Staying Optimistic: Conquering Negative Thoughts

An average person has between 12,000 and 60,000 thoughts per day, 80 per cent of which are negative. These thoughts are part of the survival mechanism in the mind that focuses on negative details as a form of self-protection. However, it is not the negative thoughts themselves that are the issue, but, rather, the importance that we give these thoughts.

This session allows you to learn how to gain control over negative thoughts and turn them into neutral or positive ones to help conquer unhealthy and unhelpful habits.

Thoughts are not facts
These are key things you need to know:

• We all have quick and automatic thoughts that just ‘pop’ into our minds.
• These automatic thoughts are often based on assumptions.
• Automatic thoughts are often very believable, but they can be inaccurate.

Why different people react differently

• Situation
• Automatic thoughts
• Consequences (feelings, physical reactions, behaviours and emotions)

Unhelpful thinking styles

• **All-or-nothing thinking**: Sometimes called 'black-and-white' thinking
• **Over-generalising**: Seeing a pattern based upon a single event or being overly broad in the conclusion
• **Mental filter**: Paying attention to certain types of evidence
• **Disqualifying the positive**: Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done
• **Jumping to conclusions**: Mind reading (imagining we know what others are thinking) and fortune telling (predicting the future)
• **Catastrophising and minimising**: Blowing things out of proportion or inappropriately shrinking something to make it less important
• **Emotional reasoning**: Since we feel a certain way, we assume what we think must be true
• **Should**: Using critical words like 'should', 'must' or 'ought' can make us feel guilty or like we have already failed
• **Labelling**: Assigning labels to ourselves or other people
Challenging negative thoughts: Thought record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Emotions and body sensations</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am out with friends on a Thursday evening around 7.00pm</td>
<td>Anxious: 80%</td>
<td>I'm going to make a fool of myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At 4.00pm, my boss asked me to take on some extra work again with a short deadline, and I said yes – even though I'd have to stay late on a Friday.</td>
<td>Sad, low and tearful: 70%</td>
<td>I'm such a pushover. He won't stop doing this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenging negative thoughts: Alternative thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Automatic thoughts</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
<th>Alternative thoughts</th>
<th>New feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I gave advice to a friend who was experiencing some difficulties. She didn't thank me, and she said I was bothering her.</td>
<td>She does not respect me.</td>
<td>Angry: 70% Sad: 30%</td>
<td>She may be irritable because she is worrying about her issues; I don't need to take it too personally.</td>
<td>Relaxed: 50% A bit sad: 40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenging negative thoughts: Perspective taking

- Record information about the situation that bothered you.
- Record how you felt.
- Identify the thoughts.
- Consider other perspectives.
- Reflect on how you are feeling.

Personal accountability

'Being willing to answer – to be accountable – for the outcomes resulting from your choices, behaviors and actions'.

- Take ownership of the situation you are involved in.
- See it through; take responsibility for what happens – good or bad.
- Don’t blame others if things go wrong. Instead, do your best to make things right.
- In the workplace, this can go beyond your own tasks. For example, you may be held accountable for the actions of your team.

The most skilled communicators match their responses to the situation. In discussions with the people you manage, it helps to differentiate the coaching situations from the counselling situations. Coaching is providing advice and information or setting standards to help your employees to improve their skills and their performance. Counselling is helping subordinates recognise and address problems involving their emotions, attitudes, motivation or personalities.

- Reflecting
- Probing
- Deflecting
- Advising
Preventing negative thoughts: Mindfulness techniques

- Practise mindfulness and meditation.
- Do yoga.
- Perform gratitude exercises.
- Give yourself a break.
- Smile.
- Sing.
- Surround yourself with positive people.
- Broaden your social life.
- Develop a hobby.
- Help someone else, or practise charity work.
- Exercise regularly.
- Don’t dwell on your mistakes – move forwards.
- Read positive quotes.
- Talk to people that you can trust.
- Talk to a professional.

Staying positive during challenging times

- Say ‘Why is this happening for me’? instead of ‘Why is this happening to me’?
- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Treat yourself.
- Keep an open mind and perspective.
- Surround yourself with loved ones.
- Allow yourself to have bad days.
- Make a list of the things you can manage.
- Spend time in nature.
- Add positivity to someone else’s life.

It’s okay to not be okay: Seeking support

- Treatment options
  - Psychotherapy
  - Medications
  - Complementary health approaches
- Contact your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

Summary

- Gain higher self-awareness about our own thoughts.
- Challenge your negative thoughts.
- Replace them with alternative thoughts.
- Seek professional help, if needed.