

Recognising Unhelpful Thinking Styles

When we are anxious or low, we often have unhelpful thoughts about ourselves and our life in general. We tend to forget to check out how true these thoughts really are, so we believe them, act on them and they make us feel worse. We may even dwell on them because they fit in with our negative mood – this makes it even harder to get rid of them and get on with life.

See if any of the unhelpful thinking styles shown below apply to you...

Unhelpful thinking styles	Typical examples	Tick if you do this
I am hard on myself	<p>I'm very critical of myself.</p> <p>I don't value my strengths and achievements.</p> <p>I don't see myself as a coping person.</p>	
I see things in a negative way	<p>I look on the bad side of things.</p> <p>Nothing I do gives me a sense of achievement.</p> <p>I see the glass as being half empty rather than half full.</p>	
I have a gloomy view of the future	<p>I usually assume things will go wrong.</p> <p>If one thing goes wrong, I assume everything else will.</p> <p>I tend to be pessimistic about life.</p>	
I always think the worst	<p>I tend to assume the worst will happen.</p> <p>I often assume I will fail at things.</p>	
I think other people are negative about me	<p>I often think other people don't like me or don't respect me.</p> <p>I worry about how others see me.</p>	
I take on too much responsibility	<p>I blame myself if things go wrong.</p> <p>I feel guilty about things which are not really my fault.</p>	
I make extreme statements or rules for myself	<p>If one bad thing happens, I feel this is typical for me.</p> <p>I make rules for myself with words like 'ought', 'should' and 'got to.'</p>	

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Continued...

How could these unhelpful thinking styles be affecting you?

- Mood changes – you may feel angry, frustrated, guilty, stressed or upset over the least little thing, or your mood may change rapidly and seem out of control
- Behaviour changes – you may try to avoid situations which make you anxious, or stop doing things you enjoy. You may start acting in unhelpful ways which make you feel worse, for example by drinking too much. This can help in the short term, but in the long term it can become part of the problem.
- Mental pictures / images. You may see pictures in your mind of something going badly wrong in the future, or of sad or difficult events in the past. You might see pictures of things that you think are happening now—people talking about you, for example—or pictures of any other unhelpful thoughts.

It's important to bear in mind that negative unhelpful thoughts are often exaggerated or just not true. They can be hard to spot or pin down, though, as they have become so automatic over time that you treat them as facts – for example, if someone asks you a question and you cannot think of an answer, the thought 'I am stupid' might pop into your head and you believe it, perhaps feel foolish or embarrassed and go and hide yourself away.

The key thing to remember is that thoughts are just thoughts and not facts, however real they are to you – just because you don't know the answer to a question doesn't mean you are stupid or that you should hide away.

You may find it helpful to keep a diary of your thoughts and images. Your guide can give you a diary sheet or you may prefer to use your own diary. This could help you spot the unhelpful thoughts quickly and even start to change them, or just pay them less attention when they do pop into your head.

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