# Thoughts & Feelings

> negative thoughts → negative emotions → increased pain

**Our moods depend on what we think**.  Negative thoughts lead to negative emotions.  Negative emotions have physical effects on the body, and can increase your pain for nothing.

Negative thoughts are generally automatic; they pop into our minds without us choosing them.  **Negative thoughts are NOT always facts**, even though they might seem convincing at the time.  There are many important errors in our negative thinking.  By identifying these thinking styles/errors we can start to challenge our negative thinking, making our thoughts more realistic and helpful.

How to challenge your negative thoughts:

1. Identify your negative thoughts:  When you notice your mood change (you suddenly feel more stressed, anxious or low in mood), see if you can identify what just went through your mind.  Write down these thoughts on a thought record.  To help identify your thoughts, ask yourself the following questions: What does this say or mean about me? About my life? About my future? What am I afraid might happen?  What is the worst thing that could happen?

2. Can you spot any particular thinking styles?

3. Ask yourself the questions to help you challenge your thoughts (see sheet)

4. Write down a more positive, realistic or helpful alternative thought

# THINKING STYLES

**CATASTROPHISING:**
- concluding that the situation is much worse than it actually is
- includes **labelling**, where you apply unreasonable labels to yourself or others

eg. *"these symptoms mean I am very ill", "tonight will be totally unbearable", "it was a disaster", "I'm stupid", "I'm useless"*


**OVERGENERALISING:**
- using absolute words such as never, always, everyone, everything
- taking one incident and believing it applies to everything

eg. *"everything always goes wrong for me", "I can't do anything"*


**FORTUNE-TELLING:**
- predicting things will turn out worse than likely

eg. *"I will make a fool of myself", "What if …?", "my pain is bound to get worse"*


**MIND-READING:**
- drawing unjustified conclusions about other people's motives or opinions
- thinking that you know what others are thinking

eg. *"they don't believe that I'm in pain", "they won't like me if I don't join in"*


**BLAMING:**
- putting too much responsibility for negative events onto yourself
- blaming others for things that go wrong

eg. *"It's my fault", "I am completely to blame", "they did it on purpose"*


**NEGATIVE MENTAL FILTER:**
- not considering all the facts, discounting positives, only focusing on negatives

eg. *"everything went wrong today", "yes, but…", "that doesn't count"*


**BLACK AND WHITE THINKING:**
- All or nothing thinking, perfectionism

eg. *"if I'm not perfect then I'm no good", "if I can't do it like I used to then there's no point at all"*


**THE TYRANNY OF "SHOULDS"**
- Using words such as "should", "must", "ought"
- Setting unnecessary or arbitrary standards for yourself or others

eg. *"I should be able to do this without problems", "I ought to have done better", "others ought to know how I'm feeling and be more understanding"*


**EMOTIONAL REASONING:**
- Using emotion to verify your beliefs

eg. *"I felt awful so it must have been awful", "I feel depressed so life must be bad"*


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| A day in the life of Mr. Bloggs | What thinking errors is he making? |
| --- | --- |
| Mr Bloggs wakes up and thinks "it's going to be a bad day". | FORTUNE TELLING |
| Whilst making breakfast he accidentally spills the milk and thinks "I always make a mess of things" | OVERGENERALISING |
| He goes out for a walk and thinks "I should be able to walk much further than this; it's no good if I can't do it as well as I used to" | SHOULDS<br>BLACK AND WHITE THINKING |
| On the way home he goes to the supermarket.  As he returns home he realises he's forgotten something.  He thinks "I'm so stupid" | LABELLING |
| He goes for a drink with a friend and thinks "they don't really like me; they think I'm boring.  It's my fault they didn't enjoy the evening" | MIND READING<br>BLAMING |
| When he gets home his partner asks about his day.  He replies "everything went wrong, it was a disaster" | NEGATIVE MENTAL FILTER<br>CATASTROPHISING |

# Questions to help you challenge your negative thinking:

1. Have you had any experiences that show that this thought is not completely true all the time?

2. What is the evidence for this thought? Is there any alternative explanation? Are you jumping to conclusions? Are you confusing a thought with a fact?

3. If your best friend or someone you loved had this thought, what would you say to them?

4. If your best friend or someone who loves you knew what you were thinking, what would they say to you? What evidence would they point out?

5. When you are not feeling so bad, do you think about this kind of situation differently?

6. Are you setting yourself an unrealistic or unobtainable standard? Are you expecting yourself to be perfect?

7. Are you ignoring the positive information and only focussing on the worst bits?

8. Are you blaming yourself or others for something that really could not be helped?

9. Are you predicting the future? Are you overestimating how likely an event is? Are you overestimating the chances of disaster?

10. Are you underestimating what you can do to deal with the situation?

11. Do these negative thoughts help or hinder you? Is the way you are thinking now helping you to achieve your goals in life? Or is it standing in your way? What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking this way?

12. Have you coped in the past with this kind of situation, and if so, how?

**An example of a completed thought record**

| Situation | Moods | Negative thoughts | More helpful thoughts | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Flare up of pain | Anxious 80%<br>Frustrated 80%<br>Low 80% | It's never going to end | This is fortune telling [thinking error] – I am predicting the worst. I know from experience the pain will ease off soon; I will use my setback plan and relax as much as possible. | Anxious 40%<br>Frustrated 30%<br>Low 30% |
| Went to shop but forgot one item | Frustrated 80%<br>Angry 70% | I'm so stupid<br>I should have remembered it<br>I must go back and get it now | [thinking errors: labelling, shoulds]<br>It was an easy mistake to make, it doesn't matter. I don't need to go back and get it now, it would be much better to pace my activities. | Frustrated 20%<br>Angry 10% |
| Unable to complete an activity I used to be able to do. | Depressed 70% | I can't do anything any more<br>I'm useless | [thinking errors: overgeneralisation, labelling, negative mental filter]<br>There are lots of things I can do. If I do this activity differently next time and pace myself or build up to it then I might be able to achieve it. If not, there are plenty of other things I can do. This means I'm not useless. | Depressed 30% |

# THOUGHT RECORD

| Situation | Moods | Negative thoughts | More helpful thoughts | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Who?<br>What?<br>Where?<br>When? | What emotions do you feel? (use one word to describe each mood)<br>How strong is the emotion?<br>(0-100%) | What was going through your mind?<br>What are you afraid might happen?<br>What does this mean about you? | What thinking error did you make?<br>What's the evidence that your thought is true or not true?<br>Ask yourself the "questions to help challenge negative thinking" | What emotions do you feel now?<br>How intense is the emotion?<br>What will you do now? |