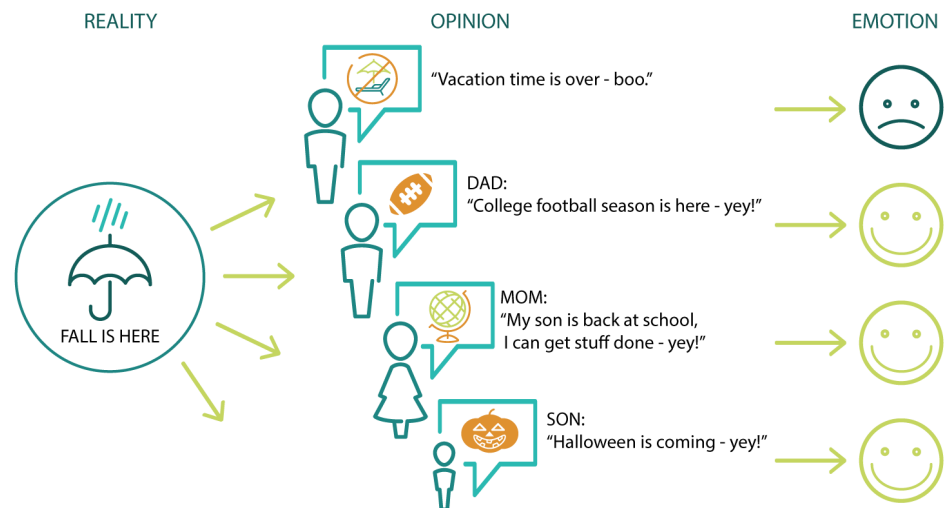


FOUR TYPES OF COGNITIVE REAPPRAISAL (PRATIPAKSHA BHAVANA)

We tend to confuse “facts,” that are concrete realities, with “opinions,” that are interpretations of those realities. An opinion is just the brain’s best guess about what’s going on based on past experience and current beliefs. An opinion often leads to an emotional response, which can be productive or destructive to our health and wellbeing. Can we control those emotional responses? Research shows that to change an emotional response we need to go back to the opinion that provoked it. If we change how we interpret the reality, we will change the emotions that show up.

Changing your interpretation of reality means choosing to emphasize a different aspect of reality.

Learning to switch your perception of the situation on demand is called “cognitive reappraisal” (or *pratipaksha bhavana* in yoga) and it is a great tool for emotional regulation.



David Rock in his book “Your brain at work” defines **four types of cognitive reappraisal**. Here is what you can do to change your emotional responses:

1. **REINTERPRET THE EVENT.** You see a guy stomping his feet on the street and you think he is angry or crazy and you should stay away. Then he smiles at you and shakes off some dirt from his shoe and you reinterpret him as a friendly guy who is trying to get the dirt of his shoe. The brain does this automatically as it receives new information. You can also do it intentionally if you accept that there might be aspects of the situation that you are not aware of, and be willing to revise your opinions once you receive new information.
2. **NORMALIZE.** Anything new and uncertain is frightening to the brain. So whenever you meet a new client, start a new project, face a new challenge your reaction might range from slightly uncomfortable to a full-blown panic. Usually just recognizing that you are having this reaction because you are dealing with something new can help diminish the stress response significantly. Once you become more familiar with the situation and develop strategies for handling it, it will become “normalized”.
3. **REORDER INFORMATION, OR REEVALUATE.** Your brain stores all information as a complex map of the world. It is arranged as a hierarchy in order of importance to you. Simply deciding that something is not important and not worth your time and mental effort rearranges your mental map and changes how you view the situation. You can decide to deal with important things and not sweat the unimportant stuff.
4. **REPOSITION, OR FIND A NEW PERSPECTIVE** from which to interpret the situation. There are as many points of view as there are people. If you take on another person’s perspective, you are changing the context through which you view the situation. What would your mom say about it? What would Buddha say? You can try to view the situation from another person’s perspective, or from the perspective of another culture, or even from your own standpoint at a different time in your life.