

# OPTIMISM TRAINING

## WHAT IS OPTIMISM TRAINING?

Our thoughts, feelings and behaviour are all linked. When we experience an event, our beliefs and how we interpret the event influence how we feel and behave. Optimism training helps you to become familiar with how you explain positive and negative events that happen to you. It teaches you how to challenge pessimistic interpretations and replace them with more optimistic and realistic alternatives.

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

Having a largely pessimistic explanatory style can make a person vulnerable to helplessness and depression.

## HOW DO I DO IT?

Skills training will help you identify the influence of your habitual ways (explanatory styles) of explaining and interpreting your experiences.

### Explanatory Style

It is your explanatory style for bad events (your habitual way of explaining these events) that usually drives the way you feel and the actions you take after a bad event. Your explanatory style is more than just the words you say when you fail or something bad happens. It is a habit of thought, learned from your childhood and adolescence.



### Flexible Explanatory Styles: Getting the balance right

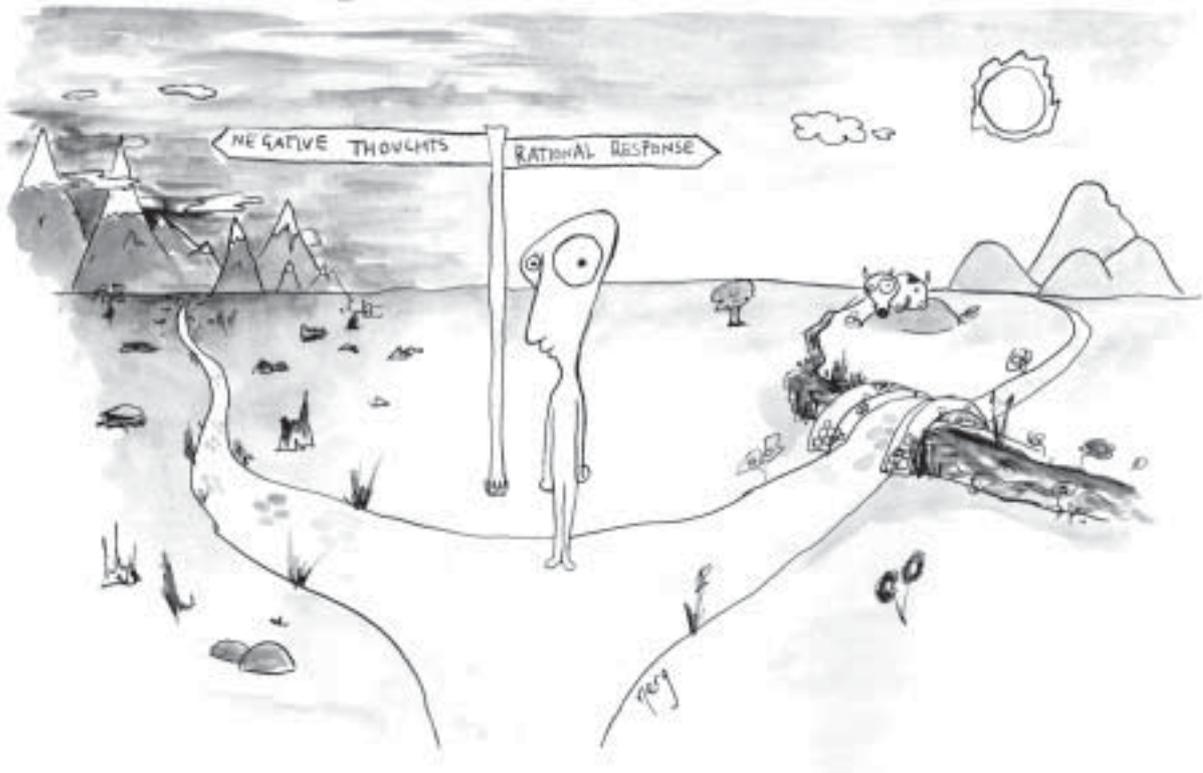
It is possible to be flexible in the way we use an optimistic or pessimistic explanatory style. There are times when you may choose to use optimism and there may be times when being optimistic is too risky. For example, when considering whether to have another drink before you drive home, it may be better to be more cautious and pessimistic of the outcome of taking that risk. On the other hand, there are times when being optimistic about the future may lead you to new experiences, build your confidence and help you pursue your goals.

## EXPLANATORY STYLES FOR BAD EVENTS

Explanatory style dimensions		Examples	
		Optimistic	Pessimistic
<b>Permanence</b>	When people explain adverse events in a permanent manner, they are more likely to give up. People who attribute adverse events as temporary are more likely to persist and be optimistic about the future.	<i>Temporary</i> “You haven’t talked to me lately”	<i>Permanent</i> “You never talk to me”
<b>Pervasiveness</b>	Making universal explanations for negative events can lead to an overall sense of helplessness, whereas using a specific explanation can limit this to one situation.	<i>Specific</i> “This boss is unfair”	<i>Universal</i> “All bosses are unfair”
<b>Personalisation</b>	Attributing the cause of negative events internally can lead to low self-confidence. Attributing events to other people or circumstances can protect our self-esteem when adverse events occur.	<i>External</i> “This is a hard golfcourse”	<i>Internal</i> “I am hopeless at golf”

### CONSIDER:

- What is my explanatory style?
- Am I happy with this style?
- When is it and when is it not helpful for me to use this style?



## EVIDENCE

Research on learned helplessness and learned optimism has demonstrated that having a pessimistic explanatory style can make one more vulnerable to depression. Moreover, if one can develop skills to be more optimistic it is possible to buffer against depression<sup>8</sup>.

## FURTHER LINKS:

*Comprehensive and detailed information on optimism.*

Seligman, M. E. P. (2006). *Learned Optimism*. USA: First Vintage Books.

[www.oceanic-change.com/Oceanic-Change/ABCDE\\_Disputing.html](http://www.oceanic-change.com/Oceanic-Change/ABCDE_Disputing.html)

### ***The Pleasant Life***

*Having an optimistic view of the future brings the influence of future-oriented positive emotions into a pleasant life.*