

thinking & feeling

People often believe that the feelings and emotions they experience are determined by external events, situations, and the behaviour of others. For example, we may hear ourselves say, "My boss made me so nervous," "My partner made me so angry," "This trip down south made me feel so relaxed," or "I'm depressed because I didn't get the job I wanted." What is the assumption underlying these statements? That someone or something other than ourselves was directly determining the feelings we experienced.

We come to these conclusions automatically without asking ourselves if this assumption is true. However, if we stop to analyse the process that links an external situation to our emotional responses, we will find that there is a step in between.

How Our Thoughts Influence Our Feelings

What really makes us feel and respond the way we do, is often not the situation or the words and actions of another person, but how we perceive that situation or that person's actions. It is how we see something or someone and what we think about it or them that really influences how we feel. It is our thoughts and beliefs about an event that significantly influences our emotions and actions.

Here's an example. Suppose you went to a party and your host introduces you to Mike. As you talk to him, you notice that he does not look directly at you but often looks around the room. How would you feel if you thought, "Boy, this guy is so rude! He won't even look at me while I'm talking with him! How nasty!" What if you thought, "Mike must think that I'm really unattractive and uninteresting. I must be a really boring person. Nobody wants to talk to me!" What about if you were to think, "Mike's probably waiting for a friend to come. Maybe he's getting a bit anxious." You probably realised that you felt three different emotions as a result of those three different thoughts. Often, we are not aware of our thoughts and beliefs because they are so automatic and happen quickly. But they are there, and they affect the way we feel.

What am I Feeling?

It is often difficult to know exactly what we are feeling, and sometimes it can also be difficult to put it into words. The list below contains words that describe feelings, and this might be a useful starting point in you being able to understand the connection between your thinking and your feelings.

Words That Describe Feelings

Tense	Enraged	Frightened	Cheerful
Annoyed	Happy	Panicky	Euphoric
Unhappy	Exhilarated	Frustrated	Mad
Exuberant	Keyed-up	Scared	Uneasy
Anxious	Irritated	Flat	Sad
Depressed	Joyful	Tired	Discouraged
Angry	Excited	Nervous	Jealous

This is only a limited list but it should give you an idea of the kinds of words we could use to describe our feelings.

Automatic thoughts

Just as we are not always conscious of the way we walk or how we drive a car, we are often not aware of our thinking. Some of our thinking is so habitual that it is automatic, and just like driving, when things are automatic, we might not be conscious of them. All of the time, our brains are turning over thoughts and ideas. However, we are not consciously aware of most of them because it happens relatively fast and we are not accustomed to slowing them down. Our automatic thoughts, however, play an important role in our emotional well-being.

There are three kinds of automatic thoughts:

Neutral thoughts, e.g. "I think I will buy some bread today."

Positive thoughts, e.g. "This is something I can do really well."

Negative thoughts, e.g. "I often find it hard to concentrate – I must be really stupid."



Automatic thoughts often reflect worries and concerns, however they can be about anything at all, anything we have ever seen, heard or learned. In addition, it can be anything we know about from any source at all. Obviously, though, negative automatic thoughts are the ones that can cause us emotional distress. People who are depressed tend to think negative thoughts about themselves, the world about them, and their future, and it is these thoughts that can be changed to lift your depression.

Feelings are not Thoughts

When we first try to distinguish thoughts from feelings, it can be easy to confuse them. We might be used to talking about thoughts and feelings as being part of the same experience, but it is more helpful to separate them and remember that feelings are not thoughts. For example, you might hear a person saying "I think I'm anxious," but they're probably *thinking* "Everyone will laugh at me," and *feel* anxious. More commonly, you might hear someone saying something like "I feel that my partner doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," when they are actually *thinking* "My partner doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," and *feel* hurt.

Being aware of your feelings and your thoughts is the first step towards feeling better. If thinking influences feelings, then it makes sense that if you want to change the way you feel, you need to change the way you think. Look out for the information flyer entitled "Changing the Way You Think" for more details on how to do this.

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analysing your thinking

We've talked about the way our thoughts affect how we feel. If we are feeling happy and excited, chances are, we have been thinking positive thoughts and about positive things. On the other hand, if we are feeling anxious, depressed, and upset, it is likely that we have been thinking negative thoughts. We call these **unhelpful thoughts** (simply because they lead to unpleasant feelings or unhelpful actions!). All of us, at times, think things that make us feel sad or anxious, and that is a normal part of life. However, if you often feel distressed or anxious, you might need to examine your thinking to improve how you feel.

If unhelpful thoughts lead to distressing emotions, then it might be quite reasonable to say that the most effective thing to do is to change those unhelpful thoughts to helpful ones!

So, how can you do that? To start influencing the way you feel, you need to learn to be aware of, and "capture," those unhelpful thoughts and beliefs, with the ultimate aim of changing them. To do that, let's start with doing an ABC analysis.



The ABC analysis begins with identifying the '**A**' which stands for '**Activating Event**.' Simply write down an event or a situation in which you experienced a strong negative emotion, such as, depression. Record the situation the same way a video camera might record it – just the facts. This means that you do not include your thoughts about why the situation occurred, who was responsible, and how you felt about it. Just describe the event simple, without any 'frills.'

The next step is to identify the '**C**' which stands for '**Consequences**,' and this includes both your feelings and your actions/behaviour. Write down the words that best describe your feelings. When you have written down these words, rate the intensity of the emotion from 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more intense the emotion. Have a look at all those feelings and then choose the feeling that best represents the emotion you actually felt at the time and underline it. You might also want to note any actions that you carried out, for example, drawing all the curtains, putting on the answering machine, and going to bed.

Now, bearing in mind the situation and the feelings you experienced, identify the '**B**,' which represents your '**Beliefs**' or thoughts, expectations, perceptions, and attitudes. Ask yourself "What was I thinking of when the event occurred?" "What was going through my mind at the time?" Write down all of these thoughts in a list. When you have completed this task, read through each statement and then underline the thought that is most associated with the primary emotion you felt during the '**A**.' We'll now call it your **hot** thought. Now rate how much you believe this thought on a scale from 0 to 100.

Let's look at an example. Imagine walking into a party and feeling anxious. To do an ABC analysis, you might ask yourself, "How am I making myself anxious? What am I thinking?" You might identify a thought such as, "I don't want to be here." If you only had this thought, you'd probably not experience a strong emotion but only feel mildly anxious. If you do experience a strong emotional response to this thought, it probably indicates that there are other thoughts underlying this thought. Therefore, the thought, "I don't want to be here" is only an initial thought, and you would need to discover what other unhelpful thoughts were present to invoke such a strong emotional response.

How to Uncover Your Unhelpful Thoughts

By asking yourself a number of questions, you can uncover any other unhelpful thoughts underlying an initial thought. Let's use the example of being at the party to identify the unhelpful thoughts underlying the initial thought "I don't want to be here." The following is a description of the thoughts that might be going through your head as you uncover other unhelpful thoughts. The questions in bold are your unhelpful thought discovery questions.



"I don't want to be here".

"I don't want to be here because...?"

"...people will look at me and know that I am depressed"

"...and that is bad because...?"

"Well, they will think something is wrong with me"

"...and what is bad about that..?"

"...They will think I'm crazy!"

"...and what does that say about me?"

".....that I must be crazy."



Your task is to become an expert at identifying your unhelpful thoughts. Sometimes, one or two thoughts might not represent the other unhelpful ones you might have had. As such, to get to those other thoughts, you might need to ask some of the following questions, called Thought Discovery Questions:

"What is bad about that?"

"What is it that I see happening in this situation?"

"What am I concluding about myself or others in this situation?"

"... and that is bad because ..."

"... and what does this say about me ...?"

It is best to be as specific as you can, even if some of your unhelpful thoughts sound stupid or embarrassing when you think about them. Discovering your unhelpful thoughts, no matter how silly they sound, is important in learning how to better manage your mood.

After you have done this, the next step is to do some 'Detective Work' and 'Disputation.' At this point, it is important that you understand how to identify your feelings and thoughts surrounding a particular situation, especially one in which you experienced unhelpful, negative emotions. When a person experiences unhelpful emotions, they might get a stronger physical reaction in their body, such as a tightness in the chest when anxious, an increase in blood pressure when angry, or a sense of heaviness when depressed. Emotions such as depression, guilt, fear, rage, and anxiety might also lead to avoidance and unhelpful behaviours towards yourself and others, get in the way of effective problem solving, and contribute to long term difficulties such as hypertension, heart disease, interpersonal problems, and psychological problems. Doing the ABC analysis is taking the first step toward learning to better manage your mood and helping yourself feel better.

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changing your thinking

In the handout 'Thinking & Feeling,' we established that it is our thoughts that influence our feelings, emotions, and behaviours – the thoughts and feelings connection. We also discussed and identified some unhelpful thinking patterns and styles that we frequently use. Often, a depressed person will think negative thoughts that are characterised by these unhelpful thinking patterns, which lead them to feel depressed, miserable, and distressed. This, in turn, maintains and perpetuates the depression.

The key to changing the way we feel is found in challenging and changing our unhelpful thoughts and beliefs. This begins with you taking a good hard look at them. Imagine that you are a detective and a lawyer, and your unhelpful thoughts and beliefs are to be investigated or on trial.

To assess whether or not your thoughts and beliefs are valid, you need to gather and examine evidence. As such, we liken this process to that of being a detective. This is the fourth step (or **D**) that follows on from the ABC Analysis.

Detective Work

"**D**" stands for "Detective Work" where you look for evidence that does or does not support your thoughts and beliefs. Like all good detectives, we need to find out the facts, and gather the evidence. Here are some helpful questions:

- Where is the evidence (or proof) that my thoughts/beliefs are true?
- Are there any evidence that disproves my thoughts/beliefs?
- How do I know that my thoughts/beliefs are true?
- Are there facts that I'm ignoring or I've overlooked?
- What other explanations could there possibly be?
- How realistic are my thoughts, beliefs, and expectations?



Disputation

"**D**" also stands for "Disputation." Remember, you are also like a lawyer, asking questions that challenge your thoughts, beliefs and expectations, ultimately testing and challenging whether or not they stand true, and whether they help or hinder you. Here are some other helpful questions to ask yourself:

- What other ways are there of viewing the situation?
- How might someone else view the situation?
- If I were not depressed, how might I view the situation differently?
- Realistically, what is the likelihood of that happening?
- Is it helpful for me to think this way?

Detective work and disputation is about trying to be objective about our thoughts. It is about analysing them, assessing, and evaluating them to see if they are indeed valid and true, as opposed to accepting these thoughts and believing them without question.

The End Result

We've spent some time examining the link between thinking and feelings, and discussed how to identify your unhelpful thoughts and thinking styles. We've also talked about looking for evidence that might prove or disprove your unhelpful beliefs as well as considering other alternative ways of viewing the situation. Now let's look at how you can change the way you are thinking in order to improve how you are feeling.

By this time, you would have learned how to describe an **A**ctivating Event, identify your automatic and unhelpful **B**eliefs and thoughts (including the Hot Thought) that have contributed to your experiencing distressing emotions (**C**onsequences), and recognise a few unhelpful thinking styles you might have used. You would have also used the **D**etective Work and **D**isputation section to challenge your hot thought. Now, take a good look at the evidence you have listed and the answers to the other challenging questions. Is there enough evidence to believe that your hot thought is true all of the time? Are there other alternative explanations?

At this point, ask yourself, "How can I revise my hot thought to take into account all the evidence I have listed?" Then, write out an alternative explanation. This becomes your new, balanced thought. A balanced and helpful thought or belief is one that takes into consideration all the evidence, objective information, and alternative viewpoints. This is the fifth step of the ABC analysis – the **E**nd Result, where you replace your original, unhelpful thought with this new, balanced, and helpful belief.

After you have written down your new, balanced thought or belief, ask yourself, "How do I feel now?" Look at the most intense emotion you identified in section **C**, and re-rate how intense that emotion feels for you now. Often, you will find that it is not as extreme and distressing.

Finally, read through the Detective Work and Disputation section again, and re-rate how much you believe the hot thought now.

This final step of replacing your unhelpful (hot) thoughts with balanced thoughts is very important. Challenging your beliefs and evidence testing is the process of change, but the final step is where you **MAKE** the change. You'll probably find that this process becomes easier after some practice. So keep it up. Keep practising and remember that you can be your own expert at managing your moods!

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improving how you feel

People often believe that the feelings and emotions they experience are caused by external events, situations, and the behaviour of others. For example, we might hear ourselves say, "My partner made me so angry," "My boss made me so nervous," "This trip down south made me feel so relaxed," or "I'm depressed because I didn't get the job I wanted." What is the assumption underlying these statements? That someone or something other than ourselves was directly determining the feelings we experienced. However, if we stop to analyse the process that links an external situation to our emotional responses, we will find that there is a step in between.

What Influences My Feelings?

What really makes us feel and respond the way we do, is not the situation or the words and actions of another person, but how we perceive that situation or that person's actions. It is our thoughts and beliefs about an event that significantly influences our feelings and actions.



Here's an example. Suppose you went to a party and your host introduces you to Mike. As you talk to him, you notice that he does not look directly at you but often looks around the room. How would you feel if you thought, "Boy, this guy is so rude! He won't even look at me while I'm talking with him! How nasty!" What if you thought, "Mike must think that I'm really unattractive and uninteresting. I must be a really boring person. Nobody wants to talk to me!" What about if you were to think, "Mike's probably waiting for a friend to come. Maybe he's getting a bit anxious." You probably realised that you felt three different emotions as a result of those three different thoughts. Often, we are not aware of our thoughts and beliefs because they are so automatic and happen quickly. But they are there, and they affect the way we feel.

Why do I feel distressed?

We've talked about the way our thoughts affect how we feel. If we are feeling happy and excited, chances are we have been thinking positive thoughts and about positive things. On the other hand, if we are feeling anxious, depressed, and upset, it is very likely that we have been thinking negative thoughts. We call these unhelpful thoughts (simply because they lead to unpleasant feelings or unhelpful actions!). All of us, at times, think things that make us feel sad or anxious, and that is a normal part of life. However, if you often feel distressed or upset, you might need to examine your thinking in order to improve how you feel.

Feelings are not Thoughts

When we first try to distinguish thoughts from feelings, it can be easy to confuse them. We might be used to talking about thoughts and feelings as being part of the same experience, but it is more helpful to separate them and

remember that feelings are not thoughts. For example, you might hear a person saying "I think I'm anxious," but they're probably *thinking* "Everyone will laugh at me," and *feel* anxious. More commonly, you might hear someone saying something like "I feel that my boyfriend doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," when they are actually *thinking* "My boyfriend doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," and *feel* hurt.

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

What sorts of thoughts are unhelpful? Unhelpful thoughts are those that tend to focus on the negative aspects of a situation, or those that overestimate the chances of a negative event occurring, or those that place unrealistic demands on yourself or others. These are also often known as unhelpful thinking styles because they are patterns of thinking that have become a habit and contribute to a person feeling unhelpful negative feelings.

What Can I Do?

Plenty! There are lots of things you can do to help yourself feel better, and this next suggestion has been proven to be pretty effective. If unhelpful thoughts lead to distressing emotions, then it might be quite reasonable to say that the most effective thing to do would be to change those unhelpful thoughts to helpful ones! Yeah? Okay, so, how can you do that?

First, identify how or what you are feeling. Then, ask yourself "What am I thinking? What conclusions am I making?" to see how and why you are feeling distressed. Remember, unhelpful thoughts will lead to you feeling upsetting emotions.

The next step is to challenge your thinking by exploring other possible explanations and looking at a situation from different points of view. You might ask yourself, "What other ways are there of viewing this situation? How might someone else view this situation? What other explanations could there be?"



The final step is to ask yourself, "How can I revise my original thoughts to take into account these other possible viewpoints?" Then, think of an alternative explanation. This becomes your new, balanced, and helpful thought. A balanced and helpful thought or belief is one that takes into consideration alternative viewpoints and helps you feel better. Replace your original, unhelpful thought with this new, balanced, and helpful belief. Once you have done this, you will probably find that you feel better and your mood will be improved.

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what are core beliefs?



By now you are probably becoming used to the process of challenging your thinking in a range of situations. You know how to identify the thoughts that are causing you distress and how to challenge them and replace them with more balanced thoughts. However, you might notice that there are times when it is harder to believe the new balanced thought and the old unhelpful thoughts seem to be very powerful. You might notice that this happens in certain kinds of situations.

A possible explanation for this 'difficulty in letting go' of an unhelpful thought is that there may be a strong core belief at the root of that unhelpful thought. **Core beliefs** are the very essence of how we see ourselves, other people, the world, and the future. Sometimes, these core beliefs become 'activated' in certain situations. Here's an example:

Erica is able to challenge her thinking in most situations. However, she has noticed that she has trouble challenging her thinking in situations involving her flatmates and friends. In these situations, she has recognised that her thinking is often about being unlikeable. In fact, when she really looks hard at her thinking, she can see that often the underlying self-statement is, "I'm unlovable."

Core beliefs, such as the one from the above example, develop over time, usually from childhood and through the experience of significant life events or particular life circumstances. Core beliefs are strongly-held, rigid, and inflexible beliefs that are maintained by the tendency to focus on information that supports the belief and ignoring evidence that contradicts it. For example, Erica focuses on any feedback from her flatmates that isn't positive and then uses this to confirm that yet again she is unlikeable. Even neutral statements from her flatmates and friends are often interpreted as negative. Over the years, this narrow focus gives strength to the belief and Erica no longer thinks to question it. It is just totally and absolutely accepted. It is not surprising, then, that these types of beliefs are the hardest to shake.

Identifying Themes from Thought Diaries

So, how can you start identifying your core beliefs? The first step is to look over your Thought Diaries to see if your 'hot' thoughts have any common themes. You might notice that there are certain patterns to your thoughts – similar themes that occur in the B columns. Look closely at these to identify the patterns. You may become aware of one or two common themes found in the things you say about yourself, others, and the world.

Identifying A Core Belief

The process of identifying a core belief is not a great deal different from what you have already been doing in your thought diaries. Essentially, the idea is to extend the hot thought further to reveal the bottom line or root of what you might be thinking. Use questions such as: "If that's true, what does that mean?" "What's bad about that?" "What does that say about me?"

This process is like sifting through the layers of self-talk to get at what is at the bottom layer. Now, you are ready to challenge your core beliefs. Even though these beliefs are strongly held, it is important that they are challenged, just like any unhelpful thoughts. Once you have fully identified what you are telling yourself, you can begin to see if your core beliefs hold up against all that you have experienced. This process of challenging your core beliefs may not be an easy one. If you find the process too difficult or distressing, do consider seeing a mental health professional and discussing this with them.

Challenging Your Core Beliefs

To evaluate and challenge your core beliefs, ask yourself "What experiences do I have that show that this belief is not completely true all the time?" List as many experiences, and be as specific, as possible. Remember to write down everything even when you're not sure if they are relevant.

When you have considered all the experiences you have written down, develop an alternative, balanced core belief. Remember that these experiences show that your unhelpful core belief is not completely true all the time. What would be an appropriate balanced and helpful core belief? Write this down.

Behavioural Experiments

You could also try doing a behavioural experiment to challenge those hard-to-budge unhelpful core beliefs. The purpose of doing an experiment is to find out how true your core beliefs are. Here's how you could conduct an experiment.

1. Write down the core belief you want to test
2. Think of a few tasks you could do to test your core belief
3. Write down what you would expect would happen if your core belief were true
4. Carry out the tasks
5. Record what actually happened when you carried out the tasks
6. Compare the actual results with your prediction and write down what you might have learned from the experiment. Then, write down a new balanced belief that fits with your conclusion.

Following Through

You might find it useful to write your balanced core beliefs onto cards that you can carry around with you as a reminder when this type of thinking is triggered. Once you've developed balanced core beliefs, follow through on them. Balanced core beliefs require careful nurturing and 'tender loving care.' Affirm yourself by using positive self-statements, remind yourself of all the evidence against the unhelpful core belief. Also, **act against** your unhelpful core belief. Ask yourself, "If I really believed my balanced belief, what are the things I would do?" Then, go out and do them. The more you do these things, the more you will come to believe your balanced beliefs. Over time, these new core beliefs will be integrated into your belief system.

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unhelpful thinking styles

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these, "unhelpful thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness. However, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. This information sheet describes a number of "unhelpful thinking styles". As you read through them, you might notice some thinking patterns and styles that you use consistently. Some of these styles might sound similar to one another. They are not meant to be distinct categories but to help you see if there is a kind of pattern to your thoughts.

Mental Filter:

This thinking style involves a "filtering in" and "filtering out" process – a sort of "tunnel vision," focusing on only one part of a situation and ignoring the rest. Usually this means looking at the negative parts of a situation and forgetting the positive parts, and the whole picture is coloured by what may be a single negative detail.

Jumping to Conclusions:

We jump to conclusions when we assume that we know what someone else is thinking (mind reading) and when we make predictions about what is going to happen in the future (predictive thinking).



Personalisation:

This involves blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong or could go wrong, even when you may only be partly responsible or not responsible at all. You might be taking 100% responsibility for the occurrence of external events.

Catastrophising:

Catastrophising occurs when we "blow things out of proportion", and we view the situation as terrible, awful, dreadful, and horrible, even though the reality is that the problem itself is quite small.

Black & White Thinking:

This thinking style involves seeing only one extreme or the other. You are either wrong or right, good or bad and so on. There are no in-betweens or shades of gray.

Shoulding and Musting:

Sometimes by saying "I should..." or "I must..." you can put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself and others. Although these statements are not always unhelpful (eg "I should not get drunk and drive home"), they can sometimes create unrealistic expectations.

Overgeneralisation:

When we overgeneralise, we take one instance in the past or present, and impose it on all current or future situations. If we say "You always..." or "Everyone...", or "I never..." then we are probably overgeneralising.

Labelling:

We label ourselves and others when we make global statements based on behaviour in specific situations. We might use this label even though there are many more examples that aren't consistent with that label.



Emotional Reasoning:

This thinking style involves basing your view of situations or yourself on the way you are feeling. For example, the only evidence that something bad is going to happen is that you feel like something bad is going to happen.

Magnification and Minimisation:

In this thinking style, you magnify the positive attributes of other people and minimise your own positive attributes. It's as though you're explaining away your own positive characteristics

unhelpful thinking styles

black & white thinking

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black & white thinking

When it comes to sports, you may have heard some people say something like "There are no prizes for second place" suggesting that there is only one winner and the rest are losers. It's almost as if being the second best in the world is nothing to be proud of. Similarly, the student who comes home with a report card with a B for Math and A's for everything else and thinks "I'm a failure." is using black and white thinking.



Perhaps you've said something similar to yourself, "If my partner and I don't always agree, then we have a bad relationship", or "If I'm not the best at what I do, then I'm worthless".

We call this all-or-nothing thinking, or black-and-white thinking because you will tend to see only one extreme or the other. With this thinking, you are either right or wrong, you are either good or bad - there are no in-betweens, no shades of grey, and no middle ground.

If you used this kind of thinking consistently, how do you think you'd start to feel?

When we judge ourselves, others, or the situation, based on these extremes, without seeing the shades of grey in-between, it can be very easy to feel negative emotions, such as disappointment, frustration, anger, and anxiety if we think that we, or others, are not clearly in the desired category of "good" or "right" and so on.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?

unhelpful thinking styles

catastrophising

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catastrophising

When someone says "you're blowing things out of proportion", or "you're making a mountain out of a molehill", chances are the person is catastrophising. This style of automatic thinking often begins with the following phrases; "What if !!!" or "Oh no! ..."

Let's try some examples.

"What if I blush in front of people and they realise I am anxious!"

"Oh no! I have a chest pain! I might be having a heart attack"

"What if I disagree with my partner on this I will lose an important relationship!"

"I feel depressed this morning...what if I will stay depressed?"



All of these examples get at the essence of this unhelpful thinking style - that the person views the situation as terrible, awful, dreadful and horrible. Sometimes unhelpful thoughts will also include other unhelpful thinking styles – notice, for example, the appearance of a bit of overprediction and a bit of jumping to conclusions, as well as catastrophising.

Let's look at this final example. Have you ever submitted a project, perhaps at work, and then realised that you'd made a small error? You might think "I can't believe I made that mistake. This is going to be a poor submission, I'm going to lose the account and probably lose my job. I'll probably never find work in this city again!" What do you think it would be like for someone with this style of thinking? Even though the reality is that the problem itself is quite small, when we catastrophise, things can get very big very quickly, and we can work ourselves up to a point where it all seems beyond our control.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?

unhelpful thinking styles

emotional reasoning

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emotional reasoning

This is a style of unhelpful thinking whereby you base your view of situations, yourself, or others, on the way you are feeling.

Have you ever felt anxious about something and thought to yourself, "I know this isn't going to work out well" and everything turned out just fine? If you



have, it's likely that you were using emotional reasoning. In this case, we tend to take our emotions as being evidence for the truth.

For example, you might be walking down the street and think "I feel anxious, so I know something dangerous is going to happen", or "I feel so depressed, this must be the worst place to work in".

It's like we're saying to ourselves "I feel, therefore it is" - rather than looking at what real evidence there may be. There might be no other evidence to suggest that something dangerous might happen, or that it is the worst place to work in. The only evidence you may be using is how you feel.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?

unhelpful thinking styles

jumping to conclusions

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these, "unhelpful thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness. However, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. One of these thinking styles is called "jumping to conclusions".

Jumping to conclusions

Most of us would have heard the phrase "You're jumping to conclusions!" meaning that a conclusion is being made without really knowing if there is any evidence to support it. Although we might like to think that if we "have a hunch" about something it is usually right, there are times when we are not right. There are times that we keep jumping to the wrong conclusion, or the conclusions are usually negative. When we do this consistently then we can cause ourselves quite a bit of distress. There are two ways in which we often jump to conclusions – mind reading and predictive thinking.

Mind reading

As the name suggests, this is where we jump to conclusions because we assume that we know what someone else is thinking, or we know the rationale behind someone else's behaviours. This happens to be a very common style of thinking.

Have you ever had this experience? You are talking to someone, and during the conversation they look at their watch? Perhaps you've thought, "they must think I'm a really boring person", or "they don't want to be here with me."

If you jumped to these conclusions without looking closely at all the evidence, such as the fact that the person is expecting an important phone call soon, do you think you'd end up feeling happy or distressed?

Often these conclusions are a reflection of how we think about ourselves, eg, "I think I'm boring," "I think I'm not good enough", "I always do things wrong". Often we jump to the conclusion that because we think poorly of ourselves, then others must too.

Predictive thinking

We also jump to conclusions when we begin making predictions about what is going to happen on some future occasion, like we're gazing into a crystal ball. This is a very common way to increase anxiety and stress.



These are often predictions where you overestimate the negative emotions or experiences you are going to encounter. Think through this example. You're asked to give a talk to a group of people, and you think "I'm going to get in there and forget what I'm supposed to say, stumble over my words, and completely stuff up the presentation, and this will be terrible". You believe this despite the fact that you have delivered many successful presentations in the past. How might you feel if you believed this overprediction?

Can you think of a situation where you have used these thinking styles?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?
Mind reading		
Predictive Thinking		

unhelpful thinking styles

labelling

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labelling

You can probably think of times when you've bumped something off the table, or dropped a glass while washing the dishes and perhaps thought to yourself, "I'm such an idiot!" Or perhaps a friend doesn't call you to say they can't make it to your birthday dinner and you think, "They are so inconsiderate". It's a little like overgeneralising about people.

When we make global statements about ourselves or other people, which are based only on behaviour in specific situations, then we are labelling. The problem is, that by defining a person by one specific behaviour - and - usually one that we consider negative, we ignore the other positive characteristics and actions.



If you were to consistently label yourself or others in this way, what effect do you think this would have on how you feel?

If you were to step back from the situation and take a closer look, you might realise that breaking a glass doesn't mean that you're an "idiot", and the fact that you are competent in your job, or can communicate effectively with your family, might suggest otherwise. Similarly, your friend may have acted kind and considerate at other times, but something may have prevented them from calling.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?

unhelpful thinking styles

magnification and minimisation

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magnification and minimisation

This is the binocular effect on thinking. Often it means that you enlarge (magnify) the positive attributes of other people and shrink (minimise) your own attributes, just like looking at the world through either end of the same pair of binoculars.

Disqualifying your own attributes for achievement has negative effects. Think of the times in your own life where you might have said, or heard others say,

*"Oh, that doesn't count, I was just lucky", or
"They don't really mean it, they were just being polite".*

When you use this binocular style of thinking, you ignore the positives about yourself, discounting them as though they are not important.



In this way you might 'water down' positive experiences, and even transform them into negative ones. It's as though you're being so humble you're putting yourself down.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?

unhelpful thinking styles

mental filter

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mental filter

When we use a *mental filter*, we "filter in" some information, while we "filter out" other types of information. Although we might sometimes consider this a useful process by focusing on what we consider important, it can also become a sort of "tunnel vision" - where we focus on only one part of a situation and ignore the rest. Often, this means looking at the negative parts of a situation and forgetting the positive parts.

Here is an example:

Maybe you are out with your partner having a romantic dinner, and at the end of dinner you have a disagreement about whether to leave a tip or not. Perhaps you stew on this disagreement in the car all the way home.

What do you think the effect of this thinking style will have on the way you feel?



Notice that in this example you are dwelling on a single detail out of the very many details that occurred during the entire night. Notice that the detail you are dwelling on happens to be negative.

You have excluded other details of the whole picture, which means that you are not remembering all the other positive experiences of the night. If you focus on this negative bit, then it is likely that you'll keep experiencing the negative feelings that go along with it.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?

unhelpful thinking styles

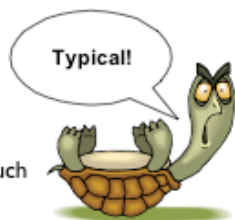
overgeneralisation

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these, "unhelpful thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness. However, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. One of these thinking styles is called "shoulding and musting".

overgeneralisation

The key element in this unhelpful thinking style is to take one instance in the here and now, and to impose this on all future situations.

Perhaps you've said to yourself in the past "This is just so typical!" telling yourself that this is "how things always are", or "everyone's like that", or "things never turn out well for me", when, in fact, there are only a few examples to go by. Making broad, generalised and global conclusions on the basis of only a little evidence can leave us thinking that things are really uncontrollable, inevitable and out of our hands. A sense of helplessness often accompanies such overgeneralisations.



If you think about personal relationships, you might notice a few overgeneralisations. Have you ever said, or heard, something like, "You never do anything romantic for me", or "I always have to take out the garbage", or "Everyone keeps having a go at me", or "Every night I come home, those kids have always left a mess!"

Notice that these unhelpful thinking styles often include words like, "all", "never", "always" and "every", when, in most cases, the "always" and "never" are not as solid as we might think they are. How do you think someone would feel if they used this thinking style? They may feel frustrated, discouraged, depressed, or annoyed, amongst other things.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?

unhelpful thinking styles

personalisation

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these, "unhelpful thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness. However, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. One of these thinking styles is called "personalisation".

personalisation

Can you think of some occasions when something hasn't gone quite as you wanted, or the way you expected, and you've blamed yourself totally for what's happened? The toast burns at breakfast, and you blame yourself not the toaster, your child plays a wrong note at a concert, and you blame yourself for not making him practice harder. Without realising it, you relate external negative events to something you have or have not done.

When you personalise something, you take total responsibility for external events occurring, and ignoring other important factors. As a consequence you end up blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong or that could go wrong - even when you may only be partly responsible, or not responsible at all.

If you were to consistently say to yourself, "This is my fault", "I'm to blame" – how do you think you'd start to feel?

Carrying 100% of the responsibility is a rather large burden to bear, and one that's likely to leave you feeling discouraged or overwhelmed. It's tough trying to carry the world on your shoulders.



Although accepting responsibility for your actions is considered a positive characteristic, it is unhelpful to accept total responsibility for events that are beyond your control, or to accept more responsibility than is your share.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?

unhelpful thinking styles “shoulding” & “musting”

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these, "unhelpful thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness. However, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. One of these thinking styles is called "shoulding and musting".

“shoulding” & “musting”

It is quite common in everyday language to hear people use "I should", and "I must" statements. Sometimes it's not necessarily unhelpful to think, "I should get my work in on time" and it can even be quite important to think "I should not get drunk and then drive home". However, these types of statements become unhelpful when you use "should" and "must" statements to put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself.

We might say

"I should get things right", or

"I must never get upset with my partner", or

"I should always cook exquisite meals."

Using "should" and "must" in this way often leads to unrealistic expectations.

How do you think someone would feel after making these kinds of statements over and over again – consistently setting the bar too high to reach? Chances are, they'll feel guilty or disappointed in themselves.



We may also use these types of statements when we are talking about other people

"She should know better than that",

"People should always keep their promises",

"I can't believe they just cut in front of my car! They shouldn't drive like that!".

You might have guessed that these kinds of statements leave us feeling frustrated or angry and disappointed in others.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?