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Thinking Optimistically

Introduction to Positive Psychology

- Martin Seligman is credited with the development of Positive Psychology
- Served as the President of the American Psychological Association during the 1998 term
- Martin Seligman is probably mostly known for his theory of learned helplessness
- The theory of learned helplessness led to the development of positive psychology

Thinking Optimistically

- What we say to ourselves when we experience stress and adversity (i.e. explanatory style) influences the following:
 - Increased motivation
 - Superior achievement in work, school, and sports
 - Elevated mood and well-being
 - Better physical health
- Based on more than 30 years of research and over 500 scientific studies

How well do you handle adversity?

- Discover your explanatory style
- Browse to the following web site:
<http://www.spiritualityhealth.com/voices/quizzes/self-test-optimism.html>
- Read the description of each situation and vividly imagine it happening to you. Then click on the cause that is more likely to apply to you. Don't choose what you think you *should* say or what would sound right to other people; choose the response that's most like you. (Your answers are not being recorded!)

About your Scores

- Pessimists have a tendency to...
 - Latch on to the worst possible cause for adversity
 - The most permanent cause (i.e. It is likely to continue.)
 - The most pervasive cause (i.e. It is reflective of my entire life.)
 - The most personal cause (i.e. It is my fault.)

About your Scores

- Optimists have a tendency to...
 - Latch onto the best causes for adversity
 - It is changeable and not permanent
 - It is a specific component of my life
 - It isn't my fault

About your Scores

- Important to remember that both...

pessimistic beliefs

and

optimistic beliefs

are beliefs

Should we use optimistic beliefs all of the time?

- Evidence shows that we should not be optimists all of the time
- When risks are high, pessimists are more firmly grounded in reality and are less likely to get hurt

When to use Optimism

- If you are in an achievement situation
 - getting a promotion
 - selling a product
 - writing a difficult report
 - winning a game
- If you are concerned about how you will feel
 - fighting off depression
 - keeping up your morale
- If your physical health is the issue
- If you want to lead or to inspire others

When to use Pessimism

- If your goal is to plan for a risky and uncertain future
- If your goal is to counsel others whose future is dim, do not use optimism initially.
- If you want to appear sympathetic to the troubles of others, do not begin with optimism, although using it later, once confidence and empathy are established, may help

How do we learn to think more positively?

- Need to see the connection between a belief and consequence (i.e. feelings or action) → Learned Optimism Activity 2

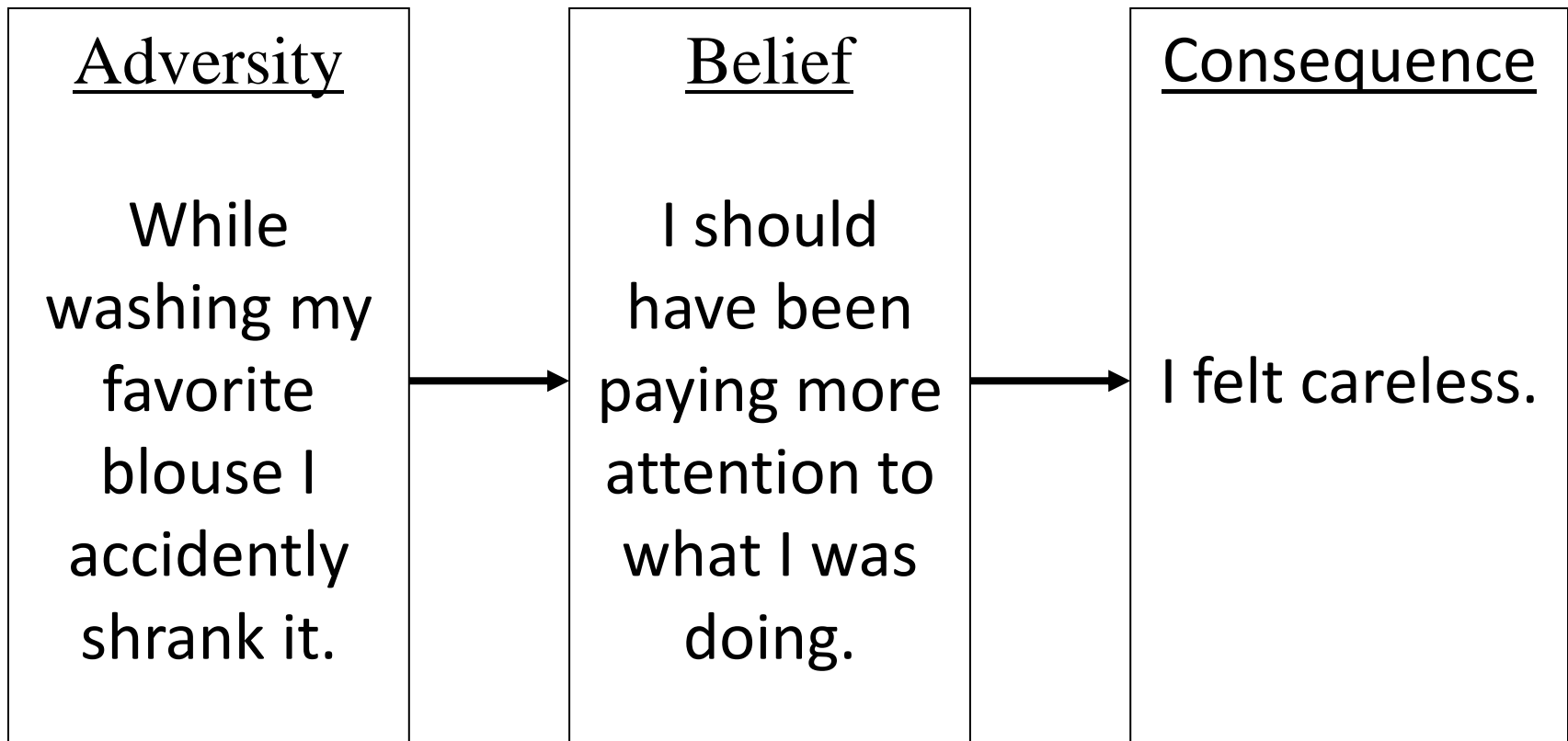
How do we learn to think more positively?

- Discover how an adversity, belief, and consequence (ABC) are connected for you → Learned Optimism Activity 3

How do we learn to think more positively? (Learned Optimism Activity 3)

- Adversity – Can be almost anything
 - Leaky faucet, frown from a friend, a large bill, etc.
- Belief – How you interpret adversity
 - It is a thought
 - It is **not** a feeling. Feelings cannot be changed. **If you feel sad, you are sad.**
 - Examples: I should have..., It isn't a big deal, He doesn't want anything to do with me, etc.
- Consequence – How you feel and/or what you did.
 - Examples: I feel dumb, excited, careless, happy, etc.
 - Examples: I ate a ice cream. I sat in front of the TV all weekend. I went for a hike.

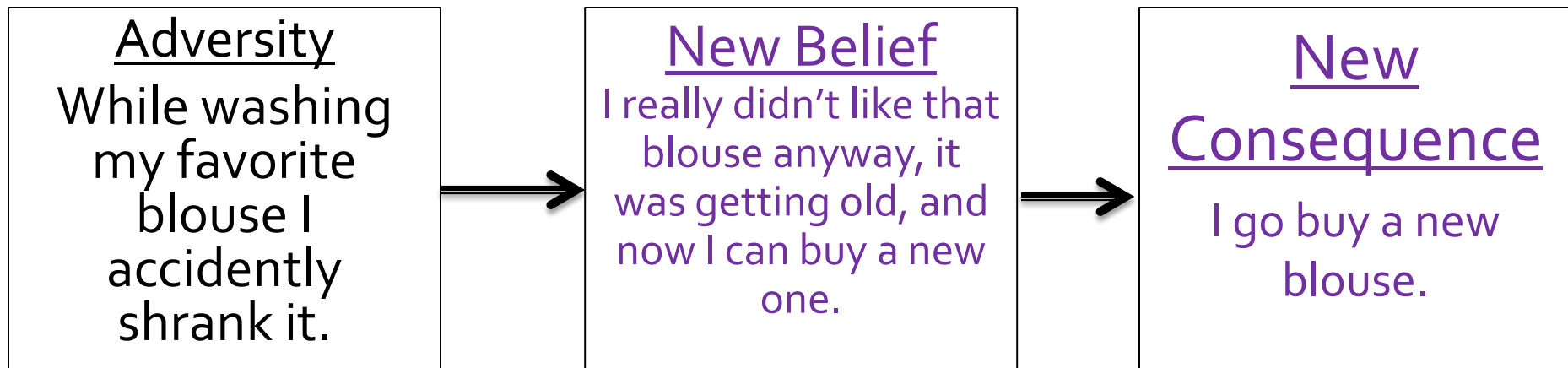
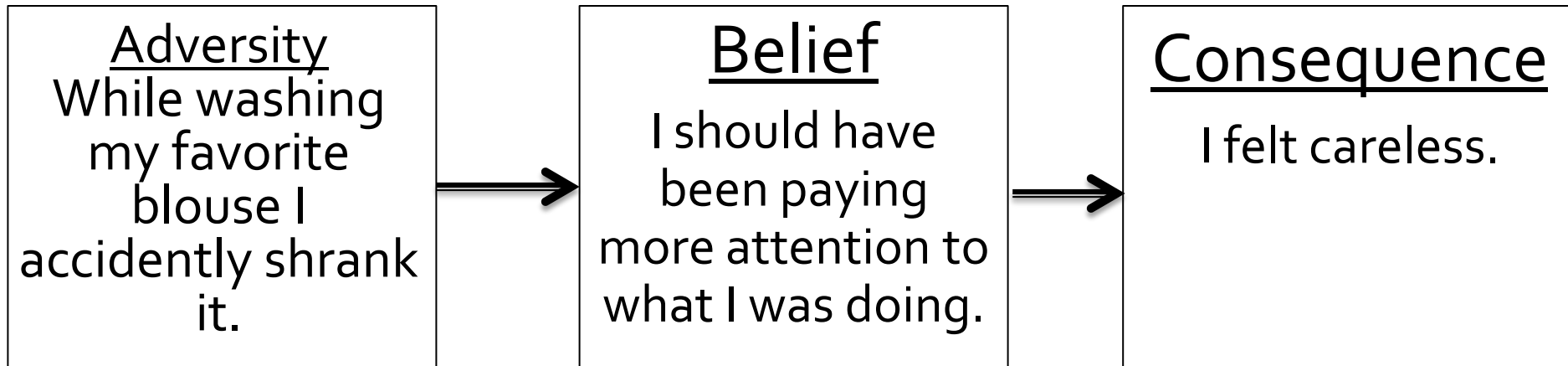
How do we learn to think more positively? (Learned Optimism Activity 3)



How do we learn to think more positively?

- Learning how to see the link between your belief and consequences and how changing the belief can change the consequence (i.e. feelings and actions) → Learned Optimism
Activity 4

How do we learn to think more positively? (Learned Optimism Activity 4)



Strategies for Generating a Belief that Leads to a More Positive Consequence

- Dispute
 - Generate one piece of evidence to point out the inaccuracy in your belief

OR

 - Generate a more accurate/optimistic alternative belief about the adversity

OR

 - Put into perspective your belief

Strategies for Generating a Belief that Leads to a More Positive Consequence

- Dispute
 - Evidence: That's not completely true because...
 - Example:

That's (i.e. it's not really true that I should have been paying more attention) not completely true because I have had to work a lot lately at home.

Strategies for Generating a Belief that Leads to a More Positive Consequence

- Dispute
 - Alternative: A more accurate way of seeing this is...
 - Example:

It's an old blouse and I really wanted to get a new one anyone.

Strategies for Generating a Belief that Leads to a More Positive Consequence

- Dispute
 - Putting it in Perspective: **The most likely outcome is...and I can...to handle it.**
 - Example:

The most likely outcome is that I can put my energy into being excited about buying a new blouse and I can work harder to be more patient with myself when I am working a lot to handle it.

Strategies for Generating a Belief that Leads to a More Positive Consequence

- Energy
 - Write a few sentences about how your Disputation changed your energy
 - What happened to your mood?
 - How did your behavior change?
 - What solutions did you see that you didn't see before?

Comments/Questions

*The glass is twice as
big as it needs to be.*



References

Seligman, Martin. (1998). *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. Simon and Shuster, New York, NY.

Shultz, Duane P. and Shultz, Sydney Ellen. (2004). *A history of modern psychology (8th edition)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth (Thomson Learning).

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