

UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

First you need to be able to recognise 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.

Here are some of the common patterns that our unhelpful thoughts follow:

Predicting the future, Catastrophising, What if?

When people are worried about something it is common for them to spend a lot of time ruminating. You can end up thinking about the future and predicting what might go wrong. This is instead of just letting things be. You might blow things out of proportion or come to expect a catastrophe. For example:

- What if I go to a party and no-one talks to me?
- What if I do not make friends when I start my new job?
- What if I cannot cope and have a panic attack?

Jumping to conclusions, Taking things personally, Mind reading

When people are feeling emotionally vulnerable, it is likely that they take things to heart and become more sensitive to what people say. They can often make assumptions about why someone said something, begin overly quick to draw conclusions, and thinking that they are the focus of what has been said. For example:

- You think that a friend has ignored you, but in fact they have other things on their mind.
- They must be laughing at me.

Focusing on the negative, Ignoring the positive, Filtering

Often people can ignore the positive aspects of life or their situation. Instead you may focus on negative elements. This style of thinking stops us feeling good about ourselves. It can lower your confidence. For example:

- Despite having many friends, we focus on the one person that doesn't seem to like us.
- I was only able to cope on that occasion because...

Black & white thinking, All or nothing, Perfectionism, "Should" thinking

Sometimes people only see things as black or white, with no grey area or in-between. Having this polarised view can lead some people into setting themselves impossibly high standards, being overly critical and struggling to recognise any achievement due to their perfectionism.

- That was a complete waste of time.
- They must hate me.
- I should always get full marks.

Over-generalising, Labelling

Based on one isolated incident you might assume that other events will follow a similar pattern in the future. You might find it hard to see a negative event as a one-off. This can also mean that you label yourself, often unkindly, which can lower your mood and confidence, perhaps even leading to feelings of hopelessness. For example:

- Failing my driving test means I will fail at everything.
- The neighbour's dog snarled at me; all dogs are vicious!
- I am useless.

Courtesy NHS