

CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL THINKING PATTERNS

Based on the principles of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), people's emotional reactions and behaviour are strongly influenced by their unhelpful thinking patterns and interpretations about themselves or the situations in which they find themselves. When a person consistently uses unhelpful styles of thinking, he or she can often cause himself or herself a great deal of emotional stress.

Prompts for challenging unhelpful thinking patterns

#1 Check the evidence



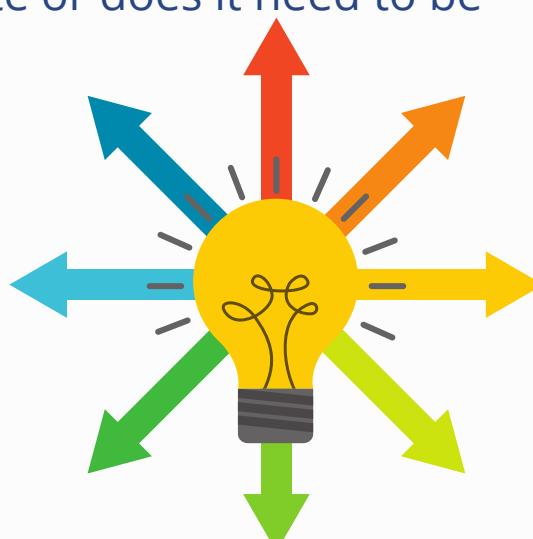
Ask yourself questions that will help you look for additional information and make an informed decision about your thoughts, instead of just accepting them as fact

- Am I confusing a fact with an opinion?
- What is the evidence for my thought?
- What is the evidence against my thought?

#2 Create more balanced thoughts

Stop for a moment and pay attention to your thoughts, ask yourself, "given all of the evidence, is my thought accurate or does it need to be modified?"

- Consider the whole picture
- Do not make assumptions
- Find all the causes
- Put it into perspective
- Find the shades of grey
- Be flexible
- Be specific
- Consider evidence contrary to how you feel
- Acknowledge the good



#3 Change your perspective



Learn to question your own thoughts using the following examples

- If your friend knew you were having this thought, what would they say to you?
- If you were giving advice to someone you care about in this situation, what would you say?
- Are you making a mistake of assuming that your perspective about the situation is the only one?
- Are there any other ways of viewing your situation?

Examples of unhelpful thinking patterns

- **Mental filter:** Noticing all the times we may have failed academically but ignoring the times we may have succeeded
- **Jumping to conclusions:** Assuming that you know what someone else is thinking (Mind Reading) or making predictions about what is going to happen in the future (Fortune Telling)
- **Personalisation:** Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that was not completely your fault. Similarly, blaming another person for something that was your fault or not completely their fault
- **Catastrophizing:** Blowing things out of proportion. For example, thinking a situation is awful, terrible, horrible even though it's actually not as 'bad' in reality
- **Black and white thinking:** Seeing only one extreme or the other; you are either wrong or right; good or bad; there are no in-betweens
- **Imperative thinking:** Putting unreasonable demands and pressure on yourself by believing "I should..." or "I must..."
- **Overgeneralising:** Taking one instance in the past or present, and imposing it on all current or future situations
- **Emotional reasoning:** Basing your view of a situation or yourself on the way you are feeling; ignoring evidence to the contrary
- **Magnification and minimization:** Magnifying the positive qualities of others and minimizing your own positive qualities by explaining them away

