



Wednesday's Child



**Identify Unhelpful
Thinking Styles & Challenge
Unhelpful Thoughts**

Managing Thoughts

It is important to recognise that as human beings our feelings are affected by our thoughts, so depending on how you are thinking will dictate how you feel.

Here are some common thoughts people have that can have a knock-on effect to how we feel – you may recognise some of them!

- Typical – It wasn't raining till I got here!
- The bus is ALWAYS late
- I'll be late for work
- They will all be talking about me when I get in
- The boss won't be happy
- I'll get into trouble
- I'll get pulled into the office
- I'll get fired

As our thoughts become more and more extreme our level of stress/anxiety increases. Recognising what we say to ourselves and changing it to more positive self-talk can be very powerful and significantly improve how we feel.

How does stress/anxiety affect your thinking?

How do your thoughts change when you are stressed or anxious?

Think about the last time you felt stress, anxious or low.

SITUATION – what was going on around you?

Where were you, who were you with, what were you doing?

Thoughts

What were you saying to yourself at this time?

How did those thoughts make you feel?

How helpful were these thoughts?

Common Unhelpful Styles of Thinking

Here are some unhelpful styles of thinking and examples. Identify any that you recognize as having had. There are also some examples of how you can question or reframe each style of unhelpful thinking.

Unhelpful Style of Thinking	Example	Reframe or Question
Being hard on yourself i.e. I overlook my strengths and focus on my weak points	"I'm no good at that"	Compared to who? How do you know?
Looking on the negative side I tend to focus on the dark side of things	"I have a headache again, wI'm not getting better"	"Even though I still get symptoms on the odd occasion; I'm doing much better than I was"
Gloomy view of the future I overestimate the chances of bad things happening	"Something will probably go wrong anyway"	"I'm going to do everything within my control to make sure everything goes as smoothly as possible"
Mind Reading I tend to assume other people don't like me / think badly of me.	"He doesn't like me"	How do you know? According to who?
Making extreme statements / rules of necessity I often say I "must", "should", or "have to" I want things to be just right / perfect	"I must go for a run tomorrow morning" "I have to make sure this is report perfect"	"I will/can go for a run in the morning" "I am going to make this as good as I can within the time frame I have. My worth is not tied to this report"
Making extreme statements / rules of impossibility "I can't", "won't"	"I can't do that"	What stops you? What would happen if you did?
Generalisations and Universal Quantifiers 'Every time', 'Always', 'Never', 'Only'	"All politicians are corrupt", "I never win" "all men are bastards"	Always? Every? All? e.g all 3 billion of them over space and time?" "Some of the men I have met are bastards but I have met some good ones before/in the past"

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Unhelpful Style of Thinking	Example	Reframe or Question
Cause and Effect Inappropriate use of causal thinking i.e., X leads to Y.	"He makes me angry"	How do you make yourself angry in relation to him or what he does? "She gives him grief" How do you know?
Presuppositions Assumptions, ways of thinking and expecting different results.	"I'm playing against Harry on Saturday so I'm going to lose" - Presupposition: I'm going to lose	"Harry is really good, but you never know what could happen, and I'm going to do what I can to play my best and beat him"
Catastrophising Viewing or presenting a situation as considerably worse than it actually is	I am never going to find the right partner.	"Being single does not make me a bad person, nor does it mean that I'm unworthy of love or going to be single forever."
Complex Equivalence X = Y and that's just how it is.	"He doesn't love me, he doesn't bring me flowers"	How does his not bringing you flowers mean that he doesn't love you? "Just because he doesn't bring me flowers, doesn't mean he doesn't love me. He shows his love in other ways"

Other Types of Unhelpful Thoughts & Self-Talk

Here are some common types of thoughts that we say to ourselves:

- "What if ..."
- "I can't cope with ..."
- "What is the point ..."
- "How do I get out of ..."

Other Questions to Tackle Unhelpful Thoughts

- What is the evidence to support this thought?
- Is the thought actually true?
- What alternative views are there?
- What would other people say?
- Does this thought help me?
- Does this way of thinking hold me back? How?
- What unhelpful thinking styles have I noticed?
- What was the result of those unhelpful thoughts?
- What can I do to change the situation?
- Is my thought based on fact or feeling?
- How likely is it that my fear will come true?
- Will this still matter in a week? A month? A year?
- What would I tell a friend if he/she had the same thought?
- If it did happen, what could I do to cope with or handle it?
- Am I falling into a thinking trap, e.g. catastrophizing or overestimating danger?
- Are you looking at the bigger picture?
- How much worry is the situation worth?

Challenging Negative and Unhelpful Thoughts

Recognising that your thoughts might be biased enables you to answer yourself back and provide a more realistic or balanced response.

Use the columns below to write down some examples of unhelpful thoughts you have had and then try and come up with a more balanced thought. If it helps, think about what you would say to a friend who was thinking that way.

Unhelpful Thought	Balanced Thought
Medical procedure "I will not wake up from the anesthesia."	"The risk of complications is extremely low, and I'm healthy. I will be just fine and will feel a lot better as a result of the procedure."

The aim is to get faster at 'catching' these stress-provoking thoughts, recognising the thought biases and answering back to them straight away. It takes a lot of practice, so you will need to keep giving this a go, but it really does work.

Learning to Think Positively

The same as negative thinking can be learnt, positive thinking can also be learnt over time. You have to practice. Here are some positive statements to practice daily:

- I can overcome this
- I am able to deal with this situation
- I can ask for help if I need it
- Things will get better for me
- I can take control
- I do have choices
- I've done this before so I can do it again
- This has happened before and I've been ok
- These feelings are not dangerous
- Everyone has bad days and that doesn't mean they are useless
- Okay that didn't go as well as it may have but that doesn't mean I am useless
– people wouldn't say I did a good job if that was true

You can also write down your own, and use daily affirmations.