

HEALTHY THINKING

troubled by upsetting thoughts?

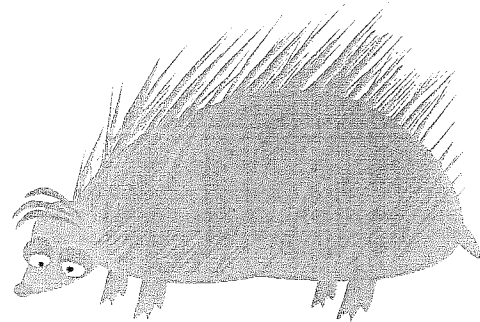
dwelling on the negative?

finding it hard to see things positively?

**If you feel this way,
you are not alone**

What is healthy thinking?

Healthy thinking does NOT mean positive thinking! No one can look at things positively all the time. Sometimes bad things happen, like getting fired at work, having an argument with a friend or losing someone you love. It's normal and healthy to feel upset and have negative thoughts when these things happen. Healthy thinking means looking at the entire situation—the positive, the negative and the neutral parts—and then coming to a conclusion. In other words, healthy thinking means looking at life and the world in a balanced way, not through rose-coloured glasses.



We all find ourselves coping with troubling thoughts from time to time—especially when we're going through changes in our lives or when we feel depressed, anxious, sad, angry or stressed out.

Did you know that your thoughts have a big influence on your mental health?

That's because what you tell yourself about a situation affects how you feel and what you do. Sometimes your interpretation of a situation can get distorted and you only focus on the negative aspects—this is normal and expected. However, when you interpret situations too negatively, you might feel worse. You're also more likely to respond to the situation in ways that are unhelpful in the long term. Fortunately, there are specific coping strategies to help manage difficult thoughts.

how do I get out of a thinking trap?

Here are helpful strategies to challenge common thinking traps. Many people find their mood and confidence improve after working through these skills. You can also find worksheets to help you go through each step at www.heretohelp.bc.ca

1. Try to separate your thoughts from actual events

Ask yourself the following questions when something upsetting happens:

- What is the situation: What actually happened? Only include the "facts" of the situation that everyone would agree on.
- What are your thoughts: What are you telling yourself?
- What are your emotions: How do you feel?
- What are your behaviours: How are you reacting and what are you doing to cope?

2. Identify the 'thinking traps'

Take a look at the thoughts you've listed. Are you using any of the thinking traps and falling into distorted thinking patterns? It's common to fall into more than one thinking trap. Go back to the thinking trap list on page 2 and identify which ones apply to you and your current situation.

3. Challenge the thinking traps

The best way to break a thinking trap is to look at your thoughts like a scientist and consider the hard facts. Use the evidence you've collected to challenge your thinking traps. Here are some ways to do that:

Examine the evidence: Try to find evidence against the thought. If you make a mistake at work, you might automatically think, "I can't do anything right! I must be a terrible employee!" When this thought comes up, you might challenge it by asking, "Is there any evidence to support this thought? Is there any evidence to disprove this thought?" You might quickly realize that your boss has complimented your work recently, which doesn't support the idea that you're a bad employee.

Double-standard: Ask yourself, "Would I judge other people if they did the same thing? Am I being harder on myself than I am on other people?" This is a great method for challenging thinking traps that involve harsh self-criticism.

Survey Method: Find out whether other people you trust agree with your thoughts. For example, you might have trouble with one of your kids and think, "Good parents wouldn't have this kind of problem." To challenge this thought, you can ask other parents if they've ever have any problems with their kids.

Conduct an experiment: Test your beliefs in person. For example, if you think you think that your friends don't care about you, call a few friends and make plans to get together. If you assumed that they will all say no, you may be pleasantly surprised to hear that they do want to see you.

aim for a balance in your thoughts

Once you have worked through some challenges, try to think of a more balanced thought to replace the old thinking traps. Let's use the following example:

Situation	Thoughts	Thinking Trap	Challenge
My friend didn't say hello when I passed her on the street.	She's so rude. She doesn't like me anymore.	Labeling Mind Reading	Examine the evidence: She has never been rude to me in the past. I have no proof she even saw me.

>> Balanced Thoughts

There could be lots of other reasons why she didn't say hello. She probably didn't see me and still likes me. I'll wait until the next time we meet before I jump to any negative conclusions about our friendship.