

Burst or Bounce Back?

RATIONALE This intervention is a very concrete, visual way of helping younger clients understand that they are not like balloons—they will not pop and disappear as though they were worthless, just because they make a mistake or fail at something.

MATERIALS

- ▷ A balloon
- ▷ A safety pin
- ▷ A Nerf (or rubber) ball

PROCEDURE

1. When the client comes to a counseling session upset about his mistakes or failures, ask him to blow up a balloon and pretend he is the balloon.
2. Give him a safety pin and ask him to recount his most upsetting mistake or failure. As he discusses this, instruct him to pop the balloon and note what happens to his “self” (there is nothing left).
3. Give him a Nerf ball and ask him to recall the same mistake or failure, but to use the pin on the Nerf ball. Discuss what happens when he sticks the pin in the Nerf ball; the ball doesn’t disappear—the pin just makes a tiny hole in it.
4. Explain that, when he makes mistakes or fails at a task, it doesn’t mean that he is no good and will disappear like the balloon because he is worthless; it just means that there is a minor problem to work on, as illustrated by the pricking of the Nerf ball.

The Price of Perfection

RATIONALE Along with the demand for perfection comes the emotional price people pay for it. By assessing and highlighting this negative characteristic of perfectionism, you can enable adolescents to look more realistically at what they should be expecting of themselves.

MATERIALS ▷ A sheet of paper
▷ A pencil

- PROCEDURE**
1. When the client presents irrational beliefs and negative feelings related to perfectionistic issues, ask him first to list, in one column, all of the advantages of striving for perfection.
 2. Ask him to think about the "price" he pays for having to be perfect and then to list, in a second column, the physical, emotional, and behavioral consequences he experiences when he tells himself that he *has* to be perfect.
 3. Discuss the two lists and ask the client to think about the following:
 - What does it say about you if you aren't perfect?
 - Is the price you pay (high anxiety, headaches, stomachaches, etc.) worth it?
 - What do you think you could do to put less pressure on yourself to be perfect?

The Anger Alarm

RATIONALE If we can teach children what pushes their anger buttons, we can be more effective at helping them control their anger, as demonstrated in this intervention.

MATERIALS

- ▷ A sheet of drawing paper
- ▷ Crayons or markers
- ▷ 2 envelopes
- ▷ 10 to 15 strips of paper
- ▷ A pencil

PROCEDURE

1. When your client talks about being angry, use the analogy of an alarm to help her recognize what pushes her anger buttons and sets off the alarm that warns her that her anger is building up and that it is time to give up her anger.
2. Have her use the crayons to draw her version of an "anger alarm."
3. Have her think about things she has been angry about recently and write them on separate strips of paper.
4. After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of hanging onto this anger and what it would take to let it go, have the client think about which anger issues she identified that she can let go of at this time, put them in one of the envelopes, and label it "Time to Let Go of the Anger."
5. Have her take additional strips and write down things that trigger her anger.
6. Have her put these in the other envelope and label it "Pushes My Anger Buttons."
7. Discuss what rational things she can say to herself so that what pushes her anger buttons doesn't set off her alarm and cause her to react angrily.
8. Ask her to write her rational responses on the backs of the individual strips in the "Pushes My Anger Buttons" envelope and see if thinking rationally helps her realize that it is time to give up her anger.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

RATIONALE Many adolescent clients are especially reluctant to discuss their own negative behaviors, let alone change them. This intervention is an indirect way to get them to set personal behavioral goals to overcome negative actions.

MATERIALS

- ▷ A sheet of paper
- ▷ A pencil

- PROCEDURE**
1. When your client has been referred to counseling because she is acting out in various ways that result in negative consequences, try the following approach:

Rather than ask her about her own behavior, first ask her to think about several negative acting-out behaviors her friends or acquaintances have engaged in, and then ask her to list on the sheet of paper the behaviors as well as the consequences.

Invite the client to discuss whether she thinks these peers thought about the consequences, if they had ever promised to change, and what might have prevented them from following through on their good intentions.
 2. Ask her to identify any negative acting-out behaviors she herself has engaged in and what the consequences were.
 3. Invite her to speculate as to what might happen if she changed these behaviors and how she might succeed in changing them.
 4. After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of behavioral change, ask her to select one of the behaviors she would consider working on and to list the steps she could take in order to change it.

Doing the Best I Can

RATIONALE Children need to remind themselves that doing the best they can is important. They should also keep in mind that, if they fail to achieve as well as someone else or get the top score, they don't gain anything by putting themselves down.

MATERIALS ▷ A jump rope or a basketball

- PROCEDURE**
1. Have your client jump rope or bounce a basketball in time to the chant.
 2. Tell her that jumping rope or bouncing the ball in time to the chant will serve as a quick and easy reminder to her just to do the best she can in situations where she is trying to achieve.
 3. As she jumps rope or bounces the ball, teach the client the following chant, personalized with her own name.

*Down at the school, where the sun shines in,
There sits _____ with her hand on her chin.
Along comes the teacher and taps her on the hand,
And tells _____ just to do the best she can.
So _____ starts thinking and does her best.
How many did she get right? Can you guess?*

The client should keep count as she jumps rope or bounces the ball until she misses.

4. Debrief this activity by asking the client to describe what it means to do the best she can.
5. Show her how she can avoid putting herself down, even when she really tries hard and does her best but still doesn't do well. She could tell herself things such as these:

"I'm doing the best I can, and I'm not a failure if I miss something."
"Even if I miss things this time, I can maybe be better next time."
6. Invite the client to make up additional chants along this same theme.

Preparing for the Future

RATIONALE Preparing for the future can be both exciting and anxiety provoking. This intervention is especially intended to help high school seniors understand how their thoughts influence their feelings.

MATERIALS

- ▷ A pair of eyeglasses
- ▷ A sheet of paper
- ▷ A pencil

PROCEDURE

1. When your client discusses his future, have him put on the eyeglasses and instruct him to "look" past high school graduation to the immediate (6 to 12 months) future, listing everything he "sees," along with a corresponding feeling.
2. Encourage him to be very specific (e.g., if he is going to college, he might list "Having to make new friends and feeling somewhat anxious about it").
3. After he has completed his list, take several of his examples and ask him to identify specific thoughts that influence how he feels (e.g., maybe everyone will ignore him or he won't find anybody to connect with or he may just have to sit in his room all year while everyone else socializes).
4. Explain to the client how these assumptions create anxiety and how to challenge them:
 - "What are the chances that *everyone* will ignore you?"
 - "Do you think that, out of thousands of students, you won't find *anyone* to connect with?"
 - "How realistic is it to think that you will sit in your room all year and never have *anyone* to socialize with?"
5. After you have demonstrated the disputing process, help your client work through other examples that he has had negative feelings about, and then identify strategies he can use to help him deal with these issues.