

Procedure for Enhancing Personal Resource Access (PEPRA)

Learn to use better what you already have

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A personal note: *This simple procedure can make a real and positive difference in your life, today. Study, practice, and use the procedure, and you may expect to feel better and to have your psychotherapy go more quickly. I use this procedure myself. It works for me, and makes my life better. I hope you will want to learn more about it, because I believe it will do the same for you. (You should not attempt this procedure, however, if you have painful memories of personal trauma, unless you have the permission and supervision of your therapist.)*

INTRODUCTION

You will learn here about the best parts of your mind and how quickly to make better use of them. There are only three basic topics in this document: (a) "personal resources"—what they are and why they matter; (b) the purpose of PEPRA procedure and how to learn and use it; and (c) the PEPRA procedure itself. I have also provided, at the end, some examples of application of PEPRA to various problems, and some success stories.

PERSONAL RESOURCES

"Personal Resources" – defined

A "personal resource" is something we have in our mind that is useful in dealing with a challenge. Some examples: knowing you have ten dollars in your pocket, when you're hungry; knowing a friend's phone number, if your car breaks down; or the belief that you can ask for what you want, if you need help from someone. When the concern is improving one's mental function and health, the resources of greatest interest are *mental* ones. Anything in our mind that can be used to solve a mental health problem might be considered a "Personal Resource" of interest.

When everything is working at its best, and a mental challenge arises, we will have a mental resource that will allow us to respond adequately. But if we do not respond well, that could indicate

either (a) that we do not have the needed resource, or (b) that we cannot access it, in our mind. Often, our problem is simply one of *access*.

An example: I get invited to speak before a group of parents at a local school, and I'm nervous about this. (The challenge here is to get past my initial self-doubt.) After a few moments, I recall that six months ago I spoke before a group of teachers at another school, and we had a fine time. Suddenly, I'm not nervous. I CAN do this, I now tell myself.

In this example, I did have a relevant Personal Resource (a memory of myself as competent in a similar situation), and I accessed it when needed.

A number of things can function as Personal Resources—skills, feelings, thoughts, memories, or fantasies, and having a good awareness of your resources tends to increase their usefulness to you. Put more simply, a Personal Resource is –

A truth about yourself that you can express in words.

Obviously, you can't tell yourself these truths if you can think of nothing positive about yourself, or if you cannot tolerate it when you DO see something positive in yourself. For some people these problems are very real, and require special attention from a mental health professional, but fortunately this is not usually the case. For most people, useful "Self-truths" can be found, although often one may need help with the task. You will find such help here.

Why Personal Resources matter

Adequate Personal Resources in our mind allow us to respond adaptively (successfully) to challenges. It's that simple. Life throws a curve ball at us and we get a base hit! Since getting more "base hits" is one of the major objectives of psychotherapy, an interest in the adequacy of our Personal Resources makes sense. "Adaptive" responses to challenges

allow us to make good use of our situations--to keep ourselves healthy and even thriving.

Someone who is in psychotherapy to resolve and finish with memories of past traumatic events has particular reason to be interested in Personal Resources. Access to such resources makes the difference between success or failure in psychotherapy. Almost immediately, use of PEPRA can show someone in psychotherapy that they *can* change what their mind feels like to them, thus helping them to feel more in control and more hopeful. This can happen because PEPRA “balances the seesaw”. It creates strong positive vision and feelings, which counterbalances the negative feelings and restricted vision of someone serious affected by psychological trauma, and the anxiety the depression that so often follow. In turn, this “balancing” helps psychotherapy to go significantly faster!

INTRODUCTION TO PEPRA

The purpose of this procedure

Put simply, the purpose of this procedure is to help you make better use of the contents and potential of your mind. Often, this will involve simply improving your ability to remember something that you already know—an important truth about yourself. But you may also have to discover or construct that truth, using materials already in your mind.

What to expect when you do this procedure

Many people discover one or more of the following to be true about this procedure:

The procedure is easy to do. Like anything new, this procedure may be a little awkward for you at first, but this feeling probably won't last long. Most often, if you do the procedure correctly from the first time you try it, you'll learn it quickly and easily.

The procedure produces good feelings. When you do the procedure, you may expect to experience an increase in positive feelings. Your mood will probably become better, more “bright”, and more responsive. Many people also experience a quieting in mind, and a distinct degree of relaxation. Used correctly, this procedure can help

you get to sleep very quickly, if you want to sleep. (And some people report that after doing this procedure they have more dreams and more of them are positive.)

The procedure tends to improve self-esteem and personal effectiveness. Just doing the procedure is an act of self-support, of course, as is true of any self-improvement activity. Being conscious that you're doing it will help improve your self-image. Beyond this, increasing the supply of positive, adaptive mental resources available to you can be fundamentally helpful, that you may expect the confidence you experience in your daily life to increase. This will be most noticeable if you do the procedure while addressing a particular challenge in your life (this last consideration is described below).

Some benefits of the procedure will be immediate, and some may not appear for a while. This is common with “strength-building” procedures, as anyone who does weight lifting knows. Furthermore, the procedure may feel and appear artificial or odd. But the *effects* will not! Professionals of all sorts use focused practice and special procedures to improve their function. You can to, if you want to be serious about making your life better.

How to learn the procedure

First of all, go slowly. The fastest way to learn something is to *do it right the first time*, so don't rush. Set aside some uninterrupted time in which to study the procedure. Focus on each step one at a time. Make sure you understand what you are to do before trying to do it.

Carefully practice each step until you know you are doing it as instructed. Then move on to the next step, until you have learned all the steps.

Then you are ready to practice the entire procedure. Once you learn the sequence, you can use these instructions to prompt you through the steps. Or you might summarize these instructions on a small card that could go in your wallet or purse. (Such a summary is offered at the end of these instructions.)

Practice often. I recommend doing this procedure at bedtime, every night, for about a week. By the end of the week you'll be familiar with it, and you should

be seeing real benefit every time you do it. Practicing right before bedtime can also put your mind in an excellent state for falling asleep, if you focus on the right “personal truth”—something reassuring, comforting, or calming.

Two ways to use the PEPRA procedure

Use the PEPRA procedure to respond to challenges. This procedure works well in relationship to many specific challenges in your life. Some examples of this: you have a phone call to make, and you keep putting it off; you have something to do that you very much want to do, but you still feel somehow a bit nervous about it; you get asked to help someone, and you want to respond, but you don't think you can really be helpful. These examples could go on forever, of course, and in real life they do. Challenges are common in our lives. Competent, successful, adaptive responses to these challenges are less common though, and that's the problem addressed by this procedure.

It is worth noting that challenges are of roughly two types: those which are *threats* and those which are *opportunities* (note, though, that many threatening situations are also opportunities in disguise). If you use PEPRA to respond to an opportunity—such as the challenge of doing a speech, or presentation, or some other kind of “performance” as well as you can, then you are using it for **performance enhancement**, and this is a growing and significant area in contemporary psychology. It is a virtual certainty, for example, that every Olympic athlete uses something very like PEPRA to gain access their full mental resources during this important athletic competition.

Use the PEPRA procedure simply to strengthen your mind. You can use it *without* a specific challenge in mind, simply to change your state of mind, to build fundamental strength of mind. This procedure improves access to your mental resources, and that definitely increases your mind's capacity to thrive in challenging situations.

So, let's learn how to do the procedure.

Procedure For Enhancing Personal Resource Access

1. List some POSITIVE truths about yourself.

An easy way to get started with this is simply to write down a list of some of the things you have done or accomplished today or this week. Simple things are just fine (for example: "I fixed myself breakfast this morning"). Starting with such obvious positive truths will get you moving in the right direction. After writing down a few things of this nature, try to write down some truths about yourself that are more general, that relate to multiple situations.

Here's one such initial list that a person might write down:

- I got the kids off to school on time every day in the past two weeks.
- I balanced the checkbook last night.
- I regularly keep my yard in order.
- I usually pay my bills on time.
- I sometimes get asked to do tough jobs.
- Some people seem to like me.
- I can be a good friend.
- In time of crisis, I can be caring and helpful.

2. Refine and focus your list of "truths".

What will be most valuable, by far, is a set of statements that are about **you**, in the most personal way possible. Those truths really say who you are. So, with each statement you've written, ask yourself "What does this mean? What does this say about me?" Your first draft list may contain items that don't need this refining work, SOME of the items will.

Your goal is a set of *simple* statements about your character, nature, abilities, skills, values, or goals. Use language appropriate for an 8 year old! When you refine a statement so that it is short, plain, and speaks of these sorts of things, write it down and put a mark of some kind next to it so you can easily distinguish from your first-version statements. “Refined” versions of the list of statements given above might read as follows:

- I am helpful to other people I care about.
- I can take care of myself.
- I can be reliable and orderly.
- I can keep promises.
- I can work hard and get a job done.
- I'm a decent person.
- I value people.
- I can stay calm and patient when it counts most.

It is certainly true that an initial version of self-truth statement might be refined and simplified to produce a number of *different* final statements. That's no problem at all.

These refined self-statements are your working List of Personal Resources. They contain great power. They can correct your view of yourself in a specific situation. They can help you act, when you're unsure what to do. They are, above all, truths about you that you easily recognize. You don't want to *lose* these truths, because of what they make it possible for you to do. To the contrary, you want them to be as accessible to you as possible. Creating this kind of good mental function is the central goal of the PEPRA procedure.

3. Optional step: Pick a current challenge in your life, and use it to focus your use of the PEPRA procedure.

You might begin by writing down a brief list of current major life-challenges. Or, you may already well know which of your challenges currently worries you the most. As with your positive self-truths, your challenge descriptions may need refinement. Seek to write descriptions of *specific* challenges. You can't respond to general challenges—only to specific ones!

For simple practice of this procedure, pick an easy challenge in your life. For maximum value from this exercise, however, pick one of your major challenges.

4. Pick a Personal Resource from your List.

If you skipped the previous, optional step, just pick a Personal Resource that particularly interests you at this moment. If you did come up with a particular life challenge, however, pick one of your Listed Personal Resources that suggests something about

you that will help you with your challenge. If you find such a statement, go on to the next step. If you do not, you can usually quickly come up with what you need by answering either of the following questions:

A. "If I were to be successful with this challenge, what would I have to do, or what skill or ability would I have to have?" It might help considerably if you simply *imagine* yourself handling the challenge successfully. Look carefully at specific behaviors and states of mind that contribute to the imagined success. Then, describe what you see yourself *doing* in this little success story that allows you to succeed. For example, you might write this truth about yourself: "In a demanding situation, I can stay focused."

B. "If I saw someone other person mastering this challenge (you could imagine a famous person from history, or a powerful person you know, have heard of, or can imagine), what skill or ability would they use to accomplish this?" Now, do you have this skill or ability? If you recognize it in another person, even an imagined person, you probably have it yourself. If so, a statement about your having it should go on your list.

(If neither of the questions above help you, because you cannot imagine yourself or someone else being successful with your chosen challenge, *but you CAN imagine success in other situations*, consider picking another challenge. The challenge you have chosen may simply be too difficult, or even impossible. But if abandoning a challenge is not an option in your life, consult an expert to help you with your problem. If you cannot imagine success in ANY challenge you look at, be sure to take this important discovery to your psychotherapist.)

5. Activate your Personal Resource.

You now need to *activate* this critical Self-Truth, to "wake up" your awareness of its truth. This is easily done, if you rephrase the truth in the form of a question. For example, suppose your Self-truth is "I can ask for help when I feel overwhelmed at work." To create an active realization of this truth, rephrase this so that it says "Can I ask for help when...?" You'll naturally reply YES to this question, because it refers to a TRUTH--something you already agree with.

6. Enhance access to your Personal Resource.

Having formed the relevant Personal Resource question, ask it of yourself. The moment you feel the YES in your mind, begin bilateral stimulation, as you have been shown by your therapist. Give yourself about 10 cycles (a cycle is one “left-right” set of eye movements or taps, etc.). At that point, if your mind is calm and quiet, you can just quit. If your mind is still lively and interesting to you, however, you can go for another 10 cycles, then quit. Upon ending the bilateral stimulation, let your mind go completely blank (if it isn’t already), take a deep breath, and exhale while releasing any tension you feel anywhere in your body. These steps are important, so learn them correctly.

While it is unlikely that this will happen with most people, should something uncomfortable come up during the bilateral stimulation, just stop. Immediately shift your attention to something you like to think about—anything at all will do. Look at this object or memory for 10 to 30 seconds, letting it fill your consciousness as completely as possible. If you have any problem with this, be sure to discuss this unusual event with your psychotherapist.

SUMMARY OF PROCEDURE

This might be an excellent summary to put on a card that you can place in your wallet or purse:

LRP/PAE: LIST self-truths > **REFINE** and focus > **PICK** challenge (optional) > **PICK** Personal Resource > **ACTIVATE** Personal Resource > **ENHANCE** access

APPLICATION EXAMPLES

Following are my suggestions for application of PEPRA to some problems sent to me readers of this document. In many ways, the first problem addressed will be a model for the others.

Getting to sleep

Getting to sleep is an easier problem than *staying* asleep (because we are conscious for the one condition, but not for the other). Usually there are either of two problems associated with getting to sleep (and they BOTH may be present): (a) poor sleep procedure—you are simply not doing what

needs to be done to allow sleep to occur; or (b) a mind that is distracted, by worries that derive from your imagined future, from your present life, or from troublesome memories. As always, correctly understanding the nature of your challenge is crucial to success. Trying to solve the wrong problem never helps!

Poor sleep habits. Curiously enough, some adults, and many children, have poor sleep preparation procedure. To sleep, your body needs to be relaxed, and your mind quiet. Then, if you are tired, and it is time to sleep, sleep will come.

So, if fatigue level and time of day are not a contributing problem, the relevant question relative to PEPRA is this: do you know how to relax your body and to quiet your mind? Do you actually have such resources to access? If not, then you need to learn these skills, and a visit to your local bookstore or a consultation with your therapist will probably put you in contact with them. Then, you must access them when needed.

Since the challenge here is clear, use it to focus your work, as you start with step one of PEPRA. List positive self-truths relative to your getting to sleep. Then work through the PEPRA steps, refining what you have written and then picking a statement that seems most useful to you in your situation.

As I imagine solving this problem, I see someone producing a truth somewhat like this one: “I can deliberately prepare for sleep, then quiet my mind to allow sleep to come.” Good access to this truth will deal with anticipatory anxiety. You must also *act* on the truth, of course, which is beyond the scope of what PEPRA addresses. I recommend setting up some simple visible reminders, where you go to sleep, to induce *use* of the skills you have.

A mind that is distracted. This can be a very serious problem when it is time to sleep. A significant percentage of people are troubled by bad memories when bedtime approaches. When busy during the day, this is no problem for them. When the day’s activities disappear however, the ever-present bad memories “step forward” in the mind, and sleep will not easily come. At its worst, this problem requires serious effort from you *and* your therapist to manage. But you can try to manage it yourself, first, of course, as many people *have*

successfully managed this problem. Ultimately, however, the permanent solution is completing your EMDR psychotherapy.

With memories, be aware that those from early childhood can be particularly disturbing, and at the same time all but impossible to detect in your mind, as normal methods of “remembering” simply do not work. If you feel a general anxiety, without any idea where it’s coming from, suspect these kinds of memories. Helping you with these kinds of memories is a skill that not all psychotherapists possess.

But part of the problem may be just poor sleep habits. For example, if you find yourself worrying about tomorrow, make a list of your concerns, and write beside each the first step you will take tomorrow to manage the problem. Or you might write your goal beside each of your concerns. That thinking done, most people will then forget about tomorrow.

In general, however, the solution is to refocus your mind at bedtime. You must *strongly* redirect your attention to something that will not produce general anxiety. This is a skill, and outside the scope of PEPRA. Because of the seriousness of the problem, and the consequent necessity that you develop this skill well, it is recommended that you consult your therapist for aid with this problem if you have any real difficulty with it. (Some brief examples of how you might refocus your mind: use a “Safe Place” exercise; use a positive affirmation—a Self-truth that you find comforting and calming; use a simple relaxation exercise, such as Step-Down Stress-Release Breathing, which most of my clients are taught.)

THEN, having learned a skill or skills, you will have but two problems. The first is to know that you have something powerful you can do at bedtime. The second is to remember to do it. If you do this you will access the needed skill.

PEPRA is ideal for the first problem. You can deal with this in exactly the same way as with “poor sleep procedure” (see section above). The second problem is solved, as above, by using some simple visual reminders to DO what you know. Virtually anything that will get your attention and serve to remind you will do this trick.

Upon remembering to do your skill at bedtime, you might want to use steps five and six of PEPRA (“activate your personal resource”, and “enhance access”) briefly to enhance your access to the truth that your skill works for you. There is excellent research to support the idea that this sort of activity will significantly increase the likelihood that *use* of your skill(s) will be successful.

Making healthy choices (food, exercise, etc.)

As with the problem with getting to sleep, first make sure you really have some choices to make. This may take some time for you to develop, as you may need to try a number of approaches until you find what works for *you*.

Let’s assume you do have some simple good choices, however. How can PEPRA help you follow through on what you know would be good for you?

The resource (the fact of your choices), as always, is accessed by remembering—at the critical point in time. As with sleep, I suggest first focusing on truths having to do with your actually having choices. This will build general confidence and expectation of a good outcome—always helpful to have.

Then, set up your memory aids (as in the sleep problem, above). When you get to a critical point (equivalent to bedtime, with sleep), you can simply make your healthy choice. However, I do recommend that, as suggested with the sleep problem, you pause for a moment before acting, and use steps five and six of PEPRA to improve access to your relevant self-truth. For example, your truth might be “I can chose the momentary initial discomfort of exercise, and gain the pleasure of relaxation and health.” Or, more simply, “I can chose vigor and health.”

Dealing with a problem you’re having with another person

This might be a spouse (with whom you too easily fall into resentment, or silence, or some other dysfunctional reaction), or a child (with whom you too easily become frustrated or discouraged).

By now, you’re probably catching on to how to do this. First you need some real choices. This just may

require you to obtain some education, or to assemble the choices from “parts” you already have in your mind. For example, perhaps you already do notice your anger when it occurs, and you do know how to pause, but you haven’t learned the skill of putting the two together. So, learn the skill. Your therapist can help you with this, if needed.

Then, since you now have a choice, use PEPRA to change your expectations about the situation. For example, your personal truth might be “I can now chose to pause and chose another path when I feel anger rising.”

Then, you need to make good use of that pause! For that might be a wonderful time, like the moment before bedtime, for you to use PEPRA to enhance access to some other self-truth, such as “I can ask the person frustrating me for help.” Or “I can use what I’m learning in my parenting class.” A very brief pass through steps five and six of PEPRA ought to do the trick.

You simply want to stay in touch with the best parts of your mind, especially at critical choice points in your life, and PEPRA can greatly help you do this. You can usually trust that good things will result with you do maintain such access to powerful personal truths.

SUCCESS STORIES

Feeling overwhelmed

The weekend I wrote the first draft of this document, I was keenly aware of having major challenges coming from multiple sources. I simply

had a lot to pay attention to, and began to feel overwhelmed and a bit defeated. This was not something I wanted to tolerate. I saw the challenge clearly, then asked myself what truth about myself could help. Almost immediately the thought came: “I can make a list of my concerns, set priorities, then focus on one thing at a time.”

This is completely true, and I know it, as I’ve done it many times. I’d just gotten distracted and lost touch with this truth, which addresses one of my skills. I went immediately to steps five and six of PEPRA, activated my awareness of this truth, then enhanced my access to it. Within five seconds, I felt my mind clear, and I felt eager to get to work. The rest of the day was very productive for me!

Scared by a writing task

A colleague told me of feeling intimidated by a grant proposal she was committed to write. She’s just received a copy of PEPRA, and put it to work immediately. The personal truth she developed was “I can ask for help to keep me focused as I do the actual writing!” As she puts it tersely, “It worked!”

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For more information on his practice, as well as downloadable versions of this and other handouts, visit his website at: <http://www.emdrportal.com/tc/>.

Mental health professionals and clients interested in further information about psychotherapy, psychological trauma, and EMDR-facilitated psychotherapy are invited to visit the **EMDR Portal website** [<http://www.emdrportal.com/>], which Tom has developed and which he manages on an ongoing basis.