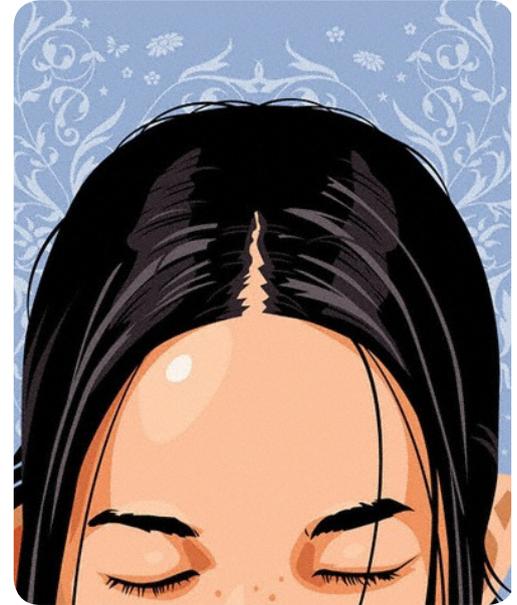




By Denise King Gillingham, MSW

# The Choice Is Yours

*Overwhelmed by your emotions? Remember that you can choose how you react to the challenges that come your way.*



**S**o maybe life has thrown you a few challenges. Maybe you are facing a cancer diagnosis or that of a loved one. Maybe it's a career challenge or a financial hurdle that has sent you reeling. Life may feel out of control. But here's the good news: there is still time to live a great life. Though you didn't choose to encounter this particular detour, you do have a choice in how you handle the emotions that result.

By training yourself to alter unhealthy mental and emotional attitudes—by taking control of your emotions and reactions—you can function better and improve your health. Ready to start training and regain some control in your life? Here is a three-step self-regulation exercise that may help.

## IDENTIFY, IMPACT, AND REFRAME

### *Step 1: Identify*

Identify the emotion or feeling you are experiencing. Name it! Sometimes it is very clear and pops right out. At other times this might take a bit more work. If you are having difficulty describing what you are experiencing, it might be helpful to jot down words that come to mind. Are you angry? Sad? Confused? Overwhelmed?

It may also be helpful to write about the situation. Journaling can help you better understand your feelings. Often when you express a feeling in an appropriate way, you feel better. All feelings, positive and negative, are legitimate and deserve to be expressed. The key to this process is to

understand the feeling so that you can express it in a way that is beneficial to you.

### *Step 2: Impact*

Consider the *impact* of the emotion you have just identified. Try to step back and look at the situation objectively. You may ask how your response benefits you or your relationship with others. Is this how you want to be in the world? What are some other ways you might have responded? What different outcomes would those responses have created?

To get a sense of the impact of your emotions, consider this hypothetical situation: You invite a new neighbor to lunch at your house. She does not eat anything. You can react in different ways. One reaction might be *I worked so hard, and she is not eating. I am offended.* Your reaction will come

through and will most likely have a negative impact on your developing relationship. Another reaction might be *I wonder if she is not eating because she is nervous or shy*. In this example, you are reacting empathically, which will likely have a more positive impact on your relationship. Which impact do you choose to have? Remember, you have control of how you react!

### Step 3: Reframe

Now *reframe* the emotion. This is where you try on different possibilities and perspectives about the event. If you were having a picture framed, you might go into a frame shop and see how the picture looks with several different frames around it. Do this with your situation. Ask yourself how another person might view the circumstances. How would a close friend or partner view what is happening? How might you react to the same situation in six months? Think of all the possibilities.

In a moment of heightened emotion, it may seem like there is only one way to see a situation. Like the facets of a diamond, every circumstance has many perspectives. One way to have a quick shift in perspec-

tive is to change your geography. If you are sitting and thinking about something, stand up and walk across the room. If you are inside, go outside. A physical shift can often trigger a shift in mental perspective. Our perspectives influence our reactions. A change in perspective—reframing your emotion—can help you react differently to a situation.

While many things in your life are beyond your control or choice, right now you do have control and power. This is a challenging time, but it is also filled with possibility. Your life will never be what it was before cancer. You may be angry and grieving for your old life. Go through the process—but also remember that this is your opportunity to reinvent yourself. Think about who you are, who you want to be, and the impact you want to have on the world. This is your time! Claim your power!

**Denise King Gillingham, MSW, is a cancer survivor and a co-active coach who specializes in helping people navigate change and realizing their magnificence. Her international practice includes clients from**

**all areas of life, including executives, cancer patients, artists, ex-patriots, and housewives. Denise received her MSW from Columbia University and has been a mental health professional for more than 15 years. She shifted her focus from therapy to coaching in 2006. Professional experience includes private practice in Prague, Czech Republic; crisis intervention with New York University; in-patient therapy at Payne Whitney Clinic in New York City; and substance abuse counseling at Bronx VA in New York City. Denise also served as a certified associate and an outplacement consultant with Lee Hecht Harrison, Inc. She conducts workshops on emotional intelligence in the United States and Europe.**



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