

E-BOOK - positive thinking

-content from Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy" by David D. Burns

Disclaimer: These techniques are based on the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and are inspired by Dr. David D. Burns' book, Feeling Good. They are powerful tools for managing negative thoughts but are not a substitute for professional counseling. If your feelings become overwhelming or you are in crisis, please connect with a professional.

Core Principle: Your Thoughts Are Not Facts

The fundamental idea is that feelings like sadness, anger, or anxiety are a direct result of the way you think. The first step to positive thinking is to recognize that a negative thought is just a hypothesis, not a truth.

Positive Thinking Practices for Students

These practices are organized by the level of a person's distress, with a focus on immediate action.

Low-Level Stress (Feeling Generally Down, Anxious, or Irritable):

Identify the "Cognitive Distortion":

When a negative thought arises, try to label it. Burns identifies ten common distortions. For students, focus on a few key ones:

All-or-Nothing Thinking: "I got one bad grade, so I'm a total failure."

Mind Reading: "My friend hasn't texted me back. They must be mad at me."

Fortune Telling: "I know I'm going to mess up this presentation."

"Should" Statements: "I should be able to handle this. It's easy for everyone else."

Purpose: Simply recognizing the distortion robs it of its power. You're no longer the victim of the thought; you're the detective observing it. This creates distance and clarity.

The "Daily Log" (Simplified):

At the end of the day, take five minutes to mentally or physically note any negative thought that stood out.

For each thought, write down a single, more balanced alternative.

Example:

Negative Thought: "This project is impossible."

More Balanced Thought: "This project is challenging, but I can break it down into smaller steps."

Purpose: This trains your brain to automatically look for a rational alternative to a negative thought. It's like doing a mental workout to build a positive-thinking muscle.

Medium-Level Stress (Feeling Stuck in a Negative Loop or Low Self-Worth):

The "Evidence Against" Exercise:

When a deeply negative thought strikes (e.g., "I'm unlovable," "I'm a failure"), treat it like a prosecutor and ask for the evidence.

Create two columns: "Evidence for the Thought" and "Evidence Against the Thought."

Example:

Thought: "I'm a failure."

Evidence FOR: "I got a bad grade on my last test."

Evidence AGAINST: "I got an A on my last paper. I finished all my homework. I have a part-time job. I'm taking a full course load. I'm a student who is trying his best."

Purpose: You will almost always find that the "Evidence Against" column is much longer. This exercise directly counters the "mental filter" distortion (focusing only on the negatives) and provides a realistic perspective.

Identify and Disarm "Self-Labeling":

When you find yourself calling yourself a negative name (e.g., "I'm lazy," "I'm an idiot"), stop.

Replace the label with a specific, factual description of the behavior.

Example: Instead of "I'm so lazy," say, "I put off studying today." Instead of "I'm a bad public speaker," say, "My last presentation was disorganized."

Purpose: This separates your identity from your actions. It empowers you to change a specific behavior without the crushing weight of a negative label defining your entire worth.

Extreme-Level Stress (Feeling Hopeless, Severely Depressed, or Paralyzed):

The "Re-framing" Exercise for Hopelessness:

When you feel there is no hope, acknowledge the feeling, but then actively search for a different perspective.

Ask yourself, "If a friend was in this exact situation, what would I tell them?" "What's one thing I can do to feel even 1% better?" "Is there any positive meaning I can find in this situation?"

Purpose: This creates a critical distance from the overwhelming emotion. It taps into your rational mind, which is often paralyzed in a crisis, to find a tiny crack in the wall of hopelessness.

Take a "TINY Action" and Log It:

The feeling of hopelessness is often tied to a belief that nothing you do matters.

To combat this, do one small, positive action, no matter how tiny. This could be making your bed, taking a shower, or simply walking to a different room.

Immediately log the action. "Today I took a shower."

Purpose: This is a direct challenge to the "all-or-nothing" thinking that says, "If I can't do everything, I'll do nothing." Each tiny action is proof that you are not powerless.