

Identifying Underlying Thoughts

When you find yourself experiencing an undesirable emotion, such as uncertainty, anxiety or fear, it can be helpful to identify the thought that is causing the emotion.

- 1) **Assess the severity of the emotion.** If it is minor or fleeting, consider simply distracting yourself and thinking about or doing something else. Emotions without intensity are easy to re-direct and focusing on them may worsen them. However, if this emotion comes up regularly, it may warrant a closer look.
- 2) **Identify the emotion.** What are you feeling? Can you name it?
- 3) **Become aware of your thoughts.** What were you thinking about just before you felt the emotion? Is there a clear, obvious link between what you're thinking about and how you're feeling? Based on your thoughts, WHY do you think you're feeling the way you do? (If you cannot answer this easily, the source of your emotions may be a deeper, unconscious belief. We'll get into this in a different video.)
- 4) **Identify the timeline.** Ask yourself, is the object of your attention (what you're thinking about) happening NOW or am I thinking about the future or the past?
- 5) **Determine if action is necessary.** If something is happening now that you have to deal with OR If you're thinking about something that is a good possibility you will have to deal with, ask yourself the following 3 questions to determine what, if anything, can be done about it.
 - a. Is there anything I can do RIGHT NOW to change the situation that's bothering me?
 - b. If not, is there something I can do LATER? If so, determine exactly what you will do and when, and then give yourself permission to let it go for now. Recognize that thinking about and worrying about it now doesn't help. It only makes you suffer.
 - c. If there is nothing you can do about it, ever, ask yourself: What would I have to think or believe about this in order to feel content, peaceful, or at ease? At this point, if there is nothing that can be done, your only option to feel better is to change your perspective or focus on something else.
- 6) **Assess the validity of your emotional reaction.** If you are having an emotional reaction to an immediate real-life situation, ask yourself whether the severity of your emotional response is equal to the severity of the actual situation. If it is, proceed to #4. If it is not—such as you're having a melt down over dirty dishes or spilt milk, this is a sign that something more is going on here. Ask yourself if you're reacting to this situation or is something else bothering you.
- 7) **Consider another perspective.** Whether your thoughts are regarding a current experience, a past memory, or a future possibility, it's always worth considering if there is a different way to look at the situation. Ask yourself:
 - a. What perspective am I taking of this or how am I judging the situation? How does that make me feel? Is there another way I can look at this? A silver lining? Another perspective?