Cognitive Reappraisal

Cognitive reappraisal is a stress control strategy that helps us rethink potential stressors so that they are interpreted in adaptive, health-promoting patterns of thought, rather than maladaptive and stress-fostering ones.

1. **Confront the stressor:** Events usually have an actor and an action. Who and what are they? What are the surrounding circumstances? What is the immediate effect on you? Focus on your emotions and feelings. Try to describe them.

2. **Analyze your reaction:** After identifying the stressor, carefully and thoughtfully analyze your original appraisal. What thoughts run through your mind during and immediately following the event? What is it about the event that causes you distress? Does it remind you of a past experience? What value, belief or expectation might be contributing to the stress?

3. **Rethink your situation:** Generate some alternative ways of viewing the event, ways that focus less on the stressful aspects and more on neutral or positive ones. Try to come up with appraisals that interpret the event as a challenge instead of despair.

4. **Select one of your alternatives:** Review your list and discard those that sound phony or sugar-coated. Choose one that is genuine and positive and help you to deal more effectively with the event.

5. **Try it out:** Deliberately divert your thoughts from your former stressful interpretation and replace it with your new, positive interpretation. Remember, this technique does not involve denial. It is a highly rational effort in which we choose to focus our attention on the elements of a situation that help us stay calm and help us resolve the problem. However, it is not an easy thing to do. Our thought patterns form slowly, over many years. We become accustomed to thinking in patterns that are hard to change. But it can be done. You always have a choice. Mental rehearsal is a good way to practice. Sometimes it’s a good idea to talk about your feelings with a trusted friend, family member or spiritual advisor.