

Reasoning with Unhelpful Thoughts

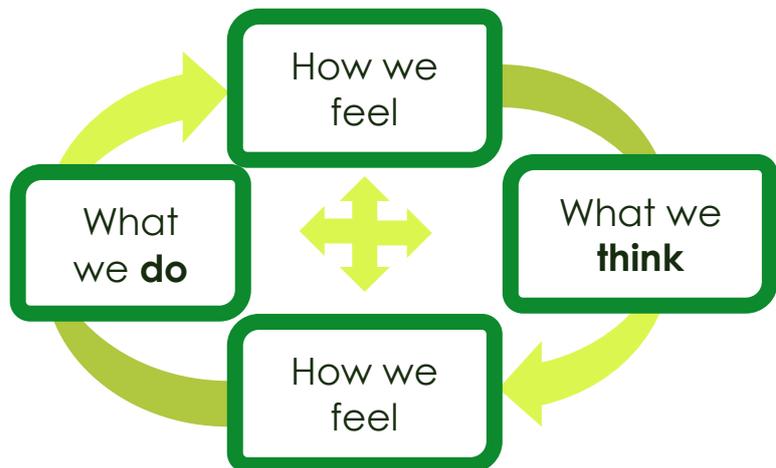
How does the way I think affect the way I feel?

A lot of our thoughts are automatic, and they can be strongly influenced by how we feel. When we're feeling good, our thoughts are likely to be more positive and optimistic, and when we're feeling down, our thoughts are likely to be more negative, cynical or pessimistic. We call these Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs).

It's easy to believe these negative thoughts are a true reflection of how things are, and so they reinforce how we feel. When our mood lends a negative tint to our thoughts, it can make us believe things are worse than they are, and that makes us feel even worse, in a vicious cycle.

This vicious cycle can also tie into the vicious cycle we looked at in Session 2.

Negative thoughts can arise when we feel physically unwell, or when we're struggling with our LTC. This can make us feel less motivated, tired, or make our symptoms feel worse, and so we do less, and the less we do, the less we want to do.



Although these negative thoughts may make sense in the context of the situation, these ways of thinking may not be helpful for us in achieving our wellbeing goals or managing our condition. For this reason, we call these NATs 'unhelpful thoughts'.

How to challenge our unhelpful thoughts

The first step to challenging our unhelpful thoughts is starting to be more aware of them. NATs can pop up and affect how we feel before we realise it.

Keep a Thought Diary

A way to keep track of this is through the thought diary. You can create a thought diary yourself or download the Thought Diary worksheet in the week 5 patient area. (www.italk.org.uk/patient-area)

Once you're able to spot your unhelpful thoughts or NATs, you can work on challenging them.

Reasoning with our Thoughts

A good way to challenge our unhelpful thoughts is to sit down with this thought to understand why it's important to us, and think of a more helpful way of thinking. Then, whenever this thought comes up, we can replace it with the more helpful version.

Step 1: Listen to your thought

Choose the thought you want to challenge. You may be experiencing many thoughts at once, write these down and identify which one is bothering you the most. This is your main thought.

Then think about why this thought affects you so much, and what it is trying to tell you. Is it about something that is important to you? Why is it so important? This will help you to make sure your new thought stays true to what's important to you.

Main thought:	
Why is this important to me?	

Step 2: Reason with your thought

Write down which of the 12 types of NAT are in your main thought, and the questions you can use to challenge them. You can watch our video guide to spotting NATs, and download our thought challenging guide in the week 5 patient area.

Note: Your thought may be more than one type of unhelpful thought.

Main thought:	
What unhelpful types of thinking are in this thought?	Questions I can ask to challenge this thought:

Step 3: Decide on a new thought

The key to finding a new thought is to make sure it stays true to what you found in Step 1. We're finding a new thought that's true to what's important to us, but is reasonable, fair and true.

Old thought:	
Why it's important to me:	
New thought:	
I believe this to be	% true

Step 4: Use your new thought

The aim of this technique is to create a more helpful habit. Every time the old thought creeps in now, you'll know it's a negative automatic thought, and you can choose to think your new thought.

Notice how you feel when you think your new thought.