

OUR PATTERNS OF UNHELPFUL THINKING

You must first be able to recognise an unhelpful thought before you challenge it. Being aware of these common unhelpful thoughts patterns can help you to POLICE them more efficiently.

Here are some examples of typical unhelpful thought patterns:

1) PREDICTING THE FUTURE: When we feel anxious it is common for us to spend much of our time thinking about the future and predicting what could go wrong as supposed to just letting things be. In the end, most of the predictions we've made don't actually happen, and we've wasted time and energy being worried and upset about them.

For example: You predict the future by assuming that you'll perform poorly at a job interview, or, you assume that someone will reject you before you've even asked them out on a date!

EXERCISE 1: Write down the last time when you have predicted the future in an unrealistic or an unhelpful way?

NOTE: Some of these thought patterns may sound similar to one another. They are not meant to be individual categories but will help you to recognise unhelpful patterns in your thinking.

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2) MIND READING: This is when we assume that we know what other people are thinking (usually about us) without any real evidence to suggest it's true. We can also make assumptions about why someone said something or behaved in a certain way and be quick to conclude that it's to do with us.

For example: My boss thinks 'I'm stupid!' Or, 'my work colleague is ignoring me', but really she just has other things on her mind.

EXERCISE 2: Write down the last time you made an assumption or jumped to a conclusion about what someone else was thinking without any real evidence to suggest it was true?

3) CATASTROPHISING: People commonly 'catastrophise' when they're anxious. This is when we blow things completely out of proportion and view the situation as a catastrophe even though the problem is actually quite small.

For example: Assuming someone hates you because they didn't reply to your text within 10 seconds. Or, you expect to lose your job because of a simple mistake that you've made.

EXERCISE 3: Write down the last time that you blew something completely out of proportion in your mind? How did you feel afterwards?

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4) FOCUSSED ON THE NEGATIVES: When we're anxious, we commonly develop 'tunnel vision' where we focus solely on the negative aspects of situations without considering the positive aspects. Sometimes the whole picture can be coloured by a single negative detail.

For example: Focusing on the one person who doesn't like you rather than the other twenty who do.

EXERCISE 4: When was the last time you focussed more on the negatives than on the positives? And what would have changed if you hadn't?

5) OVER GENERALISING: Based on one instance in the past or present, you make the assumption that all others will follow a similar pattern in the future. A sense of helplessness often accompanies such overgeneralisations.

For example: Just because one ex-partner cheated on you, you believe that 'ALL MEN (or Women) ARE BAD!'

EXERCISE 5: How did you feel about yourself (or the world), the last time that you over-generalised a situation or a group of people?

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6) IMAGINING THE WORST CASE SCENARIO: Where we make predictions that the worst case scenario is going to happen despite the fact that we may have been successful in this area in the past.

For example: You're asked to give a presentation to a group of people, and you think 'I'm going to get in there and completely mess this up' even though you've given many successful presentations in the past.

EXERCISE 6: How did you feel the last time you imagined the worst case scenario of either a situation or set of circumstances you were facing?

7) LABELLING: When we 'label' ourselves based on our behaviour in specific situations. We define ourselves by one specific behaviour (usually a negative behaviour) and fail to consider other positive characteristics and actions.

For example: 'I'm always anxious' even though this is not always the case, or 'I'm not good enough' because you failed at something, even though there are many other things that you're good at.

EXERCISE 7: What labels do you currently define yourself by and are they complimenting your life? If not, which ones do you need to 'ditch'?

Take some time to review this list of unhelpful thought patterns and see whether any of them apply to you? If so, it's time to get **POLICING YOUR THOUGHTS!**