like the place we worked was in the middle of nowhere.

It might be uncomfortable asking to make a call, but I know that comfort is a want, not a need. I could do it if I command my muscles to move.

Also I know that I can't control what's outside of me – the boss, the door, the lock.



Rather than be part of the confusion, I thought it would be good to be part of the solution so I suggested to the other employees that if the manager didn't get there by 8:30 that I would go across the street and phone the main office. They said OK. So we had a plan. We made a decision. All we had to do was wait until 8:30 and then I'd act.

***In the past:***

Before Taking Charge I had no idea that I could change my thoughts. My imagination would have played up all kinds of horrible scenes. This would have been an emergency. This time I saw it for what it was: an irritation, frustration and disappointment. And, it was a triviality when I compare it to my mental health. I would have acted on my fear and anger. I would have held on to it for at least the whole day. And because I didn't resolve the first triviality of the day, everything else that happened would have piled up on top of that one incident.



## On the job... with the disorganized

### ***Situation:***

In addition to my work, I'm working long-distance on an audio-tape project. Even though we both planned on the project being complete in about 12 months, several personal complications on Greg's part caused major delays. The good news is that we're now going forward.

Today, Saturday, Greg called about 11:00 a.m. asking if I had the script for the relaxation tape. The copy he had "seemed awfully short," implying that it would have to be reworked or lengthened. As soon as the statements were out of his mouth I felt myself getting annoyed. I suggested I email him a copy of the script and he told me his email wasn't working right. So we decided I would print off the script, he would plug in his fax machine and I'd fax it to him.

### ***Symptoms:***

Racing thoughts: "I wrote that script and he's had a copy of it for well over two years – almost three! He's just now noticing that it's not as long as the other tapes? He lost the endorsements for the brochure four times and each time I've had to re-send them to him. I'm tired of playing catch-up after him. No wonder this project is taking so long. He's totally disorganized and has proved it time after time.

What kind of business person is he? We recorded all the other tapes more than two years ago. Some of them are still in the process of being edited for the first time. Then we have to check them for errors and listen to the re-edited ones too! It's going to be at least another month. At least! I should have never gotten involved with him. I should have checked his background more closely."

As I was waiting for the fax tone on his machine to go off after dialing a second time, I realized that I was bringing to mind all the not-so-pleasant things that had happened in the last 31 months. When I got to the point of again questioning my perseverance or stupidity in staying with the project, I knew I had to consciously work at calming myself down – if not, I could be crabby for the rest of day. And, I don't like being crabby!

### ***Solution:***

I know it's temper that causes tension and tension produces symptoms – in this case my racing thoughts and feeling crabby. Only one thing to do in this situation – change my thoughts so my crabbies would go away. Greg is not wrong, he is average. Period! Millions of people are disorganized – even people in business for themselves. He's not wrong, he's average for calling me on Saturday morning. When we first started working



together, he'd only call during regular business hours, and I told him it was OK to contact me anytime.

I'm not wrong, I'm average for wishing that he was more organized. I had an average original response to an irritation, frustration and disappointment. It was totally up to me to stop that reaction in it's tracks. A lot of people might say I had a right to get angry. I like to think of it this way – I have an obligation to myself to work at not staying angry.

It's average for "old" temper, past temper thoughts, to come up in our minds when we're thinking about a "fresh" incident. So, each time I thought back to the other times Greg called to ask me for something I had already given him, I excused, or re-excused, him for those trivial things too. The secure thought is that I am organized and everything he's asked for I have a copy of. So although it might be aggravating, unpleasant and bothersome, there is no danger whatsoever.

I'm also not wrong I'm average for not finding out more about him before we started and for sticking with the project through everything that's happened. The fact is, I believe in it. I believe that it can reach and help a lot of people. And helping other people is my Number One goal after my mental health.

At this point I don't know when the project will be finished, or if in fact it ever will be. The secure thought, and the total view, is that we're closer now than we've ever been.

***In the past:***

I was too consumed by anxiety and depression myself to be able to help anybody else try to overcome their problems.

If I was involved in anything that wasn't going "right," which in my mind meant exactly according to plan, I would had been mad and stayed mad. Not out loud, but I was good at holding running arguments going in my mind – for days. And I would have thought that I had made a huge, irreversible mistake by putting in a lot of time and energy. For days and weeks I'd be anxious and on edge, all because I'd be judging everyone and everything wrong. I'd make all the trivial things big emergencies and let them pile on top of each other. Then I'd end up having more bad weeks than good days.



## Holiday Life... I don't like this gift

***Situation:***

Yesterday's mail brought a Christmas card from my sister Maggie. Tucked inside the card was a little angel pin with a tiny ruby colored stone on it. My first reaction was, "This isn't something I would ever wear!"

***Symptoms:***

The thoughts continued... "Now that's a pretty poor reaction to a gift! I should be grateful. Maggie's taste and mine used to be similar. Christmas time is for good thoughts, and not liking a gift someone bought for me isn't a very nice thought." It was like I was ten years old again and my Mother was lecturing me, "It's the thought that counts." Then I wondered how many gifts I've given to other people, that they haven't liked.

***Solution:***

I decided to look at the situation from a sensible point of view: Not everyone likes all the gifts they receive – it's average. There are probably millions of people a year who get things they don't especially care for. So, I'm not wrong I'm average for not liking the little angel pin. I don't have to like everything. In fact, it would be exceptional for me to like every single gift I ever received. Maggie's not wrong, she's average for selecting that particular gift. I'm sure she thought it was nice, or else she wouldn't have picked it for me.

***In the past:***

Normally I would stash something I don't like in a drawer or a closet. I felt obliged to keep it for at least a few months. "Obliged" is part of the judgement, "I should - I should like it, I should keep it." This time because I took the time to investigate not only my thoughts but the temper (the fear & anger) I was thinking, I thought of a good solution: I could give the angel pin to the eight-year old girl next door along with the other gifts I bought for her. Her birthday is the same month as mine is. And just to keep myself from working it up any further while I was wrapping it up, I kept chanting the thought: "I'm not wrong, I'm average!" ✍