

Fruit Expectations

It can be really frustrating when other people do things we don't agree with and we can find ourselves wishing they would just 'get with the program' and do as we expect them to. It's way too easy to fall into the trap of blaming the other person in moments like that, but staying in a place of blame doesn't get rid of frustrations and can hurt relationships when resentment creeps in. Clients often ask me for dating advice about how to change their partners and, believe it or not, I often tell them to look at changing their own beliefs and expectations first. Your expectations of the people you love might be the thing contributing most to your own frustrations.



I often explain this using the example of fruit. When you go to eat a piece of fruit, you pretty much know what to expect because of past experiences with other pieces of that same type of fruit. Your history guides your expectations of the future and sets the stage for what you believe will happen each time you peel a banana or bite into an apple. Your satisfaction, your pleasure, even your sense of comfort is directly related to how good the fit is between your expectation of what will happen and whatever actually does happen. We feel reassured and good when there's a good match and dissatisfied or cautious when there isn't.

People tend to feel most ready to change themselves when they feel good enough exactly as they are!

The same can be said about relationships. I often see clients

setting expectations for the other people in their lives based on what the clients think makes the most sense – that is, basically, what a person thinks someone else ‘should’ do in a given moment. Not surprisingly, when those others behave differently, clients tell me they feel frustrated, disappointed and often hurt. Its at moments like that when couples are most likely to argue. As a result, I regularly hear clients wishing that their partner would change, and saying that all the problems between them would just be gone if only the other person behaved differently. While that would be nice, it’s probably not realistic. We have very little ability to control what other people do. We get way more traction by changing ourselves and the expectations we have of others. While it’s true that your unreliable friend might continue to be unreliable, you might suffer less (and contribute to fewer arguments) by expecting that instead of setting yourself up for continued disappointment by hoping that person will suddenly be different.

This doesn’t mean that we should give in or give up on expecting those people in our lives to ever change or evolve. Change does happen, it just happens over time, and when we wait for and allow that gradual evolution to occur, we (and our important people) can feel happier together in the meantime. Interestingly enough, people tend to feel most ready to change themselves when they feel good enough exactly as they are! Returning to the example of fruit, my expectation of what apples should taste like now is different from what I knew apples to taste like years ago. As the flavours changed over the years, my expectations changed with them – I allowed that mutual evolution to occur by saying “Yep, that’s a bit different from the last one I ate, but that’s still an apple”. So, a piece of advice I can offer on how to improve your relationships is to work at accepting those important people in your life **exactly as they are right now**, even when they do things that differ from what you want. When your loved ones feel like they’re good enough in your eyes, they’ll be most

likely to volunteer to change themselves to make you even happier!



[Dr. Kristina Wilder](#)

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment

We help people make their relationships more successful.

What I Say and What I Mean



Which way I go depends on me.

The human body's ability to survive is an amazing thing. So many different systems all work together to alert us to possible dangers, trigger instantaneous reactions that

automatically sound the alarm, activate the body to deal with threats, then gradually settle everything down and reset it all so the entire system is ready to go the very next time anything seems amiss. Spoken language and logic are important parts of this alarm and defence system, but ones that regularly seem to fade into the background and operate outside of our conscious awareness. This means there can be huge differences between what I say and what I actually communicate to myself.

A trap of language and logic that is typically hidden from view but can activate the body's alarm systems and cause panic occurs with what I call [conditional statements](#). Conditionals refer to situations that can go one way or another, depending on some other variable. You'll know one when you see one because of telltale words like "WHEN" and "BECAUSE".

For example, in a moment of tension, a person who is [afraid of flying](#) might say to herself:

"I will be safe WHEN this plane lands."

If she accepts that statement as true, then the conditional trap means she must also, automatically accept the opposite as true, namely:

"I am not safe UNTIL this plane lands."

If she's not safe UNTIL her plane lands, then her brain will immediately conclude:

"I am not safe NOW!"

and her body's anxiety and panic alarms will instantly fire, even when the flight she's on is actually quite safe and fine. All it takes is that one moment of automatic thinking to set off the alarms.

You can learn to cope with your own [anxiety](#) and worry by

paying attention to the language you use to talk with yourself. Practice noticing when your mind is making conditional statements like these; notice how they activate your body's arousal systems and then decide – really consciously decide – whether you want to allow yourself to panic or regain your sense of calm. You can't stop your body's alarm systems from turning on automatically, but you can learn to ride out those moments of fear and build better coping skills by paying attention to what you're really saying to yourself.

Let us help you learn to cope better with anxiety, panic and worry.

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment

[Dr. Ian Shulman](#)

[How You View the Bees Matters More Than the Bees](#)

The other day, I was out with friends on a beautiful, sunny, weekend morning. We were on an outdoor patio drinking coffee and eating deliciously sweet cinnamon buns from a local bakery. It was a perfect way to spend a morning, knowing summer is over and cooler, fall temperatures will soon be upon us. I noticed some wasps flying around nearby were becoming very curious about the cinnamon buns and I decided in that moment to allow them to do whatever



they wanted and that I wouldn't interfere with them unless they became a bigger nuisance or a danger.

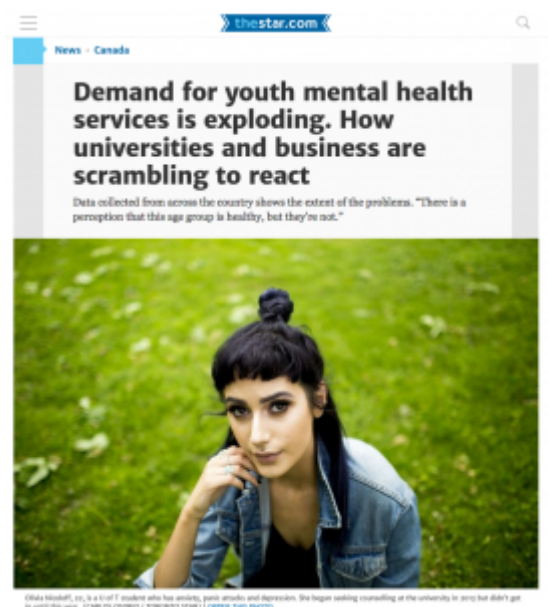
So, I became curious and decided to just observe them flying about, even when that meant allowing them to land on my food and my hand, and to fly close to my face. That decision, to be curious about them instead of automatically and thoughtlessly assuming they were "DANGEROUS!" enabled me to limit any fears I had about being stung and remain calm. Being calm allowed me to continue enjoying the moment and the company I was with. By contrast, one of the other people there kept inching forward uncomfortably on her seat, reaching out, again and again, to swat at the wasps because I wasn't, and another person couldn't even participate in the conversation because she kept leaping away from the table, frantically flailing her arms every time the wasps came near. She became so upset that, after just a few minutes, she abruptly left for home, complaining about how those "STUPID WASPS" ruined her time with friends. In the end, no one was stung and the rest of us finished our snacks without incident.

The key here is that the wasps were really just a couple of insects looking for an easy meal and the decisions all three of us made about whether they were GOOD or BAD, DANGEROUS or SAFE were in that moment. We can all cope more effectively with stress, sadness, fear, anxiety, interpersonal conflict, and whatever else we experience in a day by remembering to tune-in to those labels and judgements we make about things, because it's those labels that determine how we feel right then. In any given moment, we can feel positively when we label something as "Oh good!", negatively when we label it with "Oh no!", or neutrally when we just say "Oh."

Let us help you learn to remain calm and deal better with the challenges in your life.

[Demand for Youth Mental Health Services is Exploding](#)

The [Toronto Star](#) featured an article today about how universities and colleges are scrambling to decide what amount of funding will be needed to address the mental health needs of students, quoting a psychiatrist from McMaster University who said the school's counseling service has "lineups out the door and down the hall." The article goes on to describe surveys showing "a 50% increase in anxiety, a 47% increase in depression and an 86% increase in substance abuse" among Ontario university students, as well as a 63% increase in emergency room visits for mental health or substance abuse treatment by people under 24 years of age.



[The author](#) offered several reasons why the mental health needs of today's students might be so much higher. Most related to societal factors, like how this current wave might be the result of years of chronically underfunded child mental health services, or the expected effects of more recent campaigns to reduce the stigma about mental health issues. Others pointed at trends in parenting and the fact that so many young people

spend more time interacting with screens and electronics than with each other. Either way, the article was clear in stating that many of our kids feel ill-prepared to handle the challenges of young adult life and that on-campus resources aren't enough to handle the demands.

Anxiety, depression, ADHD and general stress are very common reasons why people see the psychologists and therapists here at Shift. In fact, we see more anxiety and depression than any other issues and teach skills young people can use to become more resilient. We also have an assessment team geared specifically toward exploring why students with academic issues might be struggling in school. Our services are covered by extended health benefits insurance and we can usually arrange for a first appointment within 1 to 2 weeks. Call us if you're concerned about your student or get in touch [here](#).

www.shiftct.com

Dr. Ian Shulman

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment Oakville is a psychology practice that helps students to succeed.

Filling Time Versus
FULLfilling Time? – Dr.
Kristina Wilder



As a mother of three young children, I find a frequent challenge in my life is finding time for all of those things I NEED to do and all those things I WANT to do. Many of my clients say they find the same thing in their lives, as well – we live in such a busy world, the time available to do everything feels so limited. Because none of us can create more time, it's that much more important to ensure that we spend that precious resource on things that feel fulfilling instead of on things that just fill the time.

To understand the difference between fulfilling time versus filling time, I often use the example of watching TV. If your favorite show is on from 8 – 9, how often do you watch the show that comes on at 9 “just because” it's on? In this example, the show you look forward to and get excited by would be the “fulfilling” one and the show after it is just “filling”. Paying closer attention to those choices we make every day can help us cut out things that don't really give us what we're looking for in life and leave more time for those activities and things that really do have a positive impact on mood and quality of life.

So, how do you implement this? One simple way to increase your attention to what you're doing is to periodically check in with yourself throughout the day. When you do, ask yourself “Is this really how I want to be spending my time right now?”. If the answer is no, then you've just given yourself an opportunity to make a positive change. You could also start asking yourself 10 minutes after starting a TV show or

activity if you're really enjoying what you're doing just then, or whether you would rather be doing something else.

Increasing your awareness of what you're doing while also keeping in mind what your personal goals are is the aim here. By monitoring your activity "diet" you can see if you are really feeding yourself FULFILLING things, or if you are just FILLING yourself with things that are available but have no real value.

– Dr. Kristina Wilder

Shift Supports

#TeamUnbreakable

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment is very proud to have supported [Cameron Helps](#), a charitable organization whose goal is to protect youth from anxiety, depression and suicide by fostering lifelong exercise through running. Over the past few months, a group of teens attended an after-school program at the [Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre](#) where they



were paired with local runners in a 12-week, learn-to-run program. The group built their endurance, with twice-weekly practice runs, and then competed in the Unbreakable Bold and Cold 5K Run for Youth Mental Health on November 27, 2016. Shift was proud to assist the [#TeamUnbreakable](#) runners by sponsoring the admissions fees for a group of at-risk youth.

More than ever before, we know that exercise is vital to overall health and to good mental health. Research consistently shows that people who exercise regularly have fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety and anger. They have lower rates of psychiatric conditions and report feeling like they have better social connections, another important factor in maintaining good emotional health.

Even small amounts of regular exercise offer big benefits for mental wellbeing. Exercise can restore normal mood when depressed or anxious and because exercise itself is a stressor on the body, regular 'doses' of it leave the body better able to cope when stressful challenges occur in daily life. Exercise also increases the brain's production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter known to be strongly related to anxiety and depression.

[Support #TeamUnbreakable and Cameron Helps](#) in their efforts to promote mental and emotional wellbeing in youth – and get out and exercise!

Bring Conscious Awareness to Your Actions

Human bodies are exceptionally good at making complicated things routine, like driving cars down busy roadways at the same time that we're singing along to music and adjusting the mirrors. This is really useful because it means I don't have to waste my precious mental resources relearning everyday things, like how to move my hand to some food and bring it up to my mouth. Once I learn how to do it, my body just does it and I'm free to preserve my very precious resource of

conscious attention for other really important things, like determining which of those things in the environment is safe or dangerous.

One side effect of this continuous automation system is that once something becomes routine, we basically lose sight of the fact that it's happening. It's almost like it becomes invisible and we forget we're even doing it. This can be challenging when it comes to managing stress. Many people speed up when they feel stressed. They try to cope by getting busier and doing more things more quickly. When we cope like that over and over, without any conscious awareness of what we're actually doing, we can end up making challenging situations even worse.

Here at Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment we work to help you tune in to the kinds of invisible thoughts and pressures that drive you to push yourself too hard, and to those behaviours you might still do even when you'd rather not be doing them. Learning how to pay better attention gives you the chance to make new choices, right now, to decide whether you want to continue performing habits that may be familiar but no longer helpful. Visit us at shiftct.com and see more about how we can help you change behaviours that are getting in your way.

www.shiftct.com

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment helps people to cope with stress, anxiety and depression.

The Teen Trap

We regularly see older teens and young adults who feel anxiety and worry when they think about taking their next steps towards school or career. They tell us they often feel bothered by physical symptoms of stress, like tension, irritability, headaches and anxiety, which makes sense – leaving the comfort of something you know well, like the high school or university you've attended for the past four years can feel like a scary thing.

As kids mature into their early adult years, more of their brain comes online, especially those parts that allow them to see the world from a broader perspective. They begin to see how hard the adults in their lives work to succeed and get things done, and they start becoming aware of how some folks do really well, while others struggle.

The 'teenage's trap' is a mental one. It happens when young people put two and two together and realize that they will also have to face the struggles of adult life, but without the benefit of all those extra years of experience that adults rely on to reassure themselves that they'll be okay because they've already made it through so many other challenges before. Young people often make the mistake of believing that they don't have enough of what it takes to be successful and that's when they start worrying and feeling the stress.

We work with adolescents in this situation all the time, helping them learn to cope with anxiety and worries and helping them understand that success in life isn't the one-shot deal they often think it is, but rather the sum total of all the choices a person makes over many years and transcends any single effort that doesn't go as planned. When young adults can lean in and really get into whatever is they're doing right then, they'll find that even the challenges bring

their own reward and the anxious worry disappears.

Congratulations to Dr. Kristina Wilder!



We are very happy to congratulate Kristina on passing all of her exams and achieving the full license to practice as a Psychologist!

Dr. Kristina Wilder is now a full member of The College of Psychologists of Ontario, after passing all of her exams and completing the final steps of her formal, clinical training. We value Kristina's active and thoughtful participation in the treatment and assessment aspects of our clinic and welcome her into the profession!

Kristina works with children, adolescents, adults, families and couples. Read more about her background [here](#).

Introduction to Mindful Living

Next Group January 15 – February 19, 2015

Take a step toward a greater quality of life with a seasoned teacher and cultivate your understanding of the basic principles of living mindfully. Over six weeks, our Intro to Mindful Living program guides participants through a variety of mindfulness practices in an open and supportive environment.



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The workshop covers:

- How to bring mindful awareness into everyday life
- How to contain worries and be present in the moment
- Tools for coping with adversity and life's challenges

The course is open to all adults – no previous experience with mindfulness or meditation is required. Because mindful living reduces stress and the tendency to get stuck in automatic patterns of upsetting thoughts, it is especially helpful for people struggling with anxiety, depression post-traumatic stress, anger, chronic pain and grief.

Registration:

\$300.00 (Covered by most extended health benefit plans.)

Our next group will run on Thursday evenings, from 7 – 8 pm, starting January 15 through to February 19, 2015.

Call the office at 905-849-1288 for information or to register.

www.shiftct.com

Shift Cognitive Therapy Oakville is a psychology practice that helps people learn to manage anxiety, stress and depression.