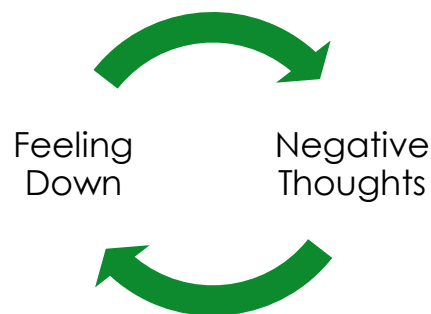


Thought challenging

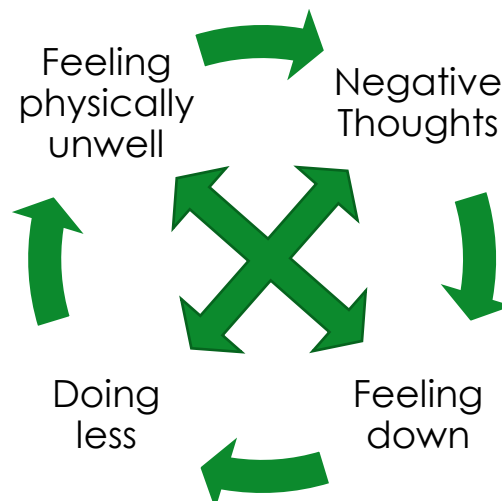
How does the way I think affect the way I feel?

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.

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 make 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 make us feel physically unwell – less motivated, tired, or having aches and pains, and so we do less, and the less we do, the less we want to do.



How to challenge our negative thoughts

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

Example

You are walking in town and see an old friend – but they just walk by.
Your automatic thought is “oh, they didn’t want to talk to me,”
which makes you feel hurt.

But what makes you think this is true?

Could there be other reasons?

Does this thought look like any of the 12 types of unhelpful thinking?

Thought Diary

Keeping a thought diary can help us to get into the habit of noticing our thoughts and how they make us feel.

You can create your own thought diary by copying the table below into a notebook, or download our Thought Diary worksheet in the patient area for Week 5.

Use the first three columns to record your initial thoughts – then use the techniques below to help you challenge them.

| Situation What was going on? Time of day, who was there etc? | Emotion How did it make you feel? | Thoughts What was going through your mind? How did you interpret this? What did it mean? | New Thought After considering the evidence, how else could you look at this situation? | New feeling If you are looking at it differently, how does it make you feel? |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Take Your Thought to Court

This technique aims to help you to think through the thoughts that are making you feel bad, and find out how true they are.

Step 1: Court Documents

First, decide on the thought you wish to challenge. To do this, it can help to start by focussing on the way you felt, or the situation you were in when you had these thoughts.

Then try to remember the exact thoughts that you have been having, and write these down. Aim to write down the exact wording your thought had.

Then think about which of these thoughts affects you the most. This is your main thought.

The final part of step 1 is for you to rate how much you believe the thought, out of 100%

| | |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Situation or feeling: | |
| Thoughts: | |
| Main Thought: | |
| I believe this to be | % true |

Step 2: Hearing the evidence

Next, we hear the evidence for and against our main thought.

Note: We recommend doing this with a thought that you believe to be around 60% true at first. This is because the more you believe a thought is true, the harder it is to challenge – so aiming for one that is around 60% true will help you to practice the technique before moving onto a stronger thought.

| | |
|--------------|------------------|
| Thought: | |
| Evidence For | Evidence Against |
| | |

What counts as evidence?

We can only count facts – no opinions, hearsay or suspicions!

Imagine a friend had this thought - what would you say was good evidence for and against it?

Step 3: The Verdict

Once you have reviewed all the evidence for and against this main thought, has that changed how true you think it is?

And if it does seem less true now, has this changed how you feel?

| | |
|--|--------|
| Situation or feeling: | |
| Main thought: | |
| I believed this to be | % true |
| After reviewing the evidence, I now believe this to be | % true |

Points to remember

- Learning to spot and challenge our negative automatic thoughts take time.
- It can be helpful to ask a friend you trust to help you look for evidence for and against unhelpful thoughts.
- With enough practice, we can start to catch the thoughts and challenge them as they happen.

Reasoning with our Thoughts

Another 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: Listening to your thought

Identify the thought you want to challenge. You can use the same method that we used earlier, to find 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: Reasoning with your thought

Next, look at which of the 12 types of unhelpful thinking this thought might fall under. Use the questioning suggested on the worksheet to challenge your thought.

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.