

# Helpful thinking

---

## Helpful and unhelpful thinking

How we think about things and what we say to ourselves can affect how we feel and how we cope with situations. You can learn to recognise when your thinking is unhelpful, and to think in more helpful ways.

## Why is helpful thinking important?

When you are faced with challenges, unhelpful ways of thinking can creep in and drain your energy. Unhelpful thinking makes it harder to deal with stress, and can get out of control, particularly if it becomes the normal way you think about things.

Some common unhelpful thinking patterns are:

- expecting other people to have a bad opinion of you – for example, ‘They think I’m stupid’, ‘She thinks I’m no good at anything’
- thinking things will always go wrong – for example, ‘Things never work out for me’, ‘Everyone is always against me’, ‘I’ll never be able to ...’
- labelling yourself – for example, ‘I’m no good’, ‘I’m stupid’, ‘I’m hopeless’
- absolute thinking – for example, ‘I have to do it this way’, ‘This will never work’
- expecting the worst – for example, ‘I’m sure to mess this up’, ‘It’s not going to work out anyway’, ‘I’m going to feel awful when it doesn’t happen’
- all-or-nothing thinking – for example, ‘He does everything right, and I always get it wrong’, ‘It has to be perfect’, ‘If only I had done it that way, it would be OK’.

You can change unhelpful thinking into realistic, helpful thinking. This way of thinking can energise you. It increases your positive feelings and therefore your ability to cope with stressful situations.

## How helpful thinking changes how you feel

Here is an example of how unhelpful and helpful thinking can affect how you react to situations.

Imagine you are lying in bed. Your child has not been settling very well at night. You are waking every 2-3 hours to resettle.

**Unhelpful thoughts** around this might be something like: ‘She is going to wake up any minute now. I’m never going to get any sleep and I’m going to be so tired tomorrow’. These thoughts are more likely to make you anxious, tense, restless and sleepless.

In the same situation, changing how you think about the situation can lead to better reactions.

**Helpful thoughts** around this situation might be something like: ‘She will wake up sometime and I might be tired tomorrow. But I can cope with that. It is not going to last forever. In the meantime, I will lie here and rest. Resting helps’. These thoughts are more likely to help you stay calmer, more relaxed and sleepy.

### Tips for using helpful thinking

To put helpful thoughts into action, try these ideas:

- **Challenge unhelpful thoughts about things that cause you stress.** For example, if your child cries when you are shopping, you might think, ‘Everyone will think I’m a bad parent’. But you could ask yourself, ‘How do I know that people will think this?’, ‘Would I think this about someone else?’
- **Think more realistically about what you can expect from your child.** For example, it might be too much to expect your child never to cry when you are out shopping. But perhaps you could think about it differently – for example, remind yourself that all children cry sometimes and maybe she’s tired or bored.
- **Develop positive self-talk statements that help you.** For example, you could say to yourself, ‘The shopping won’t take much longer – I can get through it’, ‘People are minding their own business – they’re not looking at us’, ‘Who cares what other people think?’, ‘I can do this’, ‘I will stay calm’.
- **Practise positive self-talk.** The more you practise, the more automatic it will become in your life. Start practising in one situation that causes you stress, and then move on to another one.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

### Recommended Reads

- [The building blocks of positive parenting: Specific strategies and skills all parents need!](#)
- [Mindfulness for mums & dads: Proven strategies for calming down and connecting](#)
- [Everyday blessings - The inner work of mindful parenting](#)