Probable or Possible?

Objective

To explore what it feels like to be more realistic about the likelihood of your worst fear coming true by using probability testing.

You Should Know

Just because something is possible does not mean it is probable. Sometimes you don't take the time to realistically examine the possibility that what you fear will actually happen. For example, it is *possible* that you could be struck by lightning, but statistically it is *not probable*. It is also *possible* that you could win the lottery, but statistically it is *not probable*.

Probability is the likelihood that an event will occur. Of course, it is always possible that your fears may be warranted, but is it probable? Sometimes you might imagine the worst outcome and act accordingly to prevent it. But think about this: If it is possible for the worst outcome to occur, it is equally possible for the best outcome to take place. There are usually many other more positive possibilities that exist among the continuum of likelihoods that might occur.

It might seem silly and even difficult to act "as if" by forcing yourself to think of alternatives instead of what you fear most occurring, but remember that to be mindful means to slow down, not speed up. Take the time to truly experience whatever feeling or moment you are having and then to consider carefully, mindfully what step to take next. You have the power to train your brain to slow down, to process, and to make decisions based on your ability to remember that it is the meaning that you give to thoughts that is important, and not the thoughts themselves.

What to Do

To help you visualize the concept that the worst scenario is not really very likely to happen, you will think of ten different possibilities that expand on an outcome you would usually define as solely negative.

You will then choose from these possibilities ten times in order to calculate the probability of more positive outcomes occurring.

1. Begin by writing down your prediction: one negative outcome.

2. On nine strips of equal-sized paper, write down alternative outcomes that are also possible, from the worst to the best. (If you wish to, glue each strip onto a more solid surface, like cardboard or wood, or laminate them.)

3. Put the strips of paper into a bag (paper, gift, plastic, shopping bag, or whatever you have).

4. Shake the bag so that the strips are mixed up.

5. Draw one slip of paper from the bag and record what is on it as Trial 1.

6. Read the outcome to yourself slowly, taking the time to notice the sensations you have as you are reading.

7. On a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), write down your anxiety level after you have read the result.

8. Put the slip back in the bag, shake the bag, and keep drawing again, putting each result back in the bag each time until you have drawn enough times to equal your total possibilities.

9. Using the formula for probability, calculate the likelihood of drawing a good outcome.

Your prediction: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Trial	Outcome	Anxiety level
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

Calculate the probability of drawing a good outcome by dividing the number of good outcomes by the total number of outcomes:

Good outcomes ÷ total outcomes = result_____%

Reflection

How does expanding your thinking to include both positives and negatives feel different from or similar to your usual focus on a singular negative outcome?

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What was it like to change your focus from one outcome to many outcomes?

_____

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_____

How do you think expanding your expectations might possibly add to or detract from your life?

_____

_____

_____

Was your anxiety level higher, lower, or the same when you drew a positive outcome? What do you think that means for how you experience your life?

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Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)
Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

_____

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