

PROJECT **Reframing** RESILIENCE

Definition

Reframing is a technique that originated in the field of family therapy and that we have adapted to our work with youth and adults.

Reframing is based on the observation that we all have stories about ourselves. The organizing themes of some people's stories are constructive, for instance, "I am shrewd. I've always have the ability to watch out for myself. As a child, I used those skills to escape the worst of my father's abuse. Today the same skills are my strongest suit."

Other stories are destructive. They cause considerable pain and get in the way of a productive life, for instance, "I was helpless as a child. I was a victim of my father's abuse. He damaged me irreparably. Now I can't do anything right or ever trust anyone again."

The technique of reframing capitalizes on the subjective nature of personal stories to uncover underlying, underemphasized themes in people's stories that are potentially helpful. Its purpose is to arrive at an authentic and helpful story, one that does not eliminate the pain that hardship can cause but that also includes the strength that is forged in the struggle to prevail.

We discovered the power of reframing in our research with men and women who had grown up in difficult situations and who were leading satisfying lives as adults, nonetheless. As they attempted to answer our questions regarding their success, many felt a special spark that they had never experienced before. In exploring this feeling with them, we learned about reframing.

We saw that in recalling the triumphs that were previously submerged in their stories, the men and women we interviewed began to see themselves in a new light. No longer were pain and symptoms at the center of their plot. No longer did they characterize themselves as damaged merchandise. Now they could tell a reframed story that was more constructive. Its theme was pride, and its plot revolved on their bravery, resourcefulness, determination, and all they had done to help themselves.

Practical Applications of Reframing

If you are a clinician, teacher, youth worker, or interested party you can use the technique of reframing. All you need to do is earn enough trust to encourage an honest conversation. You also need to be curious, to listen without making judgments, and to have a road map or [vocabulary](#) for identifying strengths when they come up. Then you can point them out, give them a name and talk about them again. In the process, you will see for yourself the power of a reframed story. You

will watch people who consider themselves bad, helpless or damaged change. They will become aware of their own strengths and resources to help themselves, and they will begin to act accordingly.

More Info

... Listen to youth [talking](#) about survivor's pride

Our Other Core Concepts

[Resilience as Behavior](#) | [Resilience as Struggle](#) | [Survivor's Pride](#) | [Resilience as Paradox](#) | [Vocabulary of Strengths](#) | [Phases of Strengths](#) | [Challenge Model](#) | [Reframing](#) | [Talking About Strengths](#)

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