

Stop Taking Things Too Personally

Objective

To decrease your tendency to take things too personally (believing people are critical of you when they are not).

You Should Know

Do you frequently feel that you are unfairly criticized by others? Do you feel people are attacking you when you do not deserve it? If you often feel this way you may be taking things too personally – believing people are being hard on you when they are just expressing their opinions.

For example, John's wife Susan told him one night at dinner, "My friend Maggie just got a new car. She's lucky to have a husband who is a lawyer and has such a good income." John felt his wife was saying that he is a failure and that he cannot give her the nice things she wants. He felt she was putting him down for his job as a salesman at car dealership. John at first felt hurt and depressed, but then he felt angry. He thought to himself, "Susan has no idea how hard I work. She's so selfish and only thinks about things she wants to buy. I don't even know why I stay married to her."

If you were watching this conversation as an observer, you would see that Susan was not really being critical of her husband. She was just stating a fact about her friend. You could probably tell this by Susan's tone of voice and her body language. But John often takes things personally that are not really about him. He does this with his wife, with his family, and at work. As a result, John has a difficult time with most of his relationships.

Does this sound like you? Are you also sensitive to criticism and rejection? Can you see that if you do not take things so personally your relationships will improve?

The next time your feelings are hurt, you can ask yourself:

- Was that really about me?
- Could she have meant something else by that comment?
- Is there another way to take this?
- Maybe he is talking about someone else?
- Maybe that remark means nothing.
- I can check it out with her later.
- This isn't necessarily about me!

This worksheet will help you practice "not taking things personally." If you can learn to challenge your tendency to over-personalize what people are saying, you will likely have an easier time navigating your relationships.

What to Do

Over the next two weeks, record when you take things personally in the following chart. Write down thoughts you have when you take something personally and how you react. Then, come up with some rational responses or challenging thoughts. See the example in the chart.

Date	Thoughts where I over-personalized	How I reacted	Rational responses/challenging thoughts
4/1	<i>I didn't receive an invitation to Kim's wedding, so she must dislike me.</i>	<i>I complained to my family. I feel like I don't have any friends.</i>	<i>Just because I didn't get an invitation to Kim's wedding doesn't mean she dislikes me. Maybe it's a small wedding for close friends and family only.</i>

Reflections on This Exercise

Once you have completed the exercise, answer the following questions.

Are you more aware of when you take things personally? Why or why not?

After completing this exercise, do you find that you do not take things personally as often?

What else can you do to stop taking things personally? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?
