

overgeneralizing 10

for you to know

When people overgeneralize, they assume that because they had one negative experience in the past, they will always have the same negative experience in the future—even though there is no evidence for that. This assumption raises their anxiety level whenever they encounter a situation that has been negative, even just once, in the past. People who overgeneralize often use the words “always,” “never,” “no one,” “everyone,” “all,” and “none.”

When Lauren asked a boy she liked to the school dance, he said no. She thought, “No one will ever want to date me; I’m always being rejected.” She began to feel anxious anytime she was with a boy she liked.

When Lauren dropped her lunch tray in the school cafeteria, which had never happened before, she told herself, “It figures; I’m such a klutz. I’m always causing accidents.” Lauren became nervous about dropping food and dishes even when she was at home clearing the kitchen table.

When Lauren babysat for the first time, the baby had an earache and wouldn’t stop crying. Lauren told herself, “I’ll never be good with children; I’ll make a terrible mother.” When she was called to babysit again, she got nervous just thinking about it and turned the job down.

These kinds of overgeneralized thoughts caused Lauren’s anxiety level to go up in any situation where her past experience hadn’t been perfect.

activity 10 * overgeneralizing

directions

The kids in the pictures below are having negative experiences. Next to each picture, write an overgeneralizing statement they might make about their situation that would raise their anxiety level. Use the words "always," "never," "no one," "everyone," "all," or "none." Then, write a more realistic statement that could lower their anxiety level.



1a. _____

1b. _____

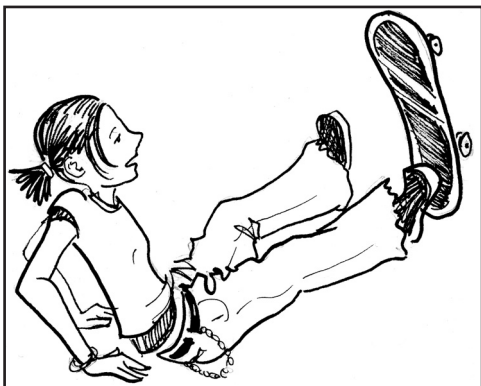
2a. _____

2b. _____



3a. _____

3b. _____



more to do

For the next few days, keep a record here of any statements you make that use the words "always," "never," "no one," "everyone," "all," and "none." Describe the situation you were in when you made each statement.

Look back at what you have written. Describe any patterns you notice in the subject areas or situations that you overgeneralize about.

Now rewrite the statements, replacing the overgeneralizing words with more accurate words.

Read both groups of sentences aloud to yourself, paying attention to your anxiety level as you read them. Notice which statements make you feel more anxious.