

# Thanking the Messenger

## What is the Thanking the Messenger Technique?

When we experience painful negative emotions, our first instinct is usually to fight them or make them go away. However, we can recognize that these feelings are not our enemies. They are often messengers highlighting our most beautiful traits, values, and helping us in some way or another.

Doing positive reframing can be especially helpful when working through a Daily Mood Log Part 2. By acknowledging the hidden wisdom in our pain and thanking the emotion for its message, we can drop our resistance, reduce self-blame, and find peace.

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### Case Example: "Things will not go well"

George, a dedicated professional, shared that he was constantly struggling with anxiety. He was facing an upcoming work presentation and found himself consumed by dread, repeating the thought, "Things will not go well and my presentation is going to be a disaster."

**Therapist:** It makes sense that this constant anxiety is exhausting. But is there anything good about anxiety or how it has helped you?

**George:** Yeah, it has always been there to protect me from danger and watches out for me.

**Therapist:** That makes complete sense. Your anxiety wants to keep you safe. What would happen if you responded using this technique by thanking it and reassuring it?

**George:** I could say, "Thank you for looking out for me all this time, I know you want to protect me and you protected me so much in the past. And thank you for reminding me to prepare for the presentation. I've got it in my calendar to prepare, so you don't need to remind me anymore. I appreciate it, but I will be okay."

**Therapist:** That is spot on. How does saying that change the weight of the anxiety?

**George:** It instantly makes me feel less like I am fighting myself. I can acknowledge that my brain is just trying to help me get ready, and I can step back and focus productively on my work.

After this back-and-forth exchange, George fundamentally changed his relationship with anxiety. He realized that his anxiety was not an irrational malfunction or an enemy to defeat, but a well-meaning part of his mind trying to look out for him and ensure he was prepared. By directly acknowledging its positive intentions, thanking it for its service, and reassuring it that his schedule was already managed, George dropped his inner

resistance. This allowed him to quiet the constant panic and channel his energy into productive preparation instead of fighting himself.

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## How You Can Use This Technique

**Step 1.** Identify a distressing emotion or negative thought running through your mind. Write it down:

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**Step 2.** Discover the hidden value or helpful function. Ask yourself: What does this painful feeling show about my core values or traits? How is this feeling trying to help me?

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**Step 3.** Speak directly to the emotion and express gratitude. Write a sincere thank you statement acknowledging its history, its warnings, and its message. (e.g., "Thank you for looking out for me all this time, I know you want to protect me and you protected me so much in the past...")

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**Step 4.** Reassure the feeling and release it. Finish your statement by letting the emotion know you are organized, capable, and safe: "...and thank you for the reminder. I have it handled, so you don't need to remind me anymore. I appreciate it, but I will be okay."

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## Important Things to Keep in Mind

- Reframing, Not Justifying: Thanking the messenger does not mean you are happy about the pain or that the negative thought is 100% true. It simply means you are choosing to extract the wisdom from the emotion rather than fighting it.
- The Power of Externalizing: Speaking directly to the emotion creates healthy distance. It reminds you that you are not your anxiety or your depression; you are the person experiencing them.
- Finding the Right Value: If you are struggling to find the positive value, ask yourself what the opposite of your emotion would look like. If the opposite of your guilt is being a person who does not care who they hurt, then your guilt is a beautiful indicator of your empathy.

## Final Note

Thanking the Messenger teaches us a profound truth about emotional pain: our darkest feelings are often inextricably linked to our brightest qualities and our desire to help ourselves grow or stay safe. When we stop viewing our distress as a malfunction and start viewing it as a helpful messenger, we strip away the shame. You teach yourself that your sensitivity, your standards, and your fears serve a purpose, creating the necessary space to move forward with self-compassion.