

Identifying and Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

The way that we think about things has an impact on our mood, anxiety and stress levels. Many of these thoughts occur outside of our control and can be negative or unhelpful. It is therefore important to remember that they are just thoughts, without any real basis, and are not necessarily facts. Even though we may believe a lot of our unhelpful thoughts when we are feeling low, anxious or stressed, it is good to remember that they should be questioned as they are often based on wrong assumptions.

Are you thinking about things in an unhelpful or unrealistic way?

Once you have identified this you can start to make positive changes to this. By doing so, you can learn to see things in a more realistic light which can help to improve your mood and reduce your anxiety or stress levels. You might have unhelpful thoughts about all kinds of things.



Unhelpful thoughts you may experience:

About Yourself	About Others	About the World	About the Future
I'm boring	No-one likes me	Life is unfair	Things will never get better
I'm ugly	People are out to get me	The world is a horrible place	What is the point in continuing?
I'm a failure	Everyone is better than me		I'm destined to fail

It is important to start recognising an unhelpful thought. Then you can challenge it. Being aware of the common patterns that unhelpful thoughts follow can help you to recognise when you have them.



Unhelpful thinking styles taken from <https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/unhelpful-thinking-styles/>

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking

Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'.

If I'm not perfect I have failed.

Either I do it right or not at all.

Over-generalising

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw.

Mental filter

Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes.

Disqualifying the positive

Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another.

That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking).
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future).

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation

Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important.

Emotional reasoning

Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot.

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed.

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration.

Labelling

Assigning labels to ourselves or other people.

I'm a loser.
I'm completely useless.
They're such an idiot.

Personalisation

"this is my fault."

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault.

Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

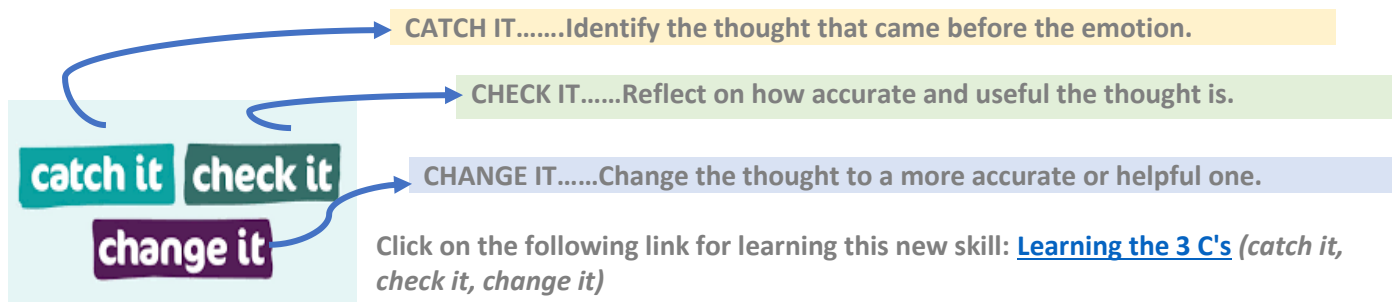
The following strategy is helpful in beginning to challenge your thoughts:

THINK! Ask yourself if your thought is?

Is it true?	Is this thought FACT or opinion? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What IS true about this situation? What ARE the facts?
Is it helpful?	Is this thought helpful to me? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What WOULD be helpful to think, right now? Inspiring or Important? Does this thought inspire me, or is it very important, right now? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What IS important, right now?
Is it necessary?	Do I really need to believe and act on this thought? Immediately? Later? Never? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What IS necessary to do, right now?
Is it kind?	Is this thought kind to me? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is this thought kind to others? Is it kind about others? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What WOULD be kind, right now?

If you answer **NO** to any of these THINK questions, you can safely dismiss the thought. Choose a new focus of attention!

Changing Unhelpful Thoughts



Check the Appstore on your device for this helpful resource:



CBT Thought
Record Diary






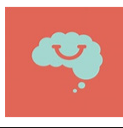
- Keep a diary of unhelpful thoughts
- Help identify unhelpful thinking styles
- Challenge and dispute your unhelpful thoughts

Having suicidal thoughts? Discuss with a loved one, call Samaritans on **116 123** or access your **G.P.** or **Crisis Service** via **NHS** on **111**.

Our recommended resources (click for direct access):

NHS Inform	Offers the most up-to-date advice on dealing varying mental health difficulties, including the 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing. Please visit: NHS Inform
Wellbeing	Our website offers a variety of self-help materials, groups, and courses for all sorts of problems that you may be facing. Anyone can download the self- help materials. Please visit: Wellbeing Website Glasgow
Mental Health Foundation	A range of content designed to give you more information about mental health and to help you to look after your mental health. Please visit: Your Mental Health - Mental Health Foundation
NHS Every Mind Matters	Interactive website providing you the opportunity to complete a short quiz which creates a Mind Plan of what you can do to improve your mental health. Please visit: Every Mind Matters
Psych Central	Run by mental health professionals offering reliable, trusted information to individuals struggling with a mental health. There is also an excellent quiz section allowing you to find out more about your symptoms and how to manage these. Please visit: PsychCentral for Mental Health
MIND	Information hub provides advice on how to support your mental wellbeing. Please visit: MIND Information Hub
SAMH	Hub of information and guidance about looking after mental health. Please visit: SAMH Guidance for Mental Health

Useful Apps:

	Mind Shift	Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations
	SAM	SAM might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and learn 25 different self-help techniques.
	Happify	Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts
	Headspace	The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus.
	Calm	Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.
	Smiling Mind	Smiling mind is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. This is helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.