

CRUFADclinic
Patient Homework

Module 3:

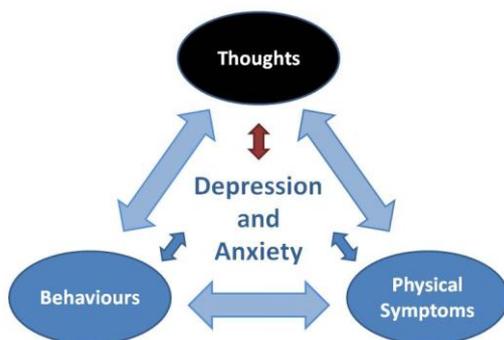
Tackling Thoughts





1. Challenging Unhelpful Thinking

In Lesson 2, you learnt about the Unhelpful Thinking Styles that people often fall into when they experience depression and anxiety. Anxiety and depression often lead people to think in ways that are distorted, unrealistic, not accurate and unhelpful. In Depression, **people often think in negative and pessimistic ways**, whereas in anxiety, **people often over-estimate the likelihood that something bad will happen**, and **underestimate their ability to cope**. It's like looking through dark "doom and gloom" glasses. Last lesson, you also learnt that **thoughts can affect how we feel** in certain situations.



Perhaps you were able to detect some of these unhelpful thinking styles as you monitored your thoughts during the week, such as:

- Catastrophising
- Mind reading
- Black and white thinking

In Lesson 3, you saw how Liz and Rob learnt to challenge their unhelpful thinking. Thought challenging gives us a helpful way to ensure our thinking is balanced and realistic. It is a helpful way of countering our negative ways of thinking.

Thought challenging helps to keep things in perspective.

Thought Challenging

Once you have recognised and recorded your thoughts on your **"Thought Monitoring Form,"** you can decide whether your thoughts are realistic or not by using Thought Challenging. There are three steps to thought challenging:

Step 1. Recognise and identify your thinking.

Step 2. Challenge your thoughts by looking at the evidence.

Step 3. Change unhelpful thoughts to more helpful thoughts.

You may find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

What are the facts?

Sometimes it's helpful to **think like a lawyer** (or a scientist) when you're challenging your thoughts. The best lawyers and scientists generally don't use feelings or opinions to win their argument – they **stick to the facts (the evidence)**. Sticking to the facts can help you to avoid unhelpful thinking styles such as catastrophising (thinking the worst) and mind reading (making assumptions about what other people are thinking).

Are there any positives in yourself or the situation that you are ignoring?

When a person is feeling depressed and anxious, they will often have a tendency to notice the negatives and ignore the positives. Psychologists call this a negative attention bias – the person only **pays attention to information that fits with their low mood**. Unfortunately, this just keeps the low mood going. In anxiety, it's called a threat attention bias. That is, people with anxiety pay attention to threatening information in their environment! You may be experiencing both at the moment (paying extra attention to threatening and negative information). By asking yourself the question above, it will help you to avoid this trap, and to notice positives as well as negatives.



What would you say to a friend in this situation?

Perhaps you will remember that both Liz and Rob recognised **lots of self criticism** in their thinking – they often berated their selves for things they hadn't done well enough, or called themselves names when they had made a mistake. Self criticism is common in Depression and Anxiety, and it can be very unhelpful. Rather than motivating us to do better, self criticism simply lowers our mood and contributes to the vicious cycle. You can reduce the harmful impact of self criticism by trying to talk to yourself as you would talk to a friend. Remind yourself to use the same kind of language and show the same kindness and compassion.

Here are some other questions that might be helpful for you to challenge unhelpful thinking:

- What evidence do I have for believing this?
- What happened last time I worried about this?
- Am I jumping to conclusions that are not completely justified by the evidence?
- Are there any things that contradict my thoughts that I might be ignoring?
- What's an alternative explanation? Are there any other ways to view this situation?
- Is what I believe the only or best way to explain what is going on?
- Would everyone in a similar situation think this way?
- What is the worst thing that could happen, and how bad would that really be?
- What is most likely to happen?



- Would it still be so bad in a week/month/year?
- What are the facts in this situation, and what are my own feelings and interpretations?
- What are the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages) of thinking this way?

What you should know about thought challenging

- Challenging unhelpful thinking can be difficult at first – often it feels forced and unnatural.
- Like any new skill, thought challenging gets easier with practice.
- You need to set aside time to practice thought challenging.
- It's often hardest to try thought challenging when you're feeling highly depressed or anxious. Therefore, we recommend that you first start practicing thought challenging when you feel less distressed.
- Thoughts and unhelpful thinking styles are like habits. Like any other habit, you need lots of practice to be able to change them effectively.
- It is important to be realistic with your expectations about this skill. You won't master it immediately. However, it will become easier (and more automatic) with practice.
- Thought challenging is not about thinking positively in a bad situation. It is about **realistic thinking**. If your thinking is realistic, then simply thinking positively is unlikely to help, whereas other techniques such as **Structured Problem Solving**, (which we discuss in Lesson 4), may be more helpful.
- Use the **Thought Challenging Worksheet** at the end of this lesson (or you can download a copy of this from the Extra Resources section) to help you.
- We have provided the Thought Challenging Worksheet for you to work through at first. You will not always need this sheet as the skill will become automatic. However, while you are learning, it is important that you go through the steps systematically until you've mastered this skill.

Challenging your thinking errors

Here are 10 common thinking errors and ways to challenge them.

1. Black-and-white thinking

When you're thinking in black-and-white, you see everything in terms of being either good or bad with nothing in between. For example: either you're great, or you're a loser; If you don't look like a model, you must be ugly; if you do something wrong, then you are completely bad.

The challenge: Look for shades of gray

It's important to avoid thinking about things in terms of extremes. Most things aren't black-and-white, but somewhere in-between. Just because something isn't completely perfect doesn't mean that it's a total disaster.

Ask yourself:

- Is it really so bad, or am I seeing things in black-and-white?
- How else can I think about the situation?
- Am I taking an extreme view?

2. Unreal ideal

Another common thinking error is to make unfair comparisons between certain individuals and yourself. When you do this, you compare yourself with people who have a specific advantage in some area. Making unfair comparisons can leave you feeling inadequate.

The challenge: Stop making unfair comparisons

Ask yourself:

- Am I comparing myself with people who have a particular advantage?
- Am I making fair comparisons?

3. Filtering

When you filter, first you hone in on the negative aspects of your situation. Then you ignore or dismiss all the positive aspects.

The challenge: Consider the whole picture

Ask yourself:

- Am I looking at the negatives, while ignoring the positives?
- Is there a more balanced way to look at this situation?

4. Personalizing: The self-blame game

When you personalize, you blame yourself for anything that goes wrong, even when it's not your fault or responsibility.

The challenge: Find all the causes

Ask yourself:

- Am I really to blame? Is this all about me?
- What other explanations might there be for this situation?

5. Mind-reading

We often think we know what other people are thinking. We assume that others are focused on our faults and weaknesses—but this is often wrong! Remember: your worst critic is probably you.

The challenge: Don't assume you know what others are thinking

Ask yourself:

- What is the evidence? How do I know what other people are thinking?
- Just because I assume something, does that mean I'm right?

6. Exaggerating

When things go wrong, you might have a tendency to exaggerate the consequences and imagine that the results will be disastrous.

The challenge: Put it in perspective

Ask yourself:

- What's the worst that can happen?
- What's the best that can happen?

- What's most likely to happen?
- Will this matter in five years?
- Is there anything good about the situation?
- Is there any way to fix the situation?

7. Over-generalizing

Over-generalizing is a lot like exaggeration. When you over-generalize, you exaggerate the frequency of negative things in your life, like mistakes, disapproval and failures. Typically you might think to yourself: I always make mistakes, or everyone thinks I'm stupid.

The challenge: Be specific

Ask yourself:

- Am I over-generalizing?
- What are the facts? What are my interpretations?

8. Fact versus feeling

Sometimes you might confuse your thoughts or feelings with reality. You might assume that your perceptions are correct.

The challenge: Stick to the facts

Ask yourself:

- Am I confusing my feelings with the facts? Just because I'm feeling this way, does that mean my perceptions are correct?
- Am I thinking this way just because I'm feeling bad right now?

9. Labeling

When you use label, you might call yourself or other people names. Instead of being specific—for example, saying "That was a silly thing to do"—you make negative generalizations about yourself or other people by saying things like "I'm ugly," or "she's an idiot."

The challenge: Judge the situation, not the person

Ask yourself:

- What are the facts and what are my interpretations?
- Just because there is something that I'm not happy with, does that mean that it's totally no good?

10. 'Can't Stand-itis'

Some people get intolerant when they have to do things they don't enjoy. They tell themselves that they "can't stand" certain things instead of acknowledging that they don't enjoy them. As a result, they easily become frustrated and angry.

The challenge: Accept that frustration is a normal part of life

Ask yourself:

- I don't enjoy it, but I can stand it.
- This is a hassle, and that's O.K.! Life is full of hassles.

Adapted from: <http://us.reachout.com/facts/factsheet/common-thinking-errors>

Your Thought Challenging Worksheet

	Liz's Responses	Your Responses 
1. Situation What is the situation that is upsetting you? What has happened?	<i>Going over my activity planning homework with the group.</i>	
2. Thoughts What are your thoughts about this situation? What is going through your mind?	<i>I haven't done the things I planned.</i>	
What is bad about that?	<i>I'm not good at this. The therapy won't work.</i>	
What does this say about you?	<i>I'm lazy. I won't get better.</i>	
3. Feelings How do you feel? E.g. angry, sad, happy, surprised, ashamed, scared, guilty, joyful, anxious, disgusted, annoyed, delighted *Rate strength of feeling (0-100)	<i>Sad (90) Ashamed (80)</i>	

	Liz's Responses	Your Responses
<p>4. Take a step back! Look at your Thoughts. Can you see any Unhelpful Thinking Patterns?</p>	<p>Unhelpful Thinking Patterns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Black and white thinking <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Disqualifying the positive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Harsh judgement <input type="checkbox"/> Personalization <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fortune telling <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Catastrophising <input type="checkbox"/> Mind reading 	<p>Unhelpful Thinking Patterns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Black and white thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Disqualifying the positive <input type="checkbox"/> Harsh judgement <input type="checkbox"/> Fortune telling <input type="checkbox"/> Catastrophising <input type="checkbox"/> Mind reading
<p>5. Reconsider What are the facts? Are there any positives in yourself or the situation that you are ignoring? What would you say to a friend in this situation?</p>	<p><i>I haven't done everything that I planned, but I have done some things, like painting and cooking. Recovery from depression is hard work and it takes time. I am making progress. I don't know whether the therapy will work, or how I will feel in the future. All I can do is try my best today.</i></p>	
<p>6. Re-rate feelings Re-rate the strength of your feelings now</p>	<p><i>Sad (50)</i> <i>Ashamed (50)</i></p>	
<p>7. Move Forward What can you do now to help yourself?</p>	<p><i>Do one of my activities – walk to the park.</i> <i>Be open and honest with the group next week.</i></p>	