

◀ CHAPTER SIX ▶



Thinking errors

We have begun to see that some of our 'hot' automatic thoughts are not helpful. They may make us feel unpleasant or prevent us from doing things. The problem with negative automatic thoughts is that they continue to go round and round in our heads and we seldom stop to challenge or question them. In fact, we do the opposite – the more we hear them, the more we believe them, and the more we look for evidence or select things to prove them.

These are **thinking errors**. There are six common types of thinking errors that we make.



The downers

With these types of errors we focus only on the negative things that happen. We only see the things that **go wrong or that aren't right**. Anything positive is overlooked, disbelieved or thought to be unimportant. There are two common types of downers.

▶ Negative glasses



Negative glasses only let you see one part of what happens – the negative part!

If you have a good time, or if nice things happen, the negative glasses will still find the things that went wrong or weren't quite good enough. It is these negative things that you notice and remember most.

- ▶ You may have had a really good day out with your friends, but at lunchtime your favourite café was full. When you are asked whether you had a good time, you reply 'No. We couldn't get into the café'.

▶ Positive doesn't count

With this thinking error, anything positive is dismissed as unimportant or else discredited.

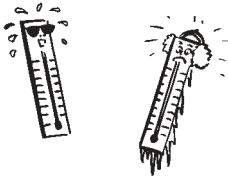
- ▶ The person who hears that a boy or girl wants to go out with them may think 'they probably can't find anyone else to go out with'.
- ▶ Doing well in a maths test may be discounted as you think 'but it was easy – we learned all that last year'.



Blowing things up

The second type of thinking errors are those where negative things are blown up and **become bigger** than they really are. This happens in three main ways.

▶ All-or-nothing thinking



Everything is seen in all-or-nothing terms. It is either boiling hot or freezing cold, and there doesn't seem to be anything in between!

- ▶ You may have a disagreement with your best friend and think to yourself 'that's it – you're not my friend any more'.

If you fall short of perfect, then you see yourself as a total failure.

- ▶ Getting 72% in a maths test may cause someone to think 'I never get anything right – I'm going to give up maths'.

▶ Magnifying the negative



With this thinking error, the importance of things that happen is exaggerated. Negative events are magnified and blown up out of all proportion.

- ▶ 'I forgot his name and **everyone** was looking at me and laughing at me'.
- ▶ 'I dropped my book and the **whole class** was watching me'.

▶ Snowballing



With this thinking error, a single event or upset snowballs and quickly grows into a never-ending pattern of defeat. The first grey cloud in the sky becomes evidence of an approaching thunderstorm!

- ▶ Not being picked for the sports team could result in thoughts such as 'I'm no good at sports, I can't understand maths, I just **can't do anything**'.

Predicting failure

Another type of thinking error is about what we **expect** will happen. These types of errors often **predict failure** and make us expect the worse. This can happen in two main ways:

▶ The mind-reader



With this thinking error, the person thinks that they know what everyone else is thinking.

- ▶ 'I know she doesn't like me'.
- ▶ 'I bet everyone is laughing at me'.

▶ The fortune-teller



With this thinking error, the person thinks that they know what will happen.

- ▶ 'If we go out, I'll end up sitting on my own'.
- ▶ 'I know I'm not going to be able to do this work'.

Feeling thoughts

With this thinking error our **emotions become very strong** and cloud the way in which we think and see things. What we think depends on how we feel, not on what actually happens.

▶ Emotional reasoning

Because you feel bad, sad and down, then you assume that everything else is, too. Your emotions take over and colour the way in which you think.

▶ Dustbin labels



You attach a label to yourself and think of everything you do in these terms.

- ▶ 'I'm just a loser'.
- ▶ 'It's me, I'm just hopeless'.
- ▶ 'I'm rubbish'.

Setting yourself up to fail

This error is about the standards and expectations that we set ourselves. Often our **targets are too high**, and we never seem to achieve them. We set ourselves up to fail. We become very aware of our failings and the things we have not done. These thoughts often start with words such as:

- ▶ I should
- ▶ I must
- ▶ I shouldn't
- ▶ I can't.

They result in us setting impossible standards, which we can't achieve.

Blame me!

At other times **we feel responsible** for the negative things that happen, even though we have no control over them. Everything that goes wrong is down to us!

- ▶ 'As soon as I got on the bus, it broke down'.
- ▶ If your friend doesn't see you and walks past without talking to you, you may think 'I must have said something to upset him'.



It is important to remember that everyone makes these errors at some stage. The problem starts when they happen regularly and when they prevent you from making real choices about the things you can or want to do in your life.



Identifying thinking errors

Keep a diary and when you notice a negative thought, write it down. Describe what was happening and how you felt.

Use the Thought Thermometer on page 87 to rate how much you believe your negative thought.

The next day, look at your diary and fill in the last column.

- ▶ Were you making any thinking errors?
- ▶ What were they?
- ▶ Do you make some errors more than others?
- ▶ Finally, use the Thought Thermometer to rate how much you now believe your negative thought.



Day and time	Situation What, where, when and who	Thoughts What were your thoughts Rate how much you believe them	Feelings How did you feel	Errors What thinking error are you making How much do you believe this now



What thinking errors do you make?



▶ The downers

- ▶ How often do you find yourself looking for the bad things that happen?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do you find yourself looking for the things that go wrong or which aren't quite good enough?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do you ignore or overlook the positive or good things that happen?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do you play down the positive or good things that happen?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

▶ Blowing things up

- ▶ How often do you find yourself using all-or-nothing thinking?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do you magnify or blow up the things that go wrong?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do single negative events seem to snowball into something bigger?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

THINK GOOD – FEEL GOOD

▶ Predicting failure

- ▶ How often do you think you know what other people are thinking about you?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do you expect things to go wrong?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

▶ Feeling thoughts

- ▶ How often do you think that you are a stupid or bad person?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do you think that you are a loser who can never do anything right?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

▶ Setting yourself up to fail

- ▶ How often do you think that things are not good enough unless they are perfect?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do you find yourself thinking that you 'should' do this or that?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

- ▶ How often do you find yourself saying 'I must'?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

▶ Blame me!

- ▶ How often do you blame yourself for the things that happen or go wrong?

Never Sometimes Often All of the time

