

# TOOL 2: THINKING TRAPS

## Build a Resilient and Optimistic Mindset

Thinking traps are mistakes that our minds make when we are thinking fast. We are most likely to distort our interpretation of things when we feel sad, angry, anxious or stressed.

**WHAT**  
it is

These traps can hinder our ability to think rationally, leading us to make rash decisions and act impulsively. If we understand how we *think*, we will be able to manage how we *feel* and *behave*.

**WHY**  
it matters



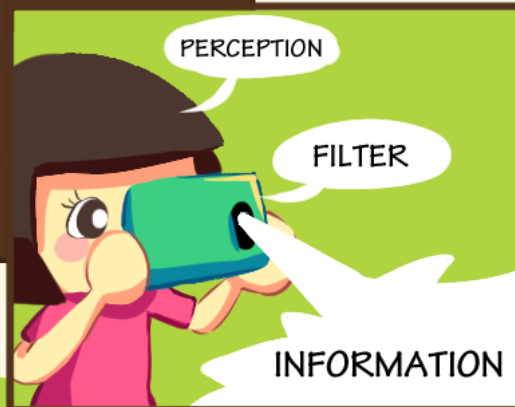
**Meet the Monster called ANXIETY!**  
His favourite foods are your worries and fears.

It is all **connected**.



What you think directly influences how you feel and how you behave.

**HOW  
it works**



According to Psychologist Dr. Albert Ellis, we experience **Activating events (A)** every day that prompt us to think about what is occurring. Our interpretation of these events results in **Beliefs (B)** about the event. Once we develop these beliefs, we experience **Consequences (C)** based solely on our beliefs.



We unconsciously take “mental shortcuts” to simplify the information and make sense of it. These shortcuts can trap us by leading us to inaccurate conclusions, hence the term “thinking traps.”

(Reivich and Shatte, 2002; Seligman, 1995)

# 6 THINKING TRAPS



1. Binocular Vision



2. Black-and-white Thinking



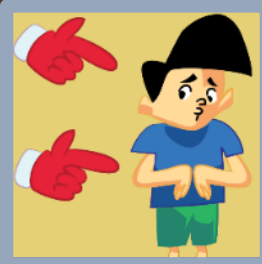
3. Dark Glasses



4. Fortune-telling



5. Making it Personal



6. Blame Game

Help your child to identify these **mental shortcuts**.

## 1. Binocular Vision



Looking at things (e.g. problems) in a way that makes them seem bigger or smaller than they really are

**Example:** During a DSA interview, one of the interviewers did not make eye contact with you. After the interview, you thought to yourself, “I must be the worst candidate today.”

## 2. Black-and-white Thinking



Looking at things in only extreme or opposite ways (e.g. good or bad, never or always, all or nothing)

**Example:** You are grounded for not helping out with household chores. You think to yourself, “I am *always* the bad kid. My sister is *always* the good kid.”



### 3. Dark Glasses

Thinking about only the negative parts of things

**Example:** You completed a challenging research report and felt pleased about it. However, your friend noticed 2 typographical errors. You thought to yourself, “I did such a sloppy job.”



### 5. Making it Personal

Blaming yourself for things that may not be primarily your fault

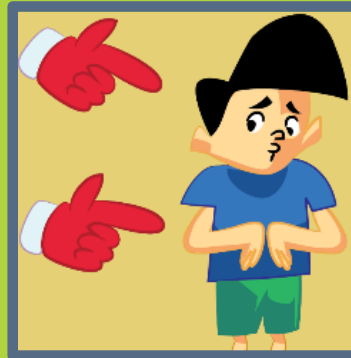
**Example:** Your team did not do well in a Social Studies project. You think to yourself, “It must be me. I didn’t do a good job. I have caused my team to do badly. They will not want to work with me anymore.”



### 4. Fortune-telling

Making predictions about what will happen in the future without enough evidence

**Example:** During a test, you did not manage to complete the last question. You thought to yourself, “I am going to do so badly. I am not going to be promoted at the end of the year.”



### 6. Blame Game

Blaming others for things you should take responsibility for

**Example:** You got into trouble for drinking in the computer room. A classmate bumped into you, and your water spilled all over the floor. Your teacher punished you, but you felt that your classmate should be the one to be punished.



I am such a loser.  
I kept missing the  
ball or hitting it  
into the net.

Other students play  
better than me, even  
on their first day!

I don't have a talent  
for racket games. I  
will never be able to  
play tennis.

## Donny's Story

Donny is a fast learner. While his peers were bumbling in the beginning, he was able to learn the violin in a very short period of time. He also picked up martial arts on his own by watching others. Today, he is upset, on his first day ever playing tennis. First, he couldn't hit the tennis ball over the net. Next, he kept missing the ball. He felt like a loser.

# Help Donny catch his thinking traps.

Explore the consequences of these beliefs.

## Activating Event

**Donny struggled during his first tennis lesson.**

- He couldn't hit the ball over the net.
- He kept missing the ball.

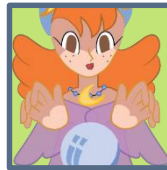
## Beliefs



"I am such a loser. I kept missing the ball or hitting it into the net."



"Other students play better than me, even on their first day!"



I don't have a talent for racket games. I will never be able to play tennis.



## Consequence

Donny is embarrassed, upset and angry at the same time.

He cannot believe that this is happening to him. He does not want to embarrass himself ever again.

He refuses to try harder, and is resigned to the "fact" that he "will never be able to play tennis". He consoles himself by saying that it is "a stupid game".



# Help Donny practise helpful self-talk.

Helpful self-talk helps you to gain courage, resilience and comfort.  
Unhelpful self-talk can make you more upset and overwhelmed.

## Be a Thought Detective!

1. What is the evidence for my belief?
2. What is the evidence against my belief?
3. What is the worst that could happen?
4. What is the best that could happen?
5. What is the most likely outcome?
6. What is **MY PLAN OF ACTION** if that happens?



Challenge these negative thoughts and replace them with helpful self-talk.

I am such a loser. I kept missing the ball or hitting it into the net.

I missed the ball a lot. It's my first time playing tennis. And I was brave to try!

I bet other students think I'm a loser too. They play better than me, even on their first day!

Most students were too busy learning the game to even notice that I missed the ball.

But what if someone did laugh at me?

Do I really want to feel bad about myself and never go back to learning the game just because someone laughed at me?



Do a **pulse check** with your child.

## Do I have a resilient and optimistic mindset?

- ☐ I can recognize my negative thoughts.
- ☐ I try and find things in my life to be positive about.
- ☐ After I make a mistake, I look for ways to learn from it.
- ☐ Setbacks don't discourage me for long.





## References

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