

ACCEPTING REALITY



Sometimes in life we end up in situations that we just can't change. Radical acceptance is all about fully accepting your reality in situations that are beyond your control. This doesn't mean you approve of the situation, are giving up, or that it isn't painful. You are still allowed to (and should!) feel however you feel, but by accepting that it is what it is, you give the problem less power over you and you can begin to move forward.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Notice when you're fighting against reality. The first step in accepting reality is gaining awareness that you're resisting it. It may seem like this would be easy to spot, but there are actually a lot of subtle ways that people push against reality. If you're feeling bitter or resentful, wishing things were different, or thinking about how life isn't fair, you might be fighting reality.



Remind yourself that you can't change what has already happened. Before you can make peace with reality, you have to acknowledge that there's no going back to the way things were. Doing this may be challenging and painful, but by identifying what you can and can't control, you can turn your energy towards coping with the things you can't change.



Embrace your feelings. You might still be angry, scared, overwhelmed, or lonely – that's okay. Accepting reality includes everything that you're feeling, too. When you accept these feelings and let yourself experience them without any judgement, you can work through them in a healthy way.



Pretend that you're accepting reality. Even if you're still struggling to fully accept reality, think about what it would look like if you *did*. How would you act if you simply accepted things as they are? What would your next step be? Changing your behaviors and actions to reflect "pretend acceptance" can help you to actually shift your thoughts.



Relax your body. If you're feeling stressed or are pushing against the reality of your situation, there's a good chance your body is tense. This is often associated with resistance and keeps your mind on high alert. Physically relaxing your body can help you feel more ready to accept what is reality. Try yoga, taking a hot bath or shower, deep breathing exercises, or getting a massage to help you relax.



Use coping statements. These are sentences that remind you that different, healthier ways of thinking are possible. Repeating them can help you get through difficult moments – you can focus on just one or make a long list of your own. Some examples are: *It is what it is. I can't change what has already happened. I can accept things the way they are. I can only control my own actions and reactions.* If it helps, write your coping statements on Post-It notes and put them in places where you will see them multiple times a day, or set an alarm/create an event on your phone with a coping statement to pop up with a reminder every now and again.



Know that it takes practice. Radical acceptance is a great tool to cope with hard situations that we can't control, but it can take a while before it comes easily. Don't get down on yourself if you don't master it immediately. Start by trying it out in smaller situations, like when you're stuck in traffic or your internet is acting up during a call. By practicing radical acceptance on a daily basis, it will be easier to use as a coping tool when bigger, tougher challenges come your way.

FAST FACTS



Practicing radical acceptance has been shown to reduce feelings of shame, guilt, and anxiety.¹



Acceptance coping skills are linked to lower rates of mental illness and suicide.²



Radical acceptance can reduce distress in dealing with negative thoughts or events.³

TAKING A MENTAL HEALTH SCREEN IS ONE WAY TO WORK ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH. VISIT MHASCREENING.ORG TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

- ¹Goerg, N., Priebe, K., Bohnke, J., Steil, R., Dyer, A., & Kleindienst, N. (2017). Trauma-related emotions and radical acceptance in dialectical behavior therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder after childhood sexual abuse. *Borderline Personality Disorder and Emotion Dysregulation*, 4(1), 15–15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40479-017-0065-5>
- ²Li, Ziyao, and Jie Zhang. "Coping Skills, Mental Disorders, and Suicide Among Rural Youths in China." *The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 200.10 (2012): 885–890. Web.
- ³Iverson, K. M., Follette, V. M., Pistorello, J., & Fruzzetti, A. E. (2012). An investigation of experiential avoidance, emotion dysregulation, and distress tolerance in young adult outpatients with borderline personality disorder symptoms. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 3(4), 415–422. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1037/a0023703>

PRACTICING RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

Many times bad things happen and we have no control over the situation. We can't change people's behaviors or the reality of what is happening, and these experiences are painful. Radical acceptance is a practice that helps us evaluate situations and work to reduce the emotional burden of the reality of the situation like resentment, anger, hatred, or shame. Use the following prompts to help you practice radical acceptance.

WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU? Use the following lines to write down your thoughts.

UNDERSTANDING REALITY

1. Look at the above statements. Is there something here that is a reality you *have to* accept (vs a judgement or opinion)? For instance - "It shouldn't be this way." Write it here.

2. Think about this reality and just sit with it. For instance - "This is what happened. It can't change. It is what it is."

3. What happened, or what events led to this reality? ("This is how things happened").

ACCEPTING REALITY

1. Think about this reality. Can you accept it in your thoughts? What can you tell yourself to help you accept this reality? Imagine what it feels like to accept it.

2. Imagine how you'd change your behaviors or actions if you accepted this reality? Imagine how the world would feel if you could let go.

3. Think about this reality. Can you accept it in your body? Where are you carrying the resistance to accept this reality? Do you carry that weight in your shoulders or your back? Is there tension or physical pain? Can you practice feeling your emotions in your body and then practice releasing them from your body?

4. Do you feel disappointment, sadness, or grief right now? Sit with that, acknowledge it, allow yourself to feel these feelings and understand it is ok and expected to feel disappointment, sadness, or grief. Write down anything specific about these thoughts and feelings.

5. Despite the pain of this reality, what makes life worth living? Remind yourself of those things here.

6. If you find yourself struggling at this point, write down some pros and cons of accepting or not accepting this reality. Then start back at #1 above for your next troubling situation.
