

Challenging unhelpful thoughts

Rationale:

How you think about things and what you say to yourself can affect how you feel and how you cope with situations. When you are faced with challenges, unhelpful ways of thinking can creep in and drain your energy. You can change unhelpful thinking into realistic helpful thinking and positive self-talk, which can increase your positive feelings and therefore your ability to cope with stressful situations. This is a simple activity to help you practise identifying and challenging unhelpful thoughts.

Age range information

Adults

What you need

You just need a pen and paper and a little time to complete this activity. You could also record your ideas on your computer or phone. Try to find a time when you are able to think calmly without distractions.

How to do it

1. Think about a time when you felt stressed.
2. Try to remember what you were thinking at the time. For example, perhaps you were stressed when your child had a tantrum in the supermarket. You might have been thinking, 'Everyone is looking at us' or 'I'll never get the shopping done now'. That might have made the situation more stressful.
3. Write down all the unhelpful thoughts you remember thinking at the time.
4. Now think about some helpful thoughts that could have replaced these unhelpful thoughts. Some examples might be: 'That lady is looking, but I don't know her and I don't really care what she thinks' or 'My child has had enough. I'll just get the shopping done tomorrow instead' or 'Anyone would find this stressful. It's not that I'm not coping, it's just that this is a stressful situation'.
5. Plan for next time. Become more aware of what your unhelpful thoughts are and what helpful thoughts you can call on to make things easier for you.
6. Practise becoming aware of how your 'I thoughts' impact on how you're feeling. Your 'I thoughts' are the things you think about yourself, like 'I'm doing great here' or 'I should be able to stop Hong Yi from screaming'. When things have not gone smoothly, take some time afterwards to plan how you might think about things differently next time.

7. Keep practising so you get better at noticing the unhelpful thoughts when they happen. With practice you will be able to overcome them when they happen so they do not make it harder to cope.
8. It is OK to ask for help from family, friends and professionals. It is a good idea to check with a health professional if you are having persistent feelings of depression, anger or resentment towards your child.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [The confident parent: a pediatrician's guide to caring for your little one-- without losing your joy, your mind, or yourself](#)
- [Mindfulness for mums & dads: proven strategies for calming down and connecting](#)
- [Positive parenting: an essential guide](#)