Follow-up for training session
Attribution

Introduction

Attribution = own inferences about events (e.g. allocating blame)

Basically, three causes are possible – all of which are often included in attribution:

1. Myself
2. Others
3. Circumstances/situation

Example: You failed your driving test.
Possible causes...

… Myself	I was very nervous and didn't have enough driving experience.
... Others	The examiner was very strict.
... Circumstances or coincidence	It was a difficult route and there was a lot of traffic.

Why do we do this?

Previous studies have shown that many, [*although not all*] people with borderline personality disorder tend to…

➢ reduce situations to single causes
➢ put all the blame for the occurrence of events on themselves
➢ attach less importance to circumstances / chance

Disadvantage: This attributional pattern often makes the evaluation of situations one-sided and unrealistic.

Learning objectives

➢ We should try to look at situations realistically in everyday life.
➢ We often overlook the fact that the same event can have many different causes (especially when strong emotions are involved such as anger or sadness). In addition, many factors are often involved at the same time.
➢ Think through several possibilities that could be involved in the occurrence of a situation (especially Myself / Others / Circumstances)!

Exercise
Please think of a negative event of the past week (which included, for example, stress, sorrow, disappointment...)

What happened? (e.g. "A friend stood you up.")

_____

_____

_____

How did you primarily explain this to yourself? (e.g. "She thinks I'm boring.")

_____

_____

_____

What are the consequences of your explanation? (e.g. "I am sad and feel unloved.")

_____

_____

_____

How might you evaluate it differently? Write down an interpretation that includes several causes (yourself, others and circumstances). Start with circumstances! (e.g. "Something important came up, and besides, it's not as though I've never been late before.").

_____

_____

_____

What is your estimate of the relative size of the different causes? Split the "pie" respectively.

Situation / Circumstances
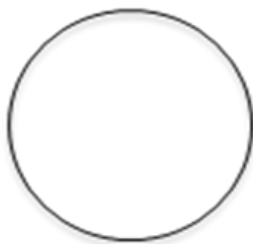
Others   Myself

Introduction

Rumination = way of thinking in which thoughts constantly revolve around the same problem without arriving at a solution (= thoughts on a treadmill).

The desperate search for the ideal solution prevents us from actually solving the problem. This is because we don't think about what we can do concretely in order to solve the problem.

Catastrophizing = tendency to continuously think about how terrible and dangerous a situation is, as well as focusing on negative future events. The likelihood that these events will happen is largely overestimated.

Learning objectives

➢ Rumination does not help you to solve problems; you do not come up with answers
➢ Try to break the vicious circle of rumination using the exercises described below!
➢ Pay attention to your thoughts and ask yourself whether you are in the habit of "catastrophizing." Try to find realistic evidence for and against your assumptions.

Exercises for rumination

Exercise 1: send a stop signal

One method of disrupting rumination is to tell yourself aloud or in your head »stop« when ruminations arise. Support this with inner images (e.g., picturing a stop sign) or clench your fist.
This exercise does not work for everyone. Only continue using it if you experience positive results!

Exercise 2:

Count down by 7s. Start at 1084!

Exercise 3: Motion exercise

Alternatively, sports or physical exercise can also be effective:
Flex and relax one muscle after the other.

Or do a body exercise:

1. Stand up
2. Rotate left arm to the right
3. Rotate right arm to the left
4. Lift one leg
5. Rotate leg

Can you keep ruminating while doing that?

Exercise 4: Make an appointment!

Instead of instantly giving in to rumination, write down your thoughts and make an appointment with yourself to ruminate for 15 minutes at an agreed upon later time (e.g., at 8 p.m.).

This exercise shows that thoughts are not almighty. Often the "appointment" gets forgotten because an acute urge to ruminate is mostly caused by situational influences (e.g., headaches or stress). If those (situational) factors stop later, the urge will not be as strong and can be overcome more easily.

Exercises for catastrophizing

Catastrophizing *[please find your own examples]*		
Example	**Catastrophizing**	**Other evaluations** *Arguments for and against?*
My boss didn't say hello this morning.	He's going to tell me that he's not satisfied with my work. Eventually he'll fire me. I'm never going to find a job again...	Did he even see me; maybe he was just having a bad day? Considering my latest achievements, I know he has no reason to be displeased with me. ...

Follow-up for training session
Empathizing I

Introduction

We sometimes overrate "body language" or hastily guess what someone is thinking or intending.

Gestures and facial expressions can, of course, be important clues for evaluating a situation or person. One should, however, try to gather as much other information as possible (otherwise we easily run into interpersonal conflicts).

How can I empathize with another person?

Example: A person crosses their arms. Why?

- ➢ **Knowledge of the person:** Does the person tend to be shy or arrogant?
- ➢ **Environment/situation:** When someone crosses their arms in the winter, he/she may be cold.
- ➢ **Self-observation:** On what occasions do I cross my arms? (Caution!: Do not immediately infer from yourself to others!)
- ➢ **Facial expression:** Does the person look angry/friendly, etc.?

Effect of mood on perception

Your own mood has an impact on how you interpret facial expressions! If you are in a bad mood, you may assume that other people have negative thoughts about you.

Examples:
- ➢ Getting an understanding smile from the doctor is understood as being laughed at.
- ➢ The concentrated and thoughtful look of the therapist is taken as hostility.

Why do we do this?

Previous studies have shown that many, [*although not all*] people with borderline personality disorder generally have no difficulties detecting emotions, however…

- ➢ … they often misinterpret neutral facial expressions as negative emotions, such as anger or disgust, and…
- ➢ … they are sometimes overly certain about their attribution of the expression.

Consequences: They often sense rejection and act accordingly (e.g., withdrawal or angry behavior). This, in turn, can cause problems, including rejection by others.

Case example:

Event: At the meat counter in the supermarket Maddy has a feeling that she is being given strange looks, and concludes that the other people think she's fat.

But!: Maddy constantly anticipates everyone else's rejection and is very insecure in public. But if anything, her own awkward reaction attracts attention.

Learning objectives

➢ Facial expression and gestures are important clues to what a person feels. But they can easily be misleading!

➢ Our current mood affects our perception; especially when stressed we tend to perceive our environment through the lens of our feelings (e.g., hostility when scared; feeling of being loved when euphoric).

Exercise 1

Situations/body language that I possibly misinterpreted:
Example: *A fellow patient at the clinic gave me a strange look the other day. In the end it turned out that he had a terrible toothache and it had nothing to do with me at all.*

Exercise 2

Effect of external factors on well-being and thinking

Please think about the short-term and long-term effects of different factors (e.g., alcohol, coffee) on your thinking. What impact do these factors have on your perception of other people?

Factors	Effect? Do I become aggressive, sad, nervous, cheerful? Other possible reactions…?
	e.g.: *"Coffee makes me feel more concentrated and makes it easier for me to focus on what others say. On the other hand, I often get nervous and cranky when I drink it in the morning on an empty stomach; I can sometimes get really obnoxious."*
Stress	
Alcohol	
Drugs	
Weather/lighting	
Sleep deprivation	

Follow-up for training session Discovering the positive

Introduction

Many [*although not all*] people with borderline personality disorder tend to concentrate on negative information in their environment. This can have negative effects on mood and well-being.

Accepting positive feedback:

- *Express happiness at compliments*
    - even if you don't think you deserve it right now—someone else seems to think so!
- *Never turn down a compliment*
    - or react with disparaging remarks about yourself, or give a compliment back to deflect attention from yourself. Instead, "bear the compliment"!
- *Coherence*
    - i.e., do your words match your tone, facial expression, and gestures?

Handling negative feedback:

- Take a more balanced view of criticism and deal with it positively: what else is there to learn? Maybe some aspects of it are true, and anyway, I'm already aware of this in myself and can work on it.

- No over-generalizations ("They mean one particular behavior —not my whole person!")

Discover the positive

- In situations where you feel uncomfortable or brood over negative thoughts, try to find more positive thoughts. Remind yourself of events in the past that went better.
  Example: "It didn't work out this time, but so what? I've solved very tricky problems before such as …"

- Discover something positive about the situation!
  Example: "I'll ask a friend for help, learn something new, and will be able to fix the problem myself next time."

Learning objectives

➢ Even if it's hard: Try to accept compliments and also compliment yourself from time to time!

➢ Practice looking for positive aspects of things in daily life. And: *What can you get out of a difficult situation for the future?*

➢ Stay realistic! This is not about white-washing the situation!
But! Not everything is always just bad, even though it might seem so at first!

Exercise 1
Be aware of your strengths

1. **Think about your own strengths:**
   What am I good at? What are the things I've been praised for? (e.g., *"I am technically skilled"*...)

   _____
   _____
   _____

2. **Imagine a specific situation:**
   When and where? What have I done concretely or who acknowledged it? (e.g., *"Last week, I helped a friend decorate her apartment. I was a great help to her."*...)

   _____
   _____
   _____

3. **Write it down!**
   Regularly write down when something went well or you received a compliment for something (e.g., in a notebook). Read this regularly and continue to expand the list. Whenever you feel worthless or like a loser, go back to these memories.

Exercise 2

Try to see positive aspects or a meaning in difficult events, too! If you have difficulties with doing so, ask others (friends, family, therapist) for support.

Situation:

_____

_____

_____

Positive aspect:

_____

_____

_____

Follow-up for training session Empathizing II

Sources of information for the evaluation of another person:

1. Language: is our most important means of communication. Tone (e.g., sarcasm) and word choice (arrogant, factual, etc.) can reveal a lot about someone.

But! There is a difference between what people say and what they actually think. Often people talk quickly without thinking, and what they say differs from what they really mean. Some people convey little emotion when talking—still they can be emotional underneath (e.g., people suffering from Parkinson disease).

2. Gestures/body language:
- Gestures and posture can emphasize words; for example, making a fist when threatening, waving when saying hello, bowing your head when praying.
- Indirect signs are often meaningful: Wild gesticulation can suggest nervousness (but keep cultural differences in mind); slouching can be a sign of low self confidence.

But!: Body language can be misleading!
Examples:
- One can put up a "good front."
- Postural deformity can make a confident person seem insecure.

3. Written statements: We take more seriously what is written than what is said!

But!
- Sometimes people "read between the lines," which can lead to incorrect conclusions!
- A study has shown that e-mail writers and e-mail recipients are both sure that they are correctly understanding the tone of an e-mail. In reality, there is a congruence of only 56% - just barely above chance!

4. Prior knowledge/cultural identity: Knowledge of a culture or ethnic group makes it easier to understand its members. Every culture has its own values and ethics. **But!** Individuals often differ from group stereotypes!

Learning objectives:

➢ Use all possible sources of information for your evaluation of other people.
➢ Try to bear in mind other points of view.
➢ Think about what you would feel if you were in the other person's shoes!
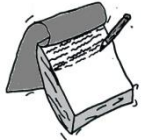
Exercise

Perspective-taking
Please insert own example

Your (negative) situation, e.g. a conflict:

_____
_____

What did you think/feel in the particular situation?	
What could the other person have thought/felt?	
What could help you taking the other person's perspective?	

Introduction

Self-esteem = how people assess their own value, i.e., an entirely subjective assessment of oneself. This does not necessarily have anything to do with how other people see the person.

Why do we do this?

Many [*although not all*] people with borderline personality disorder have low self-esteem.

Case example

> Event: Tina's friends don't talk to her as much as they used to.
>
> Tina's conviction: "My friends don't like me anymore. I am not a worthy person."
>
> But! Tina's friends like her a lot, but they might just be very busy at the moment. As they are all working now or have families, they have a lot less time than there used to be. Her belief impairs her self-esteem.

What are characteristics of people with high self-esteem?
➢ Trust in own abilities
➢ Acceptance of mistakes or failures
➢ Willingness to learn (even from mistakes)
➢ Positive and forgiving attitude toward oneself

Sources of self-esteem:
➢ No-one has a fixed amount of self-esteem; it can vary in the different areas of one's life.
➢ It is crucial difference whether we only look at our flaws *(empty shelves in a cupboard)* or at our strengths and abilities as well *(filled shelves).*

The inner critic:
= constant self-criticism
→ *Often your worst enemy is you!*

➢ Self-criticism is often associated with "all-or-nothing thinking": The inner critic is very strict—there are no shades of gray!
➢ Typical phrases of the "inner critic": "You look absolutely terrible today, once again!," "Because you picked your daughter up from school late, you are a bad mother." etc.

How can I deal with it?

➢ Consciously observe what the "inner critic" says.

➢ Question his/her statements. Does this really match the facts (Will my future be ruined forever because of one exam)? Ask friends whether they agree.

➢ When negative thoughts (self-criticism) intrude, consciously stop short and tell the critic: "Shut up!" (or "Get lost!" "I don't care what you say!). This stopping short helps the "good," more positive, thoughts to come to the fore.

Caution! Do not try to suppress recurring negative thoughts (e.g., self-reproaches like "You drip!" "Loser!") as this will only encourage them.

→ Question whether your thoughts are really justified or distract yourself by doing something enjoyable.

Learning objectives:

➢ Self-esteem is built from a lot of different areas of life. Therefore, don't just look at the "empty shelves"!

➢ Hear what your inner critic says and question his statements!

➢ Thought suppression does not help, but makes negative thoughts grow even stronger.

Exercises

Perspective-taking

It can also be helpful to look at yourself from someone else's point of view; what positive aspects would another person discover about you?

(also refer to the perspective-taking exercise for training session Empathizing II)

What strengths and positive features might others notice about you?

Follow-up for training session
Drawing Conclusions

Introduction

We often judge or make decisions without considering (or being able to consider) all the pertinent information.

➢ **Reasons/Advantages:** saves time, may appear determined and competent to others ("a wrong decision is better than no decision.")
➢ **Disadvantages:** risk of making incorrect decisions with potentially negative consequences...

We should aim for a happy medium between a very hasty decisions and being overly accurate. It is important to always evaluate the consequences.

Why do we do this?

Many [*although not all*] people with borderline personality disorder tend to jump to conclusions and act impulsively.

➢ This can lead to wrong decisions or hasty actions that will be regretted afterwards.
➢ It is therefore important to consider as much information as possible, and also to consult with others, especially when an event could result in far-reaching consequences.

Case example:

Event: Nicole gets a call from her son's teacher, who asks to meet her for a talk.

Nicole's immediate conviction: My son's in trouble at school, he probably did something bad. I failed as a mom.

But! It is not obvious at all what the teacher wants to talk to Nicole about. Maybe it is about helping with the school's summer barbecue.

Learning objectives

➢ When judgments are important and involve serious consequences, we should not act hastily but search for further information ("play it safe").
➢ Exchange views with others, especially when decisions are crucial or have dramatic implications.
➢ However, for events of minor importance, decisions may as well be speedy (e.g., yogurt flavor, sort of cake, lottery numbers).
➢ To err is human: Bear in mind that it is possible that you are wrong.
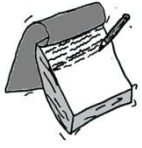
Exercise

Hasty decisions/actions/evaluations that I have made (and maybe regretted). What are alternative evaluations or actions?
Example: Your partner hasn't called yet. Speedy evaluation. He/she doesn't love me anymore and will leave me. Action: Call angrily, reproach Other explanations: He/she is stressing right now; he/she would have liked to call but left the cell phone at a friend's place.

Introduction

A depressive mood can become apparent through many different symptoms such as sadness, fear of rejection, anxiety, sleep disturbance, withdrawal…

But!: Depressive thinking patterns can be changed through consequent training! For example, so-called cognitive behavioral therapy which includes, among others, cognitive restructuring, may be useful.

However, this requires that these exercises be done regularly and over a long period of time.

Why do we do this?

Many [*although not all*] people with mental health issues show adverse thinking patterns that may promote the development of bad moods or depression. Depression is a very frequently encountered additional burden of borderline personality disorder!

Adverse depressive thought patterns:

1.   Exaggerated generalization:
Event: You used a foreign word improperly, you don't understand a newspaper article.
Exaggerated generalization: "I'm dumb."
More appropriate evaluation: "Others don't always understand everything either. Am I even interested in this topic?"
Because! Nobody's perfect. If you misuse a word from time to time, it doesn't mean that you can't express yourself at all. Every individual is complex, and we all have our strengths and weaknesses.

2.   Selective perception
Event: A friend does not come to your birthday party.
Selective perception: "I am so unpopular."
Alternative evaluation: "I missed her but the party is still great, other friends came."
Caution! There can be many explanations for a situation. Bear in mind positive things and don't search for the "fly in the ointment."

3.   Reading negative thoughts
Don't let yourself believe that your own (negative) self-image is automatically shared by others. Just because you consider yourself worthless, ugly, etc., doesn't mean that others would agree with me!

Also! There is no use in "thought-reading," as we can <u>never</u> be absolutely certain about what others think about us!

4. Comparison with other people

We continually compare ourselves to others. However, *the way in which* we compare ourselves and *with whom* we compare ourselves make all the difference! If you always come off badly in comparisons because the ideal is so out of reach or the comparison is so unfair, your self-esteem will suffer.

Also: For an evaluation of seemingly "perfect biographies," include *all* areas of life! Question supposed idols (see exercise 2).

5. Perfection:

➢ Sometimes we have extremely high expectations of ourselves while being a lot more accepting of other people!

➢ Try to reduce exaggerated demands on yourself and have fairer expectations.

➢ To do so, it can be helpful to observe yourself from someone else's point of view: *Would you be as hard on someone else as you are on yourself?*

Learning objectives:

➢ Everyone makes mistakes from time to time! → Do not generalize from one imperfection to everything!

➢ There is a difference between my self-perception and the way others see me: Just because I consider myself worthless, ugly, etc., doesn't mean that others would agree with me!

➢ Don't compare yourself to other people too much (even the "lucky ones" have weaknessess)! Nobody's perfect!

Tips for getting out of depressed moods (only helps if applied consistently):

➢ Every night, write down or think of a few positive things (up to 5) about your day. Then go through these things in your mind.

➢ Accept compliments and write them down so you can use them as resources when times are tough!

➢ Think of situations in which you felt really good and try to remember them with all your senses (seeing, feeling, smelling…), if possible with the help of a photo album.

➢ Do things you really enjoy—preferably together with others (e.g., going to the movies, going to a cafe).

➢ Work out (at least 20 minutes), but don't push yourself too hard. For example, go for a vigorous walk or go jogging.

> ➤ Listen to your favorite (happy) songs.

Exercise

In the following you will be asked to do some exercises as a follow-up to the last session. This is meant to serve as an inspiration and should be done consistently…

Exaggerated generalization *[please find own examples]*		
Event	**Depressive evaluation**	**More helpful evaluation**
I forgot the dentist appointment.	I am completely unreliable.	The week has been very busy and I was generally stressed. This happens to other people too, I will make a new appointment.

Exercise: Questioning idols!

Think of a person whom you admire. Critically question the way they present themself! e.g. *What amount of effort does this person put into his/her appearance? What are things that might make this person envious of you?*

_____

_____

_____

_____