

Finding Closure on an Upsetting Memory

Objective

To identify “open” upsetting memories and practice strategies for closure.

What to Know

Closure is something people seek following a loss, or when something significant ends. For example, people seek closure after a romantic relationship ends or a loved one dies. The goal is to resolve matters to reduce confusion and ambiguity. Closure is achieved when answers are received, making it easier to move on.

Research shows that finding closure increases self-confidence and benefits physical health and wellbeing. But occasionally you might find yourself focusing on past events or issues – situations where you did not find closure. These memories might negatively affect your daily life.

Memories can be classified in two ways. **Closed memories** are resolved issues and situations where you have found closure. **Open memories** include experiences that have not been put to rest, or issues you continue to think about. Open memories represent unresolved conflict, unexplained events, or upsetting thoughts about the past that impact your life. These memories might be distressing, and you might dwell on them and remember vivid or disturbing details.

This worksheet will help you identify an “open” memory and ways to find closure.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

Does anything from your past prevent you from finding closure and moving forward? In what ways? Explain.

Describe an open memory – something from the past you have not yet put to rest, or an issue that you believe is unresolved.

Does this memory involve someone who harmed you? If so, do you repeatedly think about this person or the consequences of their actions? Explain.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of recalling this memory?

Have you talked to anyone about this memory? If not, why not?

Are you seeking closure? What are the benefits of making this “open” memory a “closed” memory?

Here are four strategies to use with this open memory.

1. Create distance. Describe the memory from another person’s perspective. You can begin to change the meaning and feelings around it. For example, imagine yourself as a journalist or a fly on the wall and describe the memory from the perspective of a neutral third party.

2. Reinterpret. Focus on subtle aspects of the memory and recall anything positive you may have missed. Avoid focusing on any of the negative aspects. Think of your values and how they can influence how you remember the situation, and how the memory affects you now.

3. Observe. As you recall the incident or situation, allow it to unfold with a nonjudgmental and open mind. Shift your focus to internal and external experiences associated with the memory. Allow the memory to pass by like the clouds on a sunny day.

4. Divert and distract. Focus your attention on an engaging task. When the memory enters your thoughts, do something to distract yourself to avoid dwelling on it.

Next, apply each of the strategies to this open memory.

Create distance. Describe your memory from a neutral party’s perspective.

Reinterpret. What are positive aspects you might have missed? What are some of your values you can apply to the memory?

Observe. Describe your experience in a nonjudgmental manner. Focus on your internal and external experiences.

Divert and distract. What can you do whenever the memory enters your mind? Write down 3-4 activities.

Next, answer the following questions.

Which strategy was most helpful?

Which strategy was least helpful?

What did you find difficult about this activity?

How did using the four strategies change your perspective?

Did the use of these strategies help you find closure? Why or why not?

How did this exercise help you see things differently? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How do you feel about using the strategies on other open memories?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful).

What did you learn from this exercise?
