I want things to go well. And I want things to go well for your time of emotional healing and beyond. Even when an outcome turns out well in the end, there are often difficulties along the way. This lesson will help you navigate the tension between expecting the best and enduring difficulties as they arise. The way you set your mind, attitude, and disposition will determine your satisfaction along the way. Therefore, you want to set reasonable expectations. Learn to identify unrealistic expectations in treatment, and replace them with realistic expectations to bring about the changed life you desire.

This mental health e-lesson is available at journeytorecovery.com

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HAVING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

EXPECTATIONS
I want things to go well. And I want things to go well for your time of emotional healing and beyond. Even when an outcome turns out well in the end, there are often difficulties along the way. This lesson will help you navigate the tension between expecting the best and enduring difficulties as they arise. The way you set your mind, attitude, and disposition will determine your satisfaction along the way, so you want to set reasonable expectations.

REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

☐ Sometimes traffic moves slowly
☐ Sometimes people don’t understand what I’m trying to say
☐ Sometimes it snows in the winter
☐ Sometimes people are late to important meetings
☐ Sometimes people expect too much of me
☐ Sometimes I burn the pizza
☐ Sometimes I make mistakes
☐ Sometimes treatment is difficult
☐ Sometimes things don’t make sense to me
☐ Sometimes I don’t feel like it
☐ Sometimes I’m happy

☐ Sometimes I’m not happy
☐ Sometimes I feel like being around people
☐ Sometimes I don’t feel like being around people
☐ Sometimes I am sensitive to other people’s pain
☐ Sometimes I’m not sensitive to other people’s pain
☐ Sometimes people forgive me
☐ Sometimes everything in the entire day goes right
☐ Sometimes people are inconsiderate and rude
☐ Sometimes people are slow, stupid, and mean
Sometimes I forget
Sometimes I’m selfish
Sometimes I’m wrong
Sometimes I’m impatient
Sometimes I’m unmotivated
Sometimes I’m tired
Sometimes I complain

Sometimes I’m defensive and argumentative
Sometimes I’m gullible
Sometimes I don’t listen
Sometimes others don’t listen to me
Sometimes others don’t like or respect me

LET’S BE REALISTIC

People with emotional or mental health difficulties often have unrealistic goals and high expectations for themselves. They desperately want things to go well, be in good health, realize their dreams, have things go their way, make constant progress, get good grades, be involved with beautiful people, and make a lot of money. And people with high expectations can be extremely disappointed and upset when things do not turn out like they had hoped.

What unrealistic expectations do you hold for yourself? Give specific examples. Include your thoughts, feelings, and overreactions when things do not go your way.

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

What unrealistic expectations do you hold for others? Give several specific examples. Include your thoughts, feelings, actions, and overreactions when things do not go your way.

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_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

How is your mental health disorder affected when things do not go as you had hoped?

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_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

How do you respond when you are disappointed?

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_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
How do you respond when people are unsympathetic or uncaring about your emotional difficulties?

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_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

LET’S BE REASONABLE

Setting reasonable expectations means grappling with the uncontrollable, the doubtful, and the difficult. Coming to grips with these uncertainties acknowledges that sometimes you cannot control, fix, and bend them to meet your desires. Other times you must face the limitations of your own abilities.

It is wise to set expectations in harmony with good reasoning. It’s not that things don’t change; they do. If you don’t see any evidence of change, it’s reasonable to expect things will remain the same. For example, imagine having an uncle who constantly insults you and your family when you visit him for Thanksgiving. He has insulted you, criticized you, and announced your faults on every annual visit for over 20 years. This year, because you have learned several new jokes, you think he’ll like you more and you hope it’s enough for him to treat you differently. That would be an unrealistic and unreasonable expectation. You have no evidence he would be different, even if you were. It may be better to set your expectations in line with the experiences and actions from the previous 20 years and set your boundaries accordingly.

Name several things you wish would change about your situation or with people in your life, but likely won’t.
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

OVERLOOKING FAULTS

Having a good understanding that I make mistakes and other people make mistakes frees me to overlook the slights, inconsistencies, and selfish actions of myself and others. The Bible says “the righteous man falls seven times and rises again.” We are to get up after we fall. The mistake is not failing; the biggest mistake you can make is refusing to get up and try again. Work toward getting up, admitting your mistakes, dusting yourself off, and trying again. Give up on being perfect, right, always accurate, and faultless. Also, reduce your expectations that other people would be perfectly understanding, readily considerate, and eternally grateful for all you have done.

What mistakes in yourself do you need to overlook?
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
What mistakes have others made, or continue to make, that you need to let go of?

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
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HANDLING MISTAKES
We often judge people on their actions, but judge ourselves on our intentions. As you extend mercy and compassion to others, refrain from making judgments. Consider their intentions, not just their performance and behavior. Expect people to have an imperfect attitude about your current mental health problems or about your limitations in general.

The truth is, we all make mistakes. People have made and will make mistakes in their judgments of you as well. We often want others to perfectly handle all of our mistakes. This unrealistic attitude leads to disappointment and resentment.

List an area where you have been misunderstood or unfairly judged.

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

How can you become more accepting and less reactive of other’s failings?

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

CHANGING VERSUS JUSTIFYING
Many people say they are trying to change, but in reality, they end up justifying their actions and past mistakes and may not make actual changes. The more they are confronted, the more rigidly entrenched they become in their old ways. The more they are pushed, the more they resist. Although they may say they are trying to change, they seem to be spending a lot of energy to remain the same.
UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS IN TREATMENT AND EMOTIONAL HEALING

Some of your expectations may be unrealistic, no matter how hard you work; recognizing this may help you understand why you are frustrated. What unrealistic expectations have you had in your mental health treatment? Examine the list below and check any unrealistic expectations you’ve had about your condition and recovery.

- Expecting treatment to be easy
- Expecting people to always understand me
- Expecting everyone to be like me
- Expecting special attention
- Expecting things to always go my way
- Expecting a pain-free recovery
- Expecting constant progress
- Expecting to never be sad, worried, or lonely
- Expecting the counselors and the staff to be perfect
- Expecting instant progress
- Expecting medications to be immediately effective

Unrealistic expectations are rarely created suddenly. They do not emerge hastily through one simple decision or interaction, but instead grow slowly over time. Unrealistic expectations are developed through several key influences including:

1. Demanding parents, teachers, siblings
2. Being criticized for struggling, having faults, or repeatedly failing
3. Being judged on performance or appearance
4. Being rewarded for a high level of achievement or success
5. Linking value and worth with performance

DEVELOPING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Setting realistic expectations means being willing to accept responsibility for your own character, disposition, and actions, and being willing to be accountable to others. As you move forward, you are willing to work toward a desirable attitude toward myself and a better life.

1. Take a fierce moral inventory and make a rock-solid commitment to truth.
2. Spot your own ultra-high expectations, perfectionistic demands, and critical judgments of yourself.
3. Admit your faults and shortcomings.
4. Watch your sense of superiority (seeing others as inferior and substandard).
5 **Target improvements to your character, attitude, and disposition, not just your performance level.**

Aim for progress, not perfection.

6 **Examine how much you compare yourself unfavorably to others and to whom you compare yourself.**

7 **Do not disrespect, belittle, or find fault with others in order to level the playing field.**

Your worth does not go up by devaluing others. You are valuable and worthwhile regardless of their standing.

8 **Set expectations in the middle.**

Do not become apathetic, lazy, or irresponsible, and do not swing to the other side by having unrealistically high expectations for yourself and others.

9 **Be gracious and forgiving.**

**KEEP MAKING PROGRESS**

Emotional health is advanced when you admit your faults and shortcomings. As you manage mental health problems like anxiety, depression, stress, and other problems in living life, you will have times of great progress, some plateaus, and some setbacks. Expect that progression and don’t get mad at others or yourself when it occurs. Move forward, knowing you are getting stronger, making progress, and are on the right path to health and healing.