

# Cognitive focus

## Centre for Cognitive Therapy

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS AND  
PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR A SECURE FUTURE.

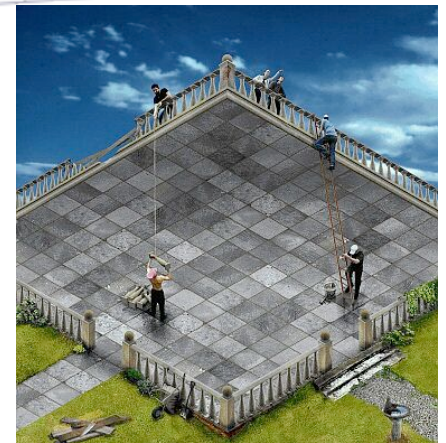
*The Centre for Cognitive Therapy is dedicated to helping clients secure sustainable psychological well being. The current issue focuses on change of time perception to become more optimistic and happier.*

## Patterns and Perceptions Across Time Frames

When we enter a room, we are confronted with billions of 'bits' of information. We are only able to process consciously about 7 'bits' of information at a time. Out of necessity, we must filter out most of the information before us. The processes we use to filter are intuitive and only occasionally a product of conscious awareness. For example how we see and interpret a room is partly a product of the room, but largely a product of our individual filter. An interior designer may see it differently than an engineer.

Each of us develops, over our life time, cognitive filters, principles or assumptions that determine how we see, feel and act in response to our time orientation.

Most of the time these assumptions function without conscious awareness (I assume the chair will hold me before I sit down, without consciously having that thought). Over time, patterns develop in our perceptions. If we tend to intuitively perceive the future to be positive, with optimism, we are happier. On the other hand, when we consistently perceive



danger ahead, we become stressed or anxious. Recent research indicates that we develop filters that bias our focus in time toward either past, present or future.

This time focus occurs automatically (without conscious awareness) and differs from person to person. Becoming aware of our personal patterns, we can begin to change them. Altering these automatic perceptions is used in cognitive therapy and is called re-framing.

There are over 50 techniques currently commonly in use by cognitive therapists to help re-frame a variety of problematic views and assumptions about life events.

## LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT, NOW SIDE

Depression and anxiety are prevalent. Happiness (general well being) is difficult in a rapidly changing world. We are inundated with dire predictions of a dangerous future of catastrophic proportions (economic collapse, global warming / catastrophic destruction of the environment, terrorism and even nuclear destruction). Optimism leads to happiness. How can you be both responsible and optimistic? Increase your mental focus on the present and reduce your focus on a negative future. Reduce the focus on negative memories from the past. The goal is to become engaged in a meaningful present and to shift our perspective to positive personal elements of the future. The phrase: 'think globally, act locally' applies. In this case it may be altered to: 'think presently, act positively'.



# Getting the most from our research analysis

*Research has found that differences in focus on past, present and future affects happiness.*

Happier people are more optimistic (think positively about the future). Dr. Phil Zimbardo has recently studied our orientation toward time. Some are present oriented, others past oriented while others are future oriented. Past oriented people become very unhappy by orienting their lives based on memories of a negative past. Present oriented people can get into trouble with impulsive behavior (drugs, sex and rock and roll), not considering the future. Future oriented people can become anxious and full of worries by focusing on a future filled with disaster.

To maximize happiness, re-frame your orientation to time. Dwell less on the past, and when thinking of the past, turn your attention to more positive past experiences. View the negatives simply as lessons learned. Appreciate the present. Enjoy yourself with creativity and joy. Avoid engaging in activities that are harmful to your future. When thoughts turn to the future, imagine the positive outcomes, recognizing the opportunities the future holds.

Be aware of your tendency to frame life in less positive ways. Deliberately shift your perspective to a more positive orientation. For this change to become an automatic focus, it is important to practise, practise, practise and to act in ways that are consistent with an optimistic view of the future.

Dr. Arthur Blouin

**Optimism is related to increased happiness in life.**  
**People who focus on a negative past are more depressed.**  
**Focus on a negative future leads to anxiety and worry.**

## SMARTER THERAPY: Tips to help with reframing



1. Reduce your focus on the past. When your mind does turn to the past, deliberately recall positive memories.
2. Enjoy the moment. Make an effort to savor life's experiences without creating problems for the future.
3. Be optimistic. If you tend to worry, deliberately balance your thoughts of the future with positive outcomes. Recognize opportunities.



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