

BLACK & WHITE

Thinking

LOOK FOR THE GREY



Black & White Thinking

Objective:

People sometimes rely on extreme behaviors or thinking patterns to address issues that involve setting goals, making decisions, interpreting political/ethical situations or forming perceptions about themselves and others. Rigid and inflexible, *Black & White Thinking* does not provide a very functional means for accurately assessing the world around us, our achievements and self-worth - or the merits and accomplishments of others.

When we reduce an entire spectrum of possibilities down to two options - which are often times polar opposites - it can lead us to undervalue or overvalue incoming information and perceptions. We may put someone on a pedestal only to knock them down when things don't go as planned. If we begin with unrealistic, unattainable expectations, we tend to either idealize or diminish the attributes of ourselves or others. We can wind up feeling angry, disappointed, defeated and sometimes distrustful - of ourselves and those around us.

Approach:

Show the front of the card. Ask the person if they are familiar with the phrase. Provide an example using an event from the person's life or a controversial news item (*the moral and ethical issues surrounding stem cell research, animal rights, gun control*). You may also want to initiate a discussion about how some groups of people are stereotyped (*All _____ people are _____*). Discuss the limitations and long term consequences of this kind of thinking and how it can cause us to hold unrealistic, unachievable expectations and sometimes revert to ineffective, unsuccessful behaviors.

Encourage the person to examine their own extreme thinking or behavioral patterns and explore why they may sometimes make unforgiving judgments about people and situations. Suggest that they begin to practice making more reasonable, temperate choices and seek out equally plausible, *greyer* alternatives. For example, saying "*I'm doing the best I can*" versus "*I must do everything perfectly*" or "*You're frequently late*" versus "*You're never on time.*"

Outcomes:

Learning to moderate extreme words, thinking and behaviors and set more realistic, achievable goals are all by-products of *looking for the grey*. The ability to identify, modify - and sometimes even abandon - unattainable standards for ourselves and others helps us grow to be more tolerant, less critical and more accepting of life's imperfections. We can feel more content moving forward and experience less frustration, disappointment and drama as we work to achieve our goals.