

Using the 2-Chair Technique to Change Your Perspective

Objective

To explore the difference between positive and negative mindsets to increase awareness of your ability to change your perspective.

You Should Know

Do you have an optimistic or pessimistic mindset? Whether you tend to be an optimist or a pessimist, your feelings and experiences are affected by whether you view situations in a negative, positive, or neutral manner.

If you are an optimist, you are more likely to find meaning or experience growth in stressful situations. You might look on the bright side, and rarely take things personally. Research has shown that when optimistic people are confronted with positive and negative stimuli, they pay significantly more attention to the positive stimuli. Pessimists pay more attention to negative stimuli, overlooking the positive or encouraging aspects of situations or events. They often take things personally, have a bleak outlook on life, or place blame on external forces.

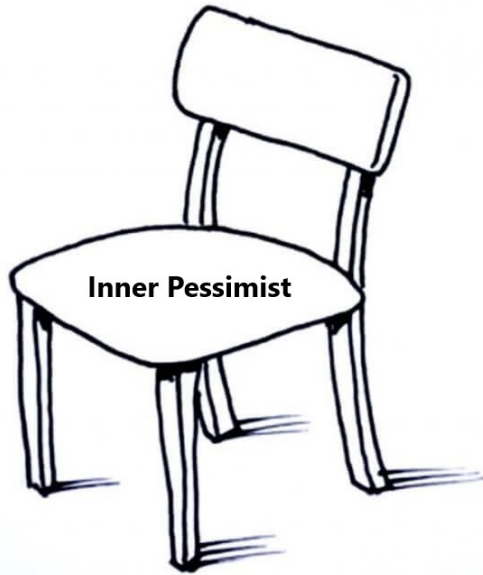
This does not mean that you must always be optimistic; in fact, people who are always overly optimistic ignore potentially important information. Some people use positive thinking to avoid or control negative experiences. Sometimes pessimism actually helps you be cautious and think in an analytical way – important for effective decision-making. So, the goal is not to become *only* optimistic and *never* pessimistic; it is about choosing what is most effective for a given situation.

This worksheet will help you explore the difference between having an optimistic and pessimistic mindset through use of the chair technique. You will become aware of how you can change your perspective, and practice focusing on the positive and the negative in situations.

What to Do

Imagine two chairs, each representing a different mindset: your inner optimist and your inner pessimist. Imagine yourself sitting in each chair and embodying these different mindsets as you answer the questions. As you do this exercise, tune in to what it feels like during and after tapping into your inner pessimist and your inner optimist.

1. Take a seat in the pessimistic mindset chair and tap into your inner pessimist.



Think about the past week from the point of view of your inner pessimist, who has a bleak, negative, possibly hopeless outlook on life. Over the past week:

What negative or unpleasant emotions did you experience?

What were some things that annoyed you?

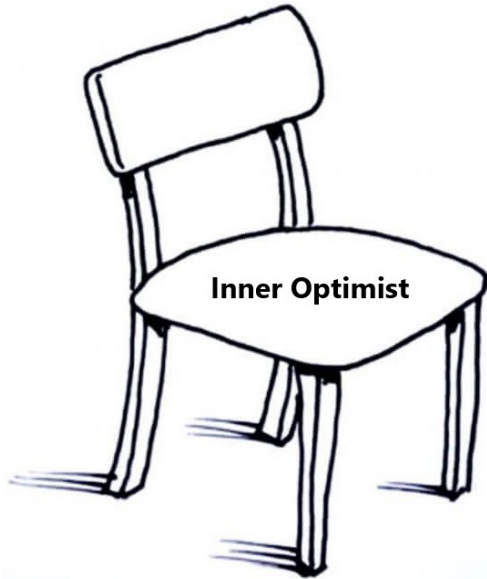
What difficulties did you face at work or at school?

What was challenging at home?

Describe a stressful situation you experienced.

Did you have an argument or conflict with a family member or friend? Describe.

Describe your feelings when you think about the past week from a pessimistic point of view.



2. Now, take a seat in the optimistic mindset chair and tap into your inner optimist.

This time you will respond from the point of view of your inner optimist. Compared with your inner pessimist, your inner optimist views events as less personal or permanent. Your inner optimist can find the “silver lining,” and tends to find the good in difficult or stressful situations. Over the past week:

What pleasant emotions did you experience?

What were some things that made you feel happy, excited, or joyful?

What good things happened at work or school?

What worked well at home?

What is one thing that made you proud?

Describe a difficult or stressful situation that you handled well.

Describe your feelings when you think about the past week from an optimistic point of view.



Now, take a seat in your normal chair and answer the following questions.

How did it feel when you were pessimistic? What did you notice?

How did it feel when you were optimistic?

How can you use what you learned from this exercise in your daily life?

Now, for the next week, use the following chart to note if you focused on the positive or on the negative when you faced different situations. Write down the date, describe the situation, and write down if you focused on the negative or positive. Finally, if you found yourself focusing on the negative, write down what you could have done differently.

Date	Situation	Focus on the positive or the negative?	What could you have done differently?

Reflection on This Exercise

After completing this exercise, do you think you will be more aware when you are tapping into your inner optimist and your inner pessimist? Why or why not?

Do you think it will be easier to change your perspective? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
