**Homework in Preparation for Week 5**

**A*. Practice the How to Learn to Respond Mindfulness Exercise***

**B. *Complete “React/Respond” Exercise in Preparation for the Next Group***

**C. *Complete Seizure and Doctor’s Appointment Log - Remember to Log Seizure Free When None Occur***

**A. *Mindfulness Exercise***

Mindfulness like any skill improves with practice. We recommend that you work at this at least once daily. You can use the following exercise. Some find it helpful to read this aloud, recording it, so that you can listen to the recording as you practice the exercise.

***How to Learn to Respond:*** The main thing to learn is mindfulness and the **pause**.

Mindfulness means watching when something happens that might have normally upset us or triggered some kind of emotional reaction. Mindfulness means paying close attention to your reactions.

When something triggers a strong emotional response, once you become aware of this trigger, the next step is to pause. You don’t have to act immediately, just because you have an internal reaction. You can pause, not act, and choose to just breathe. Watch this urge to act or over-react arise, then let this urge go away. Sometimes that takes a few seconds, other times it means you should remove yourself politely from the situation and cool down before you respond.

Pause…. Watch the reaction go away.

Now consider what the most intelligent, compassionate response might be. What can you do that will help your relationship, build a better team or partnership, make the situation better, calm everyone down (including yourself), or teach those important to us about what you need?

At first, you might make mistakes, but in time, you’ll learn to watch this reaction, and you’ll get better at pausing. Don’t fret if you make mistakes — just resolve to be more mindful when it happens next time. Take note of what happened to trigger your reaction and pay attention when something like that happens again.

Be mindful, pause, then consider a thoughtful, compassionate response.

**B. *Complete “React/Respond” Exercise in Preparation for the Next Group***

During the week two session, NES group members share the stressful life situations that have an impact on non-epileptic seizures. Some of these, for example, may include difficult life situations, overwhelming relationships, medical conditions that cause pain and fear, or difficult emotional states such as feeling depressed, guilty, or anxious. The group session, week two, explores the challenges of deciding whether these situations can change or whether individuals can change the way they are affected. This is a step by step challenging journey.

It is important to understand that stressful life events (trauma, death, financial crises etc.) coupled with day-to day stress can create **chronic** stress patterns. A person that is in a chronic pattern of stress will not be able to experience full relaxation and may suffer health consequences as a result. Stressful life situations require change and humans, by design, struggle to be comfortable with change. It is important to recognize that when you start to make changes you may feel anxious, insecure, and worried, especially when these changes might involve important relationships. One of the greatest challenges is understanding how your reactions to stressful life situations is ultimately within your control. It can be scary to accept that control lies within us, especially when these stressors have been occurring for so many years, often producing painful emotional damage. One of the most important parts of NES recovery is empowering you to effect change in your life. As is discussed in the week two session, it is a human need to feel empowered to set goals and to feel accomplishment when you meet those goals.

The first step is to use self-observation to notice how you react to stressful life situations. Start by recognizing unhealthy or unproductive reactions (for example screaming when angry). Begin to learn the differences between a reaction and a response. A reaction is usually impulsive, quick, and often worsens rather than resolves the situation. Reactions are often instinctual and habitual when encountering a stressor, and can sometimes be aggressive. A response however is the opposite of a reaction in that it is planned, calm and usually non-threatening. Responses often produce more successful outcomes and are therefore an important skill in reducing stressful patterns. Think of yourself as a magnet, attracting what you need.

Here are some examples of reacting and responding:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **REACTING** | **RESPONDING** |
| I cannot believe he/she just said that to me, I must be stupid. | I wonder why he/she is upset, maybe they had a bad day. I am going to ask questions to check. |
| Bills are mounting up, I can’t gain control over my problems, and I will lose everything! | What can I do **today** to find **some** solutions? Things in my life are challenging! |
| I really need help with this responsibility, and no one is stepping up to the plate. I should not have to tell them what I need. | I need to tell my family assertively what I need from them and give them explicit instructions on how they can help. If they choose not to help, then I know that I tried my options and will need another solution. |

Think of a time when you had a reaction which made matters worse and write this down: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Now imagine you had the time to pause and consider a response, what would that response be: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Four Main Communication Styles**

An important part of learning to respond vs reacting to a stressful situation, is to be mindful of your communication style. As we discussed in the previous lesson, it is your obligation to communicate your needs and to work towards making sure they are met. Unhelpful communication styles can also be a barrier to seeking support. Examples of communication styles include **passive (sometimes submissive), passive-aggressive (sometimes manipulative), aggressive and assertive.**

1. **Passive communication** involves avoiding expressing your needs, thoughts or feelings, usually as an attempt to avoid conflict. Passive communication leads to needs being unmet and feelings of chronic frustration.

An example of passive communication: “I’m okay with whatever you want to do.” This often occurs when you don’t want to stir the pot or make things worse. In this example the person is often NOT okay with “whatever,” but is uncomfortable saying so, or asserting their needs. This form of communication can cause anxiety and depression, even resentment. Passive communication perpetuates the problem of not getting needs met.

1. **Passive-aggressive communication** involves avoiding expressing your needs, thoughts or feelings, and also acting out in subtle ways such a slamming the door, eye rolling, or withdrawing from others out of frustration.

An example of passive communication: “I’m fine, we don’t need to talk about it.” \*While rolling your eyes and crossing your arms. In this form of communication, resentful feelings are communicated but the real source of the problem is not discussed. This results in being stuck in the pattern of unmet needs, like purely passive communication.

1. **Aggressive communication** involves expressing your needs, thoughts or feelings in a way that hurts the other person. An aggressive communicator is often defensive.

An example of aggressive communication: “You just need to get over it.” In this form of communication, you become the aggressor. Often people who resort to aggressive communication feel alone because their abusive and angry communication style alienates others. This prevents the communicator from learning the skills needed to be in relationship to others. As with passive and passive-aggressive communication, aggressive styles fail to meet the objective and needs, again, go unmet.

1. **Assertive communication** is the healthiest and usually most effective form of communication. Assertive communication means directly expressing your needs, thoughts or feelings and respecting those of others around you. It is direct and honest.

An example of assertive communication: “I felt hurt by our argument earlier, and I would like to talk about it.” People may respond poorly to assertive communication at first especially when they are not used to you asserting yourself. It is important to realize that you are not responsible for how other people choose to feel when you set healthy limits or boundaries. Assertive communication is usually part of a healthy response to a stressful life situation.

**From Reaction to Response to Communication**: People with NES often find themselves in *REACT* mode. This often comes of a lifetime necessity to be situationally aware. Reaction is the body and brain’s way of protecting itself. The problem is that reactions disengages the thinking brain, relying only on flight or fright. While this is an important tool for dangerous situations, it is rarely needed in day to day responsive communication. These next exercises will guide you through the process of understanding when to react, when to respond and how best to communicate your responses to meet your needs and the needs of others.

What is your most common communication style? Can you provide examples of times when you used passive, passive-aggressive, or aggressive communication styles? What was the outcome? Can you think of a time when you used assertive communication?

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What are some examples of how you reacted to a stressful life situation in the past? Examples may include an argument, a time where you asked for help, or a family conflict etc. Can you describe the chain of events and what happened after your reaction? What communication style were you using at the time?

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How do you feel about your reaction? What feelings did you have after the interaction?

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What are some examples of how you could have responded instead and how this might have influenced the outcome of situation? What communication style could you have used instead?

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Steps to Begin to Take Control of Our Reactions

In order to take control of how you react to stressful life situations you must begin a process of self-observation. This can include journaling about stressful things that have occurred throughout your day and what impact they produced. Start to pay attention to your responses to these situations. What sensations are happening in my body when I am angry? What thoughts do I have when this situation occurs? What impact is this situation having on my quality of life?

Begin to pay attention without judgement, to inner conflicts such as thoughts and feelings about oneself. The thoughts and feelings you have about yourself and the world affect how you react and respond to situations, as well as influencing your communication styles. Most of these thoughts and feelings are naturally subconscious and take reflection to understand. For ex: “Inside I feel like a bad person, I can’t do anything right.” “I feel guilty and ashamed.” “I feel inadequate, and not good enough. What’s the point of trying?” These feelings will influence how you react when stressed. For example, if you feel guilty or ashamed, you may not feel you have the right to stand up for yourself in a conflict. This may contribute to a passive communication style.

As you choose to begin the process of responsive communication, start to observe when you are feeling uneasy or upset. Ask yourself what you are feeling in the moment that makes you so uneasy. This can help “tune in” to these unconscious experiences. Pay attention when you feel a specific emotion and pause to consider the best response. For example, you feel sad and lonely, and choose not to call your loved one or a friend to chat. Practice doing the opposite, call and change loneliness to connection. This is a difficult and challenging undertaking and it is important to take it slow. Try making a few observations a day, and remember that this is a process.

Once you start to notice these observations you can begin to understand your experience being sure not to judge your thoughts and feelings. It is also helpful to work with an outside therapist to work on this journey of understanding your thoughts and feelings about yourself and the world. Therapists can help provide insight, and support during this process.

Another important way to improve your capacity to respond vs reacting is to practice daily stress relieving exercises. These may involve health and wellness activities, consistently practicing mindfulness and meditation, seeing a therapist, talking with friends or family, or engaging in hobbies regularly. By reducing overall stress and improving mindfulness skills, you will find that you grow your capacity to respond to stress.

Lastly, learning to communicate by responding, rather than reacting takes practice and perseverance. Humans are creatures of habit, and change requires determination. It takes an active mindset of making the choice to respond when confronted with tough situations. This is part of your journey to taking control of your non-epileptic seizures.