



As we've already said, you can choose how you think. However, before you can change your thinking, you need to be aware of the type of thought patterns you engage in that negatively affect your wellness.

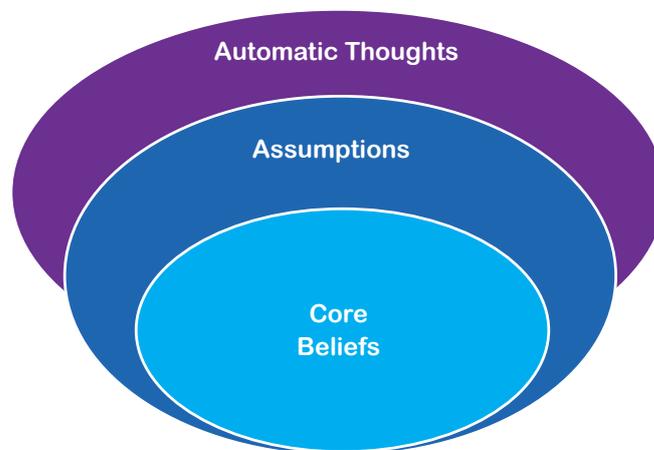
Many of our ways of thinking are handed down from generation to generation. Each new generation takes the information passed on to it from the last and adds its own refinements and discoveries, passing these on along with the rest to the next generation. Culture is all of what's passed on. It includes beliefs, assumptions, memories, customs, legends, songs, dances, humour, superstitions, prejudices, tastes, attitudes, values, information, knowledge..... even lies that get told often enough!! We think and behave in particular ways because that's the way it has always been done. We often don't question these ways of thinking and behaving because we were raised on them. They become our truths because we live as if they are true. They affect our way of seeing the world and how we feel and behave in it.

To put this in more concrete terms let's use the example of racism. With a racist view, people tend to think, feel and act in certain ways. They automatically judge others based on the colour of their skin and can have negative feelings towards them. If, for example, they believe people with a certain colour skin are inferior or bad, they will treat them as if they are. People will most likely react negatively to such treatment and the racist will use this reaction as evidence that their view is true, thereby strengthening it. It is easy to see how wrong this racist belief is from the outside but not from the inside because, for the racist, it is true.



The idea that you are responsible for how you think and therefore how you feel can be a bit scary at first. Many people react negatively to the idea because they think they are being blamed for generating their own negative and self-limiting feelings and behaviours. It is important to note that this is not what we are saying here. We recognise that most people are unaware of how their thinking affects their feelings and behaviours and therefore are not to blame for them. However, we are saying that we are responsible for ourselves and for changing things to make our lives better, once we know how to do this.

There are 3 levels of thoughts that influence our feelings and behaviours:



- **Level 1 – Automatic Thoughts** - we are automatically thinking all the time. This level involves what we think and how we think it. There is no problem with these thoughts unless they are persistently negative.
- **Level 2 – Assumptions** – these are the ‘rules’ we live our lives by. They involve ‘conditional’ statements – ‘if..... then.....’ and ‘demand’ statements – ‘people should treat each other fairly’ or ‘I should be perfect’.
- **Level 3 – Core Beliefs** – these are the strong, absolute statements we take as fact – they include ‘I am...’, ‘The world is....’ and ‘Others are....’ statements.

An example of how our thinking affects our mood and what we do is laid out below. The situation is the same in all four instances but the belief or thought is different and this is what leads to the different emotions.

# Changing Your Thinking



## Lessons from the bar

Activating Event	Belief/ Thought	Consequent Emotion
Guy in bar insults me	I'm a loser	Depression
Guy in bar insults me	He's trying to start a fight – the S.O.B.	Hostility, Anger
Guy in bar insults me	He might beat me up	Anxiety, Panic
Guy in bar insults me	He's drunk, I'll ignore him	Annoyed but none of the above

If we can spot the type of thinking that tends to lead us to experience negative emotions we can change it. There are a number of different ways of thinking that tend to lead us to feel some of the most common negative emotions that can affect our wellness:

- **Demands** – should, have to, must – these can lead us to feel angry when we or some one else does what we believe they must/should not do or doesn't do what we believe they should/must do. They can also lead us to feel guilty when we have done something we believe we 'shouldn't have done'.  
We can also feel hurt when we are treated unfairly or in a way we don't deserve when we hold the belief that others 'must treat me fairly'.
- **Catastrophising** – this is when we tell ourselves something is awful, terrible, the worst possible thing, the end of the world. When we think this way (usually about something we think could or might happen) we tend to feel anxious or panicky.
- **Self Downing** – when we put ourselves down (I'm a loser, I'm worthless, I'm inferior, I'm a failure etc.) we tend to feel down and depressed.
- **Low Frustration Tolerance** – this is when we tell ourselves we can't stand or can't bear something.  
This can lead us to feel anxious, to avoid things, to put things off or to stop ourselves from doing things that we know are good for us.



These are all forms of rigid thinking – they are absolutes in our heads. If we can spot when we are thinking these things we can change them by arguing against them, challenging the rules and assumptions we are carrying around in our heads, and constructing new thoughts that are more flexible.

- Instead of demands we can hold wants, desires and very strong preferences – my wanting something, no matter how strongly, doesn't mean it 'has' to be. Things are the way they are and they don't 'have' to be any other way.
- Instead of catastrophising we can make a realistic evaluation of how bad things might be – nothing is 110% bad or the end of the world – things may be bad but most likely they are not as bad as we think and there are some things we can do to improve things even a little bit.
- Instead of putting ourselves down we can accept ourselves unconditionally while judging our behaviour – 'I failed that exam but that does not mean I am a failure through and through - I can still succeed at other things in the future'; 'I did a bad thing but that does not mean I am a bad person, just a person who did a bad thing and I can resolve to do more good in the future'.
- Instead of telling ourselves we can't stand or bear certain things we can recognise that we can stand most things if we think they are worth standing (if there is some thing in it for us) and in actual fact we are most likely, at some level, of standing the thing we are telling ourselves we can't stand! So, for example, if we want to take exercise but tell ourselves we can't stand going out in the cold to go for a walk in the winter, we can remind ourselves that it will be worth putting up with the initial pain from the cold weather until we warm up from walking because we will feel better afterwards and it will help us achieve one of our goals.

We are not slaves to our thoughts. We can choose to think differently, thereby improving our wellness. This is not about putting a positive spin on negative life events - it's about seeing them realistically and recognising that everything changes and these times will pass but we can make our lives easier while we are waiting for them to pass by thinking about them in a more balanced and flexible way.

The first step in putting this learning into practice is to spot the thoughts that lead you to feel and behave in ways that prevent you from reaching your potential. Then you need to analyse your thinking to see if it is true and if it is helpful for you to think that way. The last step is to change your thinking to something that is true and is more helpful. The following worksheets have been designed to help you with this.

# Situations or Events That Trigger My Negative Emotions



Think about the situations or events that occur in your life that tend to trigger the negative emotions that damage your wellness. You can record them here and you will see an example of what you might include in the first line.

If my friends don't phone me when they say they will, I think no-one wants me around and I feel depressed and go to bed.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

## The Thinking Behind My Emotions

Take the situations you have described in the last worksheet and think about the last time this happened to you or you felt this way. Use the space below to write down what you were thinking the last time that event happened/situation arose. Again, the first line is filled out as an example.

If my friends don't phone me I think no-one wants me around because they think I am boring and useless and that means that I am boring and useless.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.



# Change Your Thoughts, Change Your World

Now look at the thoughts you recorded on the last worksheet. Use the space below to analyse these thoughts to see if they are logical or true (is there evidence to support them?) or helpful and, if not, why? Use the space to come up with a way of thinking that is more logical, true and helpful. You can use the example below to guide you.

Thought: If my friends don't phone on time it means they think I am boring and useless and that means I am boring and useless.

**Is this logical?** No – it does not follow that my friends not phoning on time means they think anything negative about me or that I am boring and useless.

**Is this true?** No – there could be any number of reasons why they have not phoned on time (e.g. they could be busy). They would have no reason to be friends with me if they thought I was boring and useless – they don't have to be friends with me but they are. Even if they did think I was boring and useless, that wouldn't mean I was – it would just be their opinion based on the little they know of me. No-one is completely useless or boring – we all have our uses and our interests.

**Is this helpful?** No, in fact it is counterproductive. When I think this, I feel depressed which is horrible and I also withdraw and go to bed often missing their calls when they do phone and denying myself a good chat or a night out and therefore behaving in a boring way!!!

**A more logical, true and helpful way of thinking would be:** I really don't like it when my friends don't phone at the time they say they will but they all have other things in their lives besides me and they can sometimes get delayed or can forget they said they would phone. It doesn't mean they don't want me around, or that they find me boring or useless – if they did they would never phone and would not be my friends. No-one is boring and useless - everyone has their uses and their interests. There is no point in my withdrawing and going to bed because then my life will become boring and I don't want that. I can find something else interesting to do while I am waiting for them to phone, or I can phone them!



# Change Your Thoughts, Change Your World



You can photocopy the sheet below and use it to challenge and change each of the unhelpful thoughts you have written down on the previous worksheet, using the example above and the notes you have already read to guide you.

Thought:

Is this logical?

Is this true?

Is this helpful?

A more logical, true and helpful way of thinking would be:



As you work on challenging and changing your thinking you can use the sheet below to record the benefits you achieve. The first line is filled out as an example.

<p>The situation</p> <p>My friends don't call when they say they will.</p>	<p>The old way of thinking and feeling</p> <p>They think I'm boring &amp; useless &amp; that means I feel depressed.</p>	<p>The new way of thinking and feeling</p> <p>Not calling at a particular time doesn't mean my friends think negatively of me. I am not a boring and useless person. I feel sadness &amp; disappointment when they don't call on time.</p>	<p>The benefits</p> <p>I am not dependent on my friends to feel good. I am sad and disappointed but not depressed when they are late calling, but I can get on with things and enjoy myself regardless.</p>								
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# The Benefits of Questioning & Changing My Thinking



The benefits				
The new way of thinking and feeling				
The old way of thinking and feeling				
The situation				

