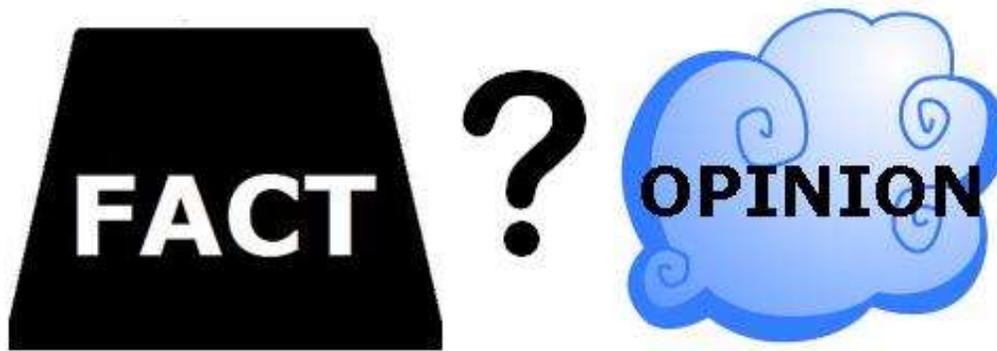


## FACT or OPINION



### FACT

- Evidence to support its truth
- Undisputable
- Driven by rational thought
- Head

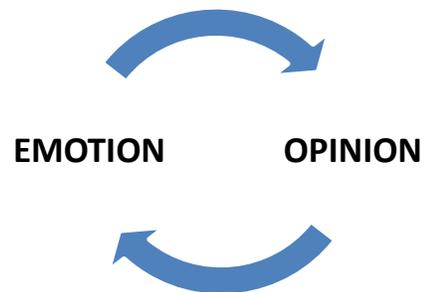
### OPINION

- Based upon a belief or personal view
- Arguable
- Driven by and reinforced by emotion
- Heart

At stressful times, we tend to be driven by our emotions and opinions, which create a vicious cycle by fuelling each other. Our emotions strengthen our opinions, which in turn, intensify our emotions.

This leads to impulsive acts and unhelpful longer term consequences, which help to maintain the overall problem.

Realising that many thoughts are opinion rather than fact makes it less likely that we'll be distressed by them, and more able to make wise and calm decisions about the best action to take.



It is helpful to ask ourselves whether our thoughts are FACT or OPINION.

- If OPINION, then we can look at the facts – what we do **know** about the situation.
- If FACT, then we can make choices about the best thing to do.

## FACT or OPINION ?

# FACT or OPINION

## Example

What words might we use to describe this picture?



### Fact

*Evidence-based*

- Clown
- Painted face
- Colourful
- Circus performer
- Smiling

### Opinion

*Varies, personal view*

- Funny
- Weird hair
- Scary
- Happy
- Ugly

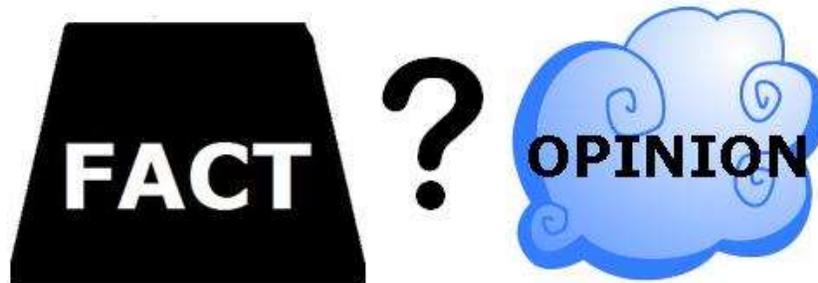
In the same way, individuals can have many varied opinions about the same event or situation. If someone we know walked past us without saying hello, we might think, "they deliberately ignored me", "she's being snooty and rude", "they didn't want to talk to me because they don't like me" and so on.



This might lead us to feel upset, and react in ways that are unhelpful.

The only *fact* is that the person walked past, anything else is opinion – our own personal interpretation of the event. The reality is that they just didn't see us.

Get into the habit of asking yourself:



# Self-talk

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 [ie.reachout.com/getting-help-2/minding-your-mental-health/self-talk/](https://ie.reachout.com/getting-help-2/minding-your-mental-health/self-talk/)

**You know the voice in your head that applauds you for your victories and gives out when you screw up? That's what we mean when we mention 'self-talk'.**

Sometimes we make ourselves feel miserable even when our situation isn't that bad, simply by thinking in a negative, self-defeating way.

It's as though we've an internal voice inside our head that influences how we feel about every situation. This inner voice is our 'self-talk', and includes our conscious and unconscious thoughts.

Some of our self-talk is reasonable. When a voice in your head tells you to study the night before an exam, or tells you to be proud of an achievement, it can be seen as positive self-talk.

But talking to yourself in a negative or unrealistic way is never helpful; in fact it's the opposite. It causes us to feel hurt, angry, frustrated, depressed or anxious.

It can also make us behave negatively. For example, telling yourself you're going to fail an exam could stop you from working as hard the night before. Check self-esteem for more.

## Challenging negative self-talk

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With practice, you can learn to notice your own negative self-talk as it happens, and consciously choose to think more positively. The automatic reactions you have to negative thoughts can cause you stress and make you less able to meet life's challenges.

Learning to challenge negative thoughts takes time and practice, but it's worth the effort. Once you start examining it, you'll probably be surprised by how much of your thinking is inaccurate, exaggerated, or negative.

Whenever you find yourself feeling anxious, stop and think about how you've been talking to yourself. Find another way to think about your situation and you can focus positively on improving it. Check anxiety for more.

Once you get into the habit of challenging your negative self-talk you'll find it easier to handle difficult situations, and as a result, feel less stressed and more self-confident. Writing down your negative self-talk as you learn to identify it helps you develop your skills. Initially it might feel like hard work, but the more often you do it the better you'll feel.

## Thinking errors

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These errors are irrational patterns of thinking that cause you to feel bad, and act in self-defeating ways. Whenever you find yourself feeling depressed or anxious, look for thinking errors that make you feel that way. Some common thinking errors and how to challenge them:

### Error 1: Thinking in black and white

Seeing everything in terms of being good or bad. Either you're great, or you're a loser, so if you do something wrong then you're completely bad.

Challenge: Avoid thinking about things in extremes. Most things aren't black and white, they're somewhere in between. Just because something isn't perfect doesn't mean it's a write-off.

### Error 2: Unfair comparisons

Making unfair comparisons between yourself and other people. The people you compare yourself with often have a specific advantage in some area. Making comparisons can leave you feeling inadequate.

Challenge: Recognise that comparing yourself isn't helpful. Appreciate your own qualities on their own terms and remember everyone has their own problems.

### Error 3: Filtering

Focusing on the negative aspects of your situation, while dismissing the positive ones.

Challenge: Realise there are always positives and negatives to every situation. Focusing only on the negative will give you a distorted view of reality.

### Error 4: Personalising everything

Feeling responsible for everything that goes wrong around you, even when it's not your fault or responsibility.

Challenge: Take a step back and remember you're not to blame for things outside your control. The situation isn't all about you.

### Error 5: Mind-reading

Feeling like you know what other people are thinking and assuming they're focused on your faults.

Challenge: You'll simply never know what others are thinking, so playing that guessing game is a waste of time. Give yourself peace of mind by taking responsibility for your own thoughts alone.

### Error 6: Catastrophising

Feeling like things are always headed for disaster and imagining that potential consequences will be worse than they are.

Challenge: Ask yourself what the worst thing that can happen is and what you're so afraid of. Believe in your own abilities to get things right sometimes. Check [self-esteem](#) for more.

### Error 7: Over-generalising

Exaggerating the number of mistakes and failures in your daily life. Thinking everyone around you is judging you for your mistakes.

Challenge: Stick to the facts. If something's gone wrong, don't take it as a sign that you're an all-round failure. Just try to learn from it and move on.

### Error 8: Labelling

Calling yourself or other people names. Instead of focusing on specific things that have gone wrong, you brand yourself or other people with negative labels like "stupid" or "ugly".

Challenge: Try not to think in those terms. Using labels on yourself can break down your self-esteem, so stick firmly to the facts.

## Blaming others

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Sometimes things go wrong. You might have a picture in your head of the way you want something or someone to be, but it doesn't always work out that way.

If we've put a lot of stake in something, it's easy to blame others when it doesn't turn out like we'd hoped.

The problem with blaming others is that it increases your frustration levels, but doesn't solve the problem. Avoid getting upset in all sorts of situations by learning to think flexibly.

This means learning to prefer things to be a certain way, but accepting that this won't always be the reality. Try to feel ok with things not being OK. Don't give yourself or others too hard a time.

**CRUFAD**clinic  
Patient Homework

# Module 3:

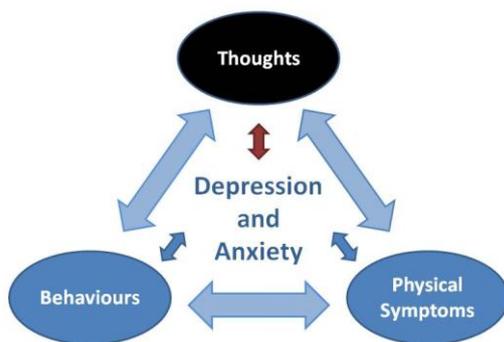
## Tackling Thoughts





## 1. Challenging Unhelpful Thinking

In Lesson 2, you learnt about the Unhelpful Thinking Styles that people often fall into when they experience depression and anxiety. Anxiety and depression often lead people to think in ways that are distorted, unrealistic, not accurate and unhelpful. In Depression, **people often think in negative and pessimistic ways**, whereas in anxiety, **people often over-estimate the likelihood that something bad will happen**, and **underestimate their ability to cope**. It's like looking through dark "doom and gloom" glasses. Last lesson, you also learnt that **thoughts can affect how we feel** in certain situations.



Perhaps you were able to detect some of these unhelpful thinking styles as you monitored your thoughts during the week, such as:

- Catastrophising
- Mind reading
- Black and white thinking

In Lesson 3, you saw how Liz and Rob learnt to challenge their unhelpful thinking. Thought challenging gives us a helpful way to ensure our thinking is balanced and realistic. It is a helpful way of countering our negative ways of thinking.

**Thought challenging helps to keep things in perspective.**

### Thought Challenging

Once you have recognised and recorded your thoughts on your **"Thought Monitoring Form,"** you can decide whether your thoughts are realistic or not by using Thought Challenging. There are three steps to thought challenging:

**Step 1.** Recognise and identify your thinking.

**Step 2.** Challenge your thoughts by looking at the evidence.

### Step 3. Change unhelpful thoughts to more helpful thoughts.

You may find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

#### What are the facts?

Sometimes it's helpful to **think like a lawyer** (or a scientist) when you're challenging your thoughts. The best lawyers and scientists generally don't use feelings or opinions to win their argument – they **stick to the facts (the evidence)**. Sticking to the facts can help you to avoid unhelpful thinking styles such as catastrophising (thinking the worst) and mind reading (making assumptions about what other people are thinking).

#### Are there any positives in yourself or the situation that you are ignoring?

When a person is feeling depressed and anxious, they will often have a tendency to notice the negatives and ignore the positives. Psychologists call this a negative attention bias – the person only **pays attention to information that fits with their low mood**. Unfortunately, this just keeps the low mood going. In anxiety, it's called a threat attention bias. That is, people with anxiety pay attention to threatening information in their environment! You may be experiencing both at the moment (paying extra attention to threatening and negative information). By asking yourself the question above, it will help you to avoid this trap, and to notice positives as well as negatives.



#### What would you say to a friend in this situation?

Perhaps you will remember that both Liz and Rob recognised **lots of self criticism** in their thinking – they often berated their selves for things they hadn't done well enough, or called themselves names when they had made a mistake. Self criticism is common in Depression and Anxiety, and it can be very unhelpful. Rather than motivating us to do better, self criticism simply lowers our mood and contributes to the vicious cycle. You can reduce the harmful impact of self criticism by trying to talk to yourself as you would talk to a friend. Remind yourself to use the same kind of language and show the same kindness and compassion.

Here are some other questions that might be helpful for you to challenge unhelpful thinking:

- What evidence do I have for believing this?
- What happened last time I worried about this?
- Am I jumping to conclusions that are not completely justified by the evidence?
- Are there any things that contradict my thoughts that I might be ignoring?
- What's an alternative explanation? Are there any other ways to view this situation?
- Is what I believe the only or best way to explain what is going on?
- Would everyone in a similar situation think this way?
- What is the worst thing that could happen, and how bad would that really be?
- What is most likely to happen?



- Would it still be so bad in a week/month/year?
- What are the facts in this situation, and what are my own feelings and interpretations?
- What are the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages) of thinking this way?

## What you should know about thought challenging

- Challenging unhelpful thinking can be difficult at first – often it feels forced and unnatural.
- Like any new skill, thought challenging gets easier with practice.
- You need to set aside time to practice thought challenging.
- It's often hardest to try thought challenging when you're feeling highly depressed or anxious. Therefore, we recommend that you first start practicing thought challenging when you feel less distressed.
- Thoughts and unhelpful thinking styles are like habits. Like any other habit, you need lots of practice to be able to change them effectively.
- It is important to be realistic with your expectations about this skill. You won't master it immediately. However, it will become easier (and more automatic) with practice.
- Thought challenging is not about thinking positively in a bad situation. It is about **realistic thinking**. If your thinking is realistic, then simply thinking positively is unlikely to help, whereas other techniques such as **Structured Problem Solving**, (which we discuss in Lesson 4), may be more helpful.
- Use the **Thought Challenging Worksheet** at the end of this lesson (or you can download a copy of this from the Extra Resources section) to help you.
- We have provided the Thought Challenging Worksheet for you to work through at first. You will not always need this sheet as the skill will become automatic. However, while you are learning, it is important that you go through the steps systematically until you've mastered this skill.

## Challenging your thinking errors

Here are 10 common thinking errors and ways to challenge them.

### 1. Black-and-white thinking

When you're thinking in black-and-white, you see everything in terms of being either good or bad with nothing in between. For example: either you're great, or you're a loser; If you don't look like a model, you must be ugly; if you do something wrong, then you are completely bad.

#### The challenge: Look for shades of gray

It's important to avoid thinking about things in terms of extremes. Most things aren't black-and-white, but somewhere in-between. Just because something isn't completely perfect doesn't mean that it's a total disaster.

#### Ask yourself:

- Is it really so bad, or am I seeing things in black-and-white?
- How else can I think about the situation?
- Am I taking an extreme view?

## 2. Unreal ideal

Another common thinking error is to make unfair comparisons between certain individuals and yourself. When you do this, you compare yourself with people who have a specific advantage in some area. Making unfair comparisons can leave you feeling inadequate.

### **The challenge: Stop making unfair comparisons**

Ask yourself:

- Am I comparing myself with people who have a particular advantage?
- Am I making fair comparisons?

## 3. Filtering

When you filter, first you hone in on the negative aspects of your situation. Then you ignore or dismiss all the positive aspects.

### **The challenge: Consider the whole picture**

Ask yourself:

- Am I looking at the negatives, while ignoring the positives?
- Is there a more balanced way to look at this situation?

## 4. Personalizing: The self-blame game

When you personalize, you blame yourself for anything that goes wrong, even when it's not your fault or responsibility.

### **The challenge: Find all the causes**

Ask yourself:

- Am I really to blame? Is this all about me?
- What other explanations might there be for this situation?

## 5. Mind-reading

We often think we know what other people are thinking. We assume that others are focused on our faults and weaknesses—but this is often wrong! Remember: your worst critic is probably you.

### **The challenge: Don't assume you know what others are thinking**

Ask yourself:

- What is the evidence? How do I know what other people are thinking?
- Just because I assume something, does that mean I'm right?

## 6. Exaggerating

When things go wrong, you might have a tendency to exaggerate the consequences and imagine that the results will be disastrous.

### **The challenge: Put it in perspective**

Ask yourself:

- What's the worst that can happen?
- What's the best that can happen?

- What's most likely to happen?
- Will this matter in five years?
- Is there anything good about the situation?
- Is there any way to fix the situation?

## 7. Over-generalizing

Over-generalizing is a lot like exaggeration. When you over-generalize, you exaggerate the frequency of negative things in your life, like mistakes, disapproval and failures. Typically you might think to yourself: I always make mistakes, or everyone thinks I'm stupid.

### **The challenge: Be specific**

Ask yourself:

- Am I over-generalizing?
- What are the facts? What are my interpretations?

## 8. Fact versus feeling

Sometimes you might confuse your thoughts or feelings with reality. You might assume that your perceptions are correct.

### **The challenge: Stick to the facts**

Ask yourself:

- Am I confusing my feelings with the facts? Just because I'm feeling this way, does that mean my perceptions are correct?
- Am I thinking this way just because I'm feeling bad right now?

## 9. Labeling

When you use label, you might call yourself or other people names. Instead of being specific—for example, saying "That was a silly thing to do"—you make negative generalizations about yourself or other people by saying things like "I'm ugly," or "she's an idiot."

### **The challenge: Judge the situation, not the person**

Ask yourself:

- What are the facts and what are my interpretations?
- Just because there is something that I'm not happy with, does that mean that it's totally no good?

## 10. 'Can't Stand-itis'

Some people get intolerant when they have to do things they don't enjoy. They tell themselves that they "can't stand" certain things instead of acknowledging that they don't enjoy them. As a result, they easily become frustrated and angry.

### **The challenge: Accept that frustration is a normal part of life**

Ask yourself:

- I don't enjoy it, but I can stand it.
- This is a hassle, and that's O.K.! Life is full of hassles.

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Adapted from: <http://us.reachout.com/facts/factsheet/common-thinking-errors>

## Your Thought Challenging Worksheet

	Liz's Responses	Your Responses 
<b>1. Situation</b> What is the situation that is upsetting you? What has happened?	<i>Going over my activity planning homework with the group.</i>	
<b>2. Thoughts</b> What are your thoughts about this situation? What is going through your mind?	<i>I haven't done the things I planned.</i>	
What is bad about that?	<i>I'm not good at this. The therapy won't work.</i>	
What does this say about you?	<i>I'm lazy. I won't get better.</i>	
<b>3. Feelings</b> How do you feel? E.g. angry, sad, happy, surprised, ashamed, scared, guilty, joyful, anxious, disgusted, annoyed, delighted *Rate strength of feeling (0-100)	<i>Sad (90) Ashamed (80)</i>	

	Liz's Responses	Your Responses
<p><b>4. Take a step back!</b> Look at your Thoughts. Can you see any Unhelpful Thinking Patterns?</p>	<p><b>Unhelpful Thinking Patterns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Black and white thinking</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Disqualifying the positive</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Harsh judgement</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Personalization</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fortune telling</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Catastrophising</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mind reading</li> </ul>	<p><b>Unhelpful Thinking Patterns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Black and white thinking</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Disqualifying the positive</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Harsh judgement</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fortune telling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Catastrophising</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mind reading</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Reconsider</b> What are the facts? Are there any positives in yourself or the situation that you are ignoring? What would you say to a friend in this situation?</p>	<p><i>I haven't done everything that I planned, but I have done some things, like painting and cooking. Recovery from depression is hard work and it takes time. I am making progress. I don't know whether the therapy will work, or how I will feel in the future. All I can do is try my best today.</i></p>	
<p><b>6. Re-rate feelings</b> Re-rate the strength of your feelings now</p>	<p><i>Sad (50)</i> <i>Ashamed (50)</i></p>	
<p><b>7. Move Forward</b> What can you do now to help yourself?</p>	<p><i>Do one of my activities – walk to the park.</i> <i>Be open and honest with the group next week.</i></p>	

# Wellness Journal



Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**WATER**

**TODAY'S POSITIVE THOUGHTS**

**FRUIT & VEGETABLES**



**EXERCISE**

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**JUST FOR ME**

**GRATITUDE LIST  
FOR TODAY**

Today I am grateful for...

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**REFLECTIONS ON THE DAY**



\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## **Challenging your unhelpful thinking**

Source: <https://thiswayup.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Module-3-Thought-challenging.pdf>

*Here are some other questions that might be helpful for you to challenge unhelpful thinking:*

- ◆ What evidence do I have for believing this?
- ◆ What happened last time I worried about this?
- ◆ Am I jumping to conclusions that are not completely justified by the evidence?
- ◆ Are there any things that contradict my thoughts that I might be ignoring?
- ◆ What's an alternative explanation? Are there any other ways to view this situation?
- ◆ Is what I believe the only or best way to explain what is going on?
- ◆ Would everyone in a similar situation think this way?
- ◆ What is the worst thing that could happen, and how bad would that really be?
- ◆ What is most likely to happen?
- ◆ Would it still be so bad in a week/month/year?
- ◆ What are the facts in this situation, and what are my own feelings and interpretations?
- ◆ What are the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages) of thinking this way?

## Unhelpful V 'Real' Thoughts

Activity 1 – Look at each situation and working with your partner, come up with 2 potential different reactions to the situation – one unhelpful thought and one 'real' thought.

Situation	Unhelpful Thoughts	'Real' Thoughts
You are not invited to a party organised by a girl in your class.	<i>She doesn't like me. I bet I am the only one who didn't get invited in the whole class.</i>	<i>She probably just forgot. Or maybe it was just a small party. I have other good friends.</i>
You told your best friend a secret yesterday. Today you saw them talking to people in your class and they are all laughing but stopped when you walked up to them.		
You failed a maths exam.		
Your older brother is a very talented sportsperson and had has a lot of success. Your parents keep telling him how proud they are of him.		
You are at a disco with a new friend and you want to fit in. He/She want you to drink before the disco and you have never drank alcohol before.		
You put up a post on social media yesterday and you got a few 'likes' and comments from friends. Another person put up a post and they have 250 'likes'		

[Adapted from – Dowling, K., Ryan, J., Clarke, A.M., Sheridan, A. & Barry, M.M. (2017) Mindout Teacher Manual 2.0– Promoting social and emotional wellbeing: A senior cycle programme for post-primary schools, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway & the Health Service Executive, Ireland.]

# Being aware of our thoughts/beliefs

An tSraith Shóisearach do Mhúinteoirí

Junior**CYCLE**  
for teachers



A

- Activating Event

B

- Belief

C

- Consequences



[www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk](http://www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk)

## The Worry spiral

What if I am  
homeless?

What if my  
insurance is out  
of date?

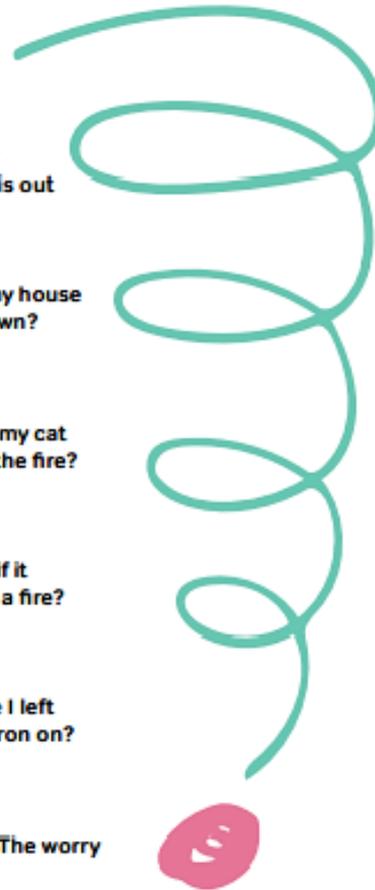
What if my house  
burns down?

What if my cat  
dies in the fire?

What if it  
starts a fire?

Have I left  
the iron on?

The worry



### STOP THE SPIRAL

Ask yourself – how likely is  
it to happen?

What's the worse that can  
happen?

What would be a more  
helpful way of thinking?

Notice the thought and let  
it go!

Bring your thoughts back  
to the present.

Activating  
Event

- A friend seems techy and snaps at you in class.

Belief

- A helpful thought/belief might be to assume that your friend is having a bad day, as this is not usual behaviour for them
- An unhelpful thought/belief might be that your friend no longer likes you.

Consequence

- A consequence of helpful thinking might be that you give your friend some space for the day, or at lunchtime, gently ask them if they are ok.
- A consequence of unhelpful thinking might be that you withdraw from the friendship and stop interacting with other people, believing that everyone hates you.

# Unhelpful Thinking styles

An tSraith Shóisearach do Mhúinteoirí

Junior **CYCLE**  
for teachers

## All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

*If I'm not perfect I have failed*

*Either I do it right or not at all*

## Over-generalising

*"everything is always rubbish"*

*"nothing good ever happens"*

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

## Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

*Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes*

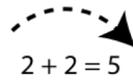
## Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

*That doesn't count*

## Jumping to conclusions



$2 + 2 = 5$

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

## Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

## Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

*I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot*

# should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

## Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

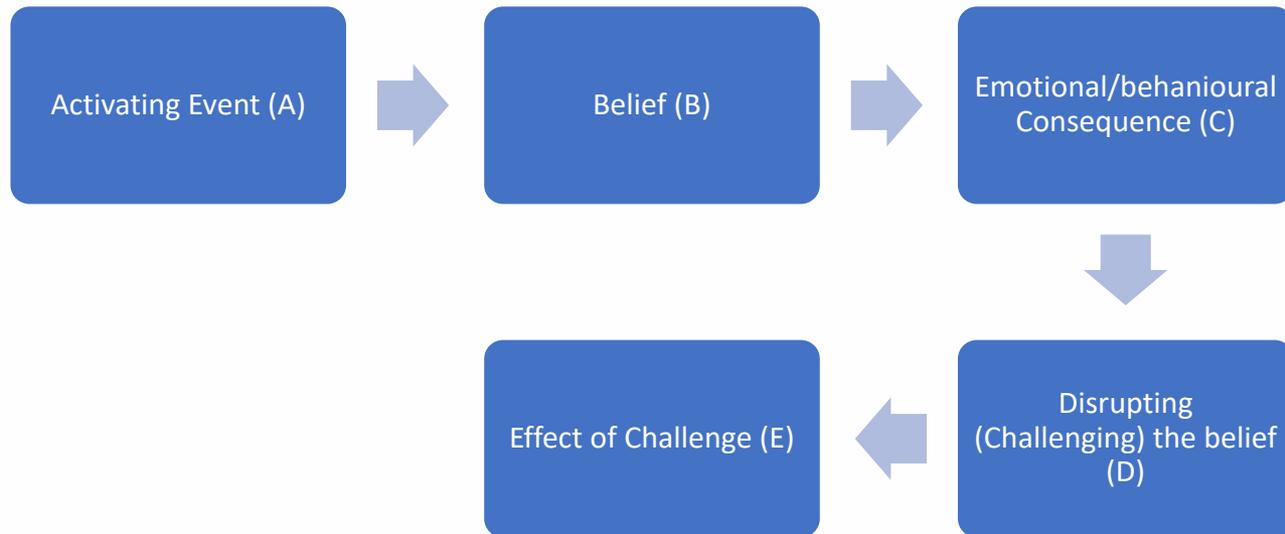
*I'm a loser  
I'm completely useless  
They're such an idiot*

## Personalisation

# "this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

# ABCDE Model of Thinking



# Challenging unhelpful thoughts

An tSraith Shóisearach do Mhúinteoirí

Junior **CYCLE**  
for teachers

## THOUGHTS are **NOT** FACTS PRACTICE

mindful  
mindful.org

When you put some space between you and your reaction, it changes your relationship to your thoughts—you can watch them come and go instead of treating them as facts.

If you're stuck on a negative thought, ask yourself:

### 1 Is it true?

Often the answer is, "Well, yes." This is the brain initially reacting—the autopilot you live with and believe is you.

### 2 Is it **absolutely** true?

Is this thought 100% accurate? Can you see the thought in a different way?

### 3 How does this thought make me feel?

Notice any storylines you're holding onto, and name your feelings: *sad, angry, jealous, hurt*.

### 4 What would things be like if I didn't hold this belief?

Imagine possible benefits to your relationships, energy levels, and motivation.