

Challenging my depressed thinking

Our thoughts have a very powerful effect on our feelings and behaviour. There are many common negative thinking habits which help depression to flourish, and which are also reinforced by depression. Knowing how your habitual ways of thinking might be affecting your mood is an important tool for tackling depression.

1. Understand types of depressed thinking

Use the list to tick which types of depressed thinking you recognise in yourself. Write down a specific example of each type of thinking which is relevant to you, if you can think of one:

Types of depressed thinking	Yes/No?	My own example
Tunnel vision eg. "There is nothing good in my life whatsoever."		
All-or-nothing thinking eg. "If I'm not part of the in group then I'm a loser."		
Over-generalisation eg. (After a break-up) "No one will ever love me. I'll never find someone else."		
Jumping to conclusions eg. "She ignored me so she must hate me."		
Control freakery eg. "If I'm not in total control then everything is unacceptably out of control."		
Perfectionism eg. "If I don't come top of the class, I'm a failure."		
Thoughts about death or suicide eg. "The only way I can fix this is to end my life."		
Emotional reasoning eg. "I feel so bad that I must be bad."		
Avoidance-justification eg. "No one will talk to me so I might as well not go."		
Superstitious thinking eg. "If I let myself hope for a 1st I won't get one."		
Disappointment 'insurance' eg. "I expect the worst so I won't be disappointed."		
Cynicism eg. "There's no point investing hope or energy in anything because the world always lets you down."		



Control freakery: eg. "I have to be fully in control of my life."		
Rule-bound thinking eg. "I should be able to manage on my own."		
Catastrophising eg. "It's a disaster if I lose control/fail a test etc."		
Hyper-vigilance eg. "I have to be constantly on the alert to prevent bad things from happening."		
Jumping to conclusions eg. "I got a bad mark on this essay so I'm probably going to fail this degree."		
Over-focus on blame eg. "If I can identify who's fault it is then I can stop it happening again."		
Perfectionism eg. "If I make sure I don't make any mistakes then everything will be okay."		
Self-blame eg. "If something bad happens it's probably my fault."		
Over-personalisation eg. "She ignored me, maybe I did something to upset her."		
Perfectionism eg. "It's all going wrong because I'm not trying hard enough."		
Self-bullying eg. "I need to drive myself harder to make sure I do better/get things right."		

2. Identify your own forms of depressed thinking

Spend a day or a week 'tuning in' to your own internal running commentary. Use copies of the attached 'Thought Diary' to write down what you learn about your own habits of depressed thinking.

3. Challenge your depressed thinking

Challenging depressed thinking is about becoming a detective to find evidence to test the validity of your beliefs, and then using reasoning skills to modify them and develop more helpful attitudes in their place.

The ABC model is a commonly used model for identifying negative thoughts in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. You can read more about this method in some of the books listed in the More Resources section.

It is a very powerful way to change your depressed feelings and behaviour. Use the second section on the Thought Diary to work through the thoughts you have identified. Make more copies of the Thought Diary and Thought Challenging form to keep using this strategy whenever you have a difficult experience or find that your mood has been affected.

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<p>A = Activating Event What happened? (give a brief description, with date and time)</p> <p>Example: Monday, 6 Nov, I got my essay back with a lower mark than I had hoped for.</p>	<p>C = Consequences What did I do? What feelings did I have? (rate the intensity of each feeling from 0 to 10, and underline the one that is most intense)</p> <p>I went quiet and then skipped the next lecture and went home instead. I felt numb, a bit sick, tearful, disappointed, <u>panicky</u>, overwhelmed 7</p>	<p>B = Beliefs What was I thinking before, during and after the event? (• list all the thoughts you can think of, asking yourself why you thought it and what was bad about that and what it says about you • now underline the thought that is most associated with the feeling that you rated as most intense)</p> <p>Oh no, I'm so dumb. My lecturer probably thinks I'm not worth much. If I keep getting marks like this I won't get a good degree. My parents are going to be disappointed in me. I don't understand what I did wrong. I'm obviously not clever enough to be at uni. I can't manage.</p>

Challenge depressed thinking

Ask yourself:

1. Is this an example of a type of depressed thinking? If so, what?
2. What's the evidence for this perspective?
3. What evidence is there for a different point of view?
4. How did I get into the habit of thinking this way?
5. What other explanations could there be?
6. How realistic are my expectations and beliefs?
7. Is it helpful for me to see things this way?
8. What would be a more positive way to see this?
9. What would I say to a friend who was thinking this way?

Example:

1. Yes, Tunnel vision. Jumping to conclusions.
2. I got a disappointing mark for this essay when I thought I had done well.
3. I got good marks for the previous essay. My teachers said I was clever enough for uni.
4. I used to be called thick at school before they realised I had dyslexia.
5. Maybe I just didn't read the question clearly enough.
6. It's still very early in the course and the topic is very new to me. The mark won't even count to my final degree.
7. No! It's an unhelpful thought. It makes me want to give up.
8. It's a learning experience. I can ask the tutor to explain where I went wrong so I'll do better next time.
9. Cheer up - it's all part of the learning experience. Let's take some time off and do something fun tonight and get back on track with work in the morning.

Work out your own example here:

Now see if you can replace the 'hot thought' (the one you underlined in B) with a more balanced, helpful belief. Write it down here:

eg: It's a learning experience. I can ask the tutor to explain where I went wrong so I'll do better next time.

Re-rate the feeling that you underlined in C:

eg. How panicky am I now? 3

Write your rating here:

Give the thought a label

Eg. The old 'I'm not clever enough' thought

This helps you recognise it as an unhelpful thought and either replace it with your more helpful thought or just 'let it go'