

CHAPTER SEVEN



# Balanced thinking

Often we become stuck in a negative trap and find ourselves making the same thinking errors time and time again. The more we make these errors, the more we believe our negative thoughts and the harder it becomes to challenge them and see things in a different way.

In order to break out of this cycle, we have to learn to identify and challenge our negative thoughts. By doing this we shall be able to gain a more balanced view of what is going on.

Until you get used to doing it, **balanced thinking** can be hard.

It is at these times that the **Thought Tracker** can help. The **Thought Tracker** can suggest some questions that might help you to gain a more balanced view and help you to challenge your negative thoughts.

The following questions might be helpful.



What evidence is there to **support** this thought?



What evidence is there to **question** this thought?



What would my **best friend**/teacher/parent say if they heard me thinking in this way?



What would I **say to my best friend** if he or she had this thought?



Am I making **any thinking errors**?

- ▶ Am I having a **DOWNER** on myself and forgetting my strengths (negative glasses or positive doesn't count)?
- ▶ Am I **BLOWING THINGS UP** (all-or-nothing thinking, magnifying the negative or snowballing)?

- ▶ Am I **PREDICTING FAILURE** (mind-reader or fortune-teller)?
- ▶ Are these **FEELING THOUGHTS** (emotional reasoning and dustbin labels)?
- ▶ Am I **SETTING MYSELF UP TO FAIL?**
- ▶ Am I **BLAMING MYSELF** for the things that have gone wrong?



Balanced thinking is **NOT** about rationalizing your thoughts.

Balanced thinking is **NOT** about seeing everything positively.

**Balanced thinking is about looking for new information that you might otherwise overlook.**

Our thoughts have to be realistic. Otherwise we would be fooling ourselves into thinking that everything is problem free – and this just isn't the case!

## So how does it work?

### ▶ Sita's school work

Sita was watching television when she noticed herself becoming very tearful and feeling very stressed. The programme on TV was one of her favourites, but she hadn't really been watching it. She was thinking about other things. The **Thought Tracker** helped Sita to identify and write down the following thoughts:



- “
- ▶ I've messed everything up.
  - ▶ I'm never going to pass my examinations.
  - ▶ Even if I started working now, it's too late.
  - ▶ I'm just stupid.”

Now that Sita had identified the thoughts that were making her feel unhappy, the next stage was to check whether she was seeing the whole story. She used some of the **Thought Tracker's** questions to find out whether this really was **balanced thinking**.

- ▶ **What evidence is there to support these thoughts?** Sita had been struggling to complete her maths homework that evening, and no matter how she tried she just couldn't seem to do it.

- ▶ **What would her best friend Claire say?** ‘You know that maths isn’t your strongest subject, but you have always got through the exams. You are in the top groups for everything else’.
- ▶ **What would her maths teacher say?** ‘We have only started this work today, and I think it will take all the class some time before they really understand it’.
- ▶ **What thinking errors was Sita making?**

1 *Blowing things up*

**All-or-nothing thinking** – leaping from being unable to complete her maths homework to failing her examinations.

**Snowballing** – failing to complete her maths homework meant that ‘everything’ was messed up.

2 *The downers*

**Negative glasses** – not recognizing that she is in the top set for all the other subjects.

3 *Feeling thoughts*

**Dustbin labels** – thinking of herself as stupid when her best friend and teachers think that she is clever.



By stopping and challenging these negative thoughts, Sita recognized that she was seeing only half of the story. Although she did not understand her maths homework, it was new work. Maths was the subject she found hardest, but so far she had always managed to pass her exams. Finally, Sita recognized that she was doing very well in her other subjects, and that there was no reason why her future should be ruined.

▶ **Adam’s friends**

Adam was lying in bed and felt himself becoming very tense. The **Thought Tracker** helped Adam to identify the following thoughts that were racing through his head.



- “
- ◀ *Mike doesn’t like me anymore.*
  - ◀ *He wants to be on his own.*
  - ◀ *I’m too boring and serious.*
  - ◀ *I annoy him’.*”

It was time for Adam to check whether this was **balanced thinking** or whether he was only listening to his negative thoughts. Like Sita, he used some of the **Thought Tracker's** questions to test this.

- ▶ **What evidence is there to support these thoughts?** Mike said he was unable to come to my house after school today. He doesn't seem very happy when we talk, and often he doesn't seem to listen to what I say.
- ▶ **What evidence is there to question these thoughts?** Mike slept over at my house at the weekend and he invited me to stay with him next Saturday. I know that Mike is worried about his parents at the moment and perhaps he wants to stay at home with them.
- ▶ **What thinking errors was Adam making?**
  - 1 *Predicting failure*  
**The mind-reader** – thinking that Mike doesn't like me.
  - 2 *Feeling thoughts*  
**Dustbin labels** – 'I'm boring' – even though we've been friends for five years.



Adam was able to recognize that he was panicking. He and Mike were still friends and had already arranged a time to be together. Adam realized that maybe Mike was feeling unhappy and worried about something else, rather than being fed up with him.



- ▶ **Balanced thinking** is a way of testing your thoughts and checking that you are seeing the whole of the story.
- ▶ Look for new evidence.
- ▶ Think what other people would say if they could hear your thoughts.
- ▶ Check that you aren't making any thinking errors.



## Looking for evidence

Keep a thought diary. When you find yourself having negative thoughts, **STOP** and **TEST** them.

- ▶ Write down your negative thoughts as clearly as you can.
- ▶ Use the Thought Thermometer on page 87 to rate how much you believe them.
- ▶ Write down the evidence that supports these negative thoughts.
- ▶ Write down the evidence that does not support these thoughts.
- ▶ What would your best friend say?
- ▶ What would you say to them if they had these thoughts?
- ▶ Use the Thought Thermometer to rate how much you believe these thoughts now.



# Looking for evidence

<p><i>Day and time</i></p>	<p><i>Thoughts</i>                  What were your thoughts?                  Rate how much you believe them</p>	<p><i>Support</i>                  What evidence supports your thoughts?</p>	<p><i>Challenge</i>                  What evidence challenges this thought?</p>	<p><i>Best friend</i>                  What would I say to them?                  What would they say to me?                  Rate how much you believe this now</p>	
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## Balanced thinking

Keep a thought diary. When you find yourself having negative thoughts, **STOP** and **TEST** them.

- ▶ Write down your negative thoughts as clearly as you can.
- ▶ Write down the evidence that supports these negative thoughts.
- ▶ Write down the evidence that does not support these thoughts.

The next day, look at your diary and fill in the last column (i.e. on the basis of this evidence, what would be a more balanced thought?).

Finally, use the Thought Thermometer on page 87 to rate how much you believe your balanced thought.



# Balanced thinking

<p><i>Day and time</i></p>	<p><i>Thoughts</i> What were your thoughts?</p>	<p><i>Support evidence</i> What evidence supports your thoughts?</p>	<p><i>Challenging evidence</i> What evidence does not support these thoughts?</p>	<p><i>Balanced thought</i> What is a more balanced thought? Rate how much you believe this thought</p>	
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## Thought thermometer

Use the scale to show how strongly you believe in your thoughts.



10 **Very strongly believe**

9

8

7 **Fairly strongly believe**

6

5

4 **Believe a little**

3

2



1 **Don't really believe at all**