



# Challenging unhelpful thoughts

## 1: Identify your unhelpful thoughts

Unhelpful thoughts are often automatic, so you might not even notice them most of the time - like many of our habits. Most unhelpful thoughts relate to one of the following categories:

- Coping
- Helplessness and Control
- Safety
- Guilt
- Blame and Anger

Identify recent situations, or situations that occur over the next few days or weeks, that made/make you feel unhappy, tense or angry.

What thoughts are going through your mind when you get these feelings? Those thoughts are probably some of the unhelpful thoughts that you're trying to identify.

Record your negative thoughts, feelings and the situations in which they occur.

## 2: Challenge unhelpful thoughts

When you identify your unhelpful thoughts, the next important step is to challenge them.

**Remember:** Just because you have a thought, it doesn't make it true.

### Ask yourself:

- What's the evidence that this negative thought is true?
- Is there another way of looking at this situation?
- How would someone else see this?
- Am I jumping to conclusions?
- Am I basing my judgement on how I'm feeling rather than what is actually happening?
- Am I showing 'black & white' or 'all-or-nothing' thinking?
- Am I exaggerating what I think has gone wrong or might go wrong?
- Am I over-generalising? (e.g. because something has gone wrong in the past, I'm expecting things to go wrong now)
- Am I personalising things that go wrong by blaming (putting-down) myself?
- How important is it? Will it affect my entire future?





Choose the question that is most relevant to challenging your unhelpful thought and note it down and then:

- Describe situations leading to unpleasant feelings?
- Identify your unpleasant feelings. What unpleasant feelings did you have in response to this situation.
- Identify your unhelpful thoughts. What were your unhelpful thoughts at the time, or just after, the situation occurred?
- Challenge these thoughts. Which of the thought challenging questions is most relevant to this particular unhelpful thought?
- Replace the negative thoughts with more realistic helpful thoughts.

### **3: Identify helpful thoughts**

Now that you have identified and challenged your unhelpful thoughts, replace them with helpful thoughts.

Remember:

- Helpful thoughts will be based on the facts (reality based), not on feelings
- Be kind and encouraging to yourself
- Accept mistakes as normal and then seek to change things
- Acknowledge your achievements
- Centre on what is going well and on your personal strengths

### **4: Schedule practice of helpful thoughts**

Unhelpful thoughts can be difficult to dislodge from our thinking, especially in the early stages of change.

Schedule some time to challenge your unhelpful thoughts and practice saying aloud your helpful thoughts. As you do this, imagine that you are in the situation where the unhelpful thoughts occur. Or practice in the actual situation if this is possible.

### **5: Review progress**

Set a date for when you will sit down and rate your progress.

At that point you may decide to also review your helpful thoughts and decide whether you need some new ones. You may also have identified some other unhelpful thoughts that you need to counter by working through the steps again on a new worksheet.

