

But/Or vs. And - The Law of Polarity

There's nothing magical about the Law of Polarity. In fact, you already understand the concept because what the Law of Polarity tells us is that there's a duality in everything. You can't have a positive without a negative. An up without a down. Good without bad. Dark without light. And at life's most basic, you can't have a life without death. Therefore, why would we only focus our thinking on one polarity? Why focus on the negative, the bad, the sad, the downright annoying, when we can switch our thinking to the alternative?

Challenging the word "But" and "Or" can help switch our thinking, a form of COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING, so to speak. It's about finding a way to walk the middle ground, and to shut down uncertainty. Which in turn can assist us in tolerating problems with less distress.

Definition of "But"

1. used to introduce a phrase or clause **contrasting** with what has already been mentioned
2. used to **indicate the impossibility** of anything other than what is being stated

Definition of "Or"

- 1 . used as a function word to **indicate an alternative or afterthought**

When we use the word "BUT" we are negating everything that came before it, leading to uncertainty about how to accept or solve a problem.

*I would like to return to work, **but** I haven't worked in three years.
My case manager wants me to volunteer, **but** I am too anxious about what people will think.*

When we use the word "Or" we forget or dismiss the option that both might be true, leading us to ignore possible solutions.

*Should I focus on my work **or** take care of my life at home.
Do we focus on medical opinion **or** our subjective concerns.*

The truth:

The universe is filled with opposing sides/opposing forces. There is always more than one way to see a situation, and more than one way to solve a problem. Two things that seem like opposites can both be true.

*The day can be sunny **AND** it can rain.
I am working on improving myself **AND** accepting myself exactly as I am.*

By removing the negating word BUT/OR we are restructuring the way we think about a problem. This is not meant to be toxic positivity, but to help us not feel helpless, and to accept that we can also live with challenges we face. The activity challenges thought patterns such as "this is unfair", "why me" and "why now".

Learn to switch off the polarity

Pay attention to the feeling you get when you read the following:

I want to be connected with my community, but my disability makes it hard to get out of the house.

What do you think this person is feeling/thinking? *(They think they don't have a solution; grief with their loss; what else?)*

Read it again now:

I want to be connected with my community, ~~but~~ AND my disability makes it hard to get out of the house.

What do you think this person might be thinking/feeling now? *(Maybe they see that they have a challenge ahead of them, and that they also can look at it differently; Accepting that their disability has caused some loss, and they are also seeing that being with their community is important to them; what else?)*

The “and” provides a kernel more truth and opens them to the possibility for accepting those things that are hard. Tolerating that they may not have any control to change their situation, though it can also provide the first steps to seeing that there might be solutions they have not considered before.

Take a moment to write down some statements you have said about yourself or situations you have found yourself in where you used a BUT or OR:

Now take a moment to write them down differently. Change the BUT to AND, and the OR to AND.

Some things to help you look for both sides:

1. Ask yourself – what am I missing, where is the kernel of truth in the other side?
2. Let go of extremes: Change “either-or” to “both-and”, “always-never” to “sometimes”
3. Embrace confusion: Enter the paradox of the Law of Polarity, of YES and No, True and Not True
4. Play the devil’s advocate: Argue and validate each side of your own position with equal passion
5. Use metaphors and storytelling to unstick and free the mind.