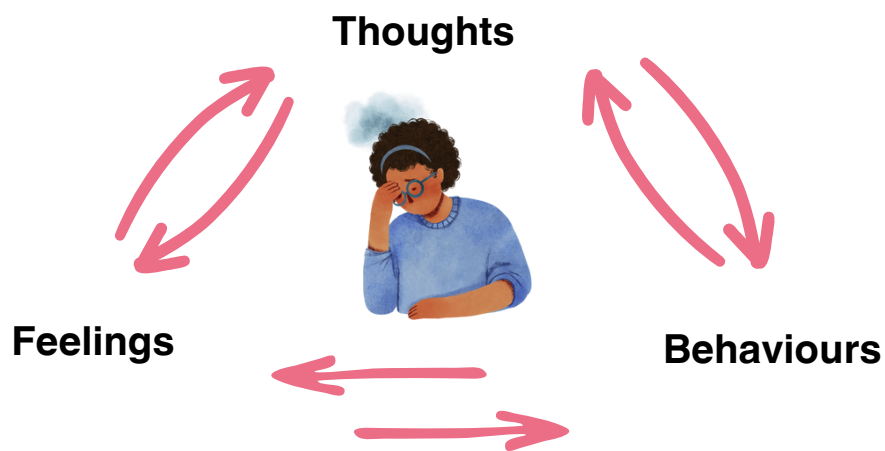


COMBATING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

guidance from NTU Wellbeing

Negative thoughts can be about ourselves, other people, our situation, the world in general, the past, the future. It is easy to fall into habits of negative thinking, and there can be lots of things going on in life and with the people around us that can re-enforce these thinking patterns.

Our experiences can be broken down into three parts: thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. These three are all connected, so negative thinking can lead to bad feelings and unhelpful actions.



For example, if you often think, “I’m useless,” you might start feeling really down and avoid people so they don’t see how “useless” you think you are. When you’re feeling lonely and depressed, it’s easy to keep thinking negatively. Your mood affects your thoughts, and being isolated means you’re not around others who could challenge your negative view of yourself. This creates a vicious cycle.



However, with practice, you can break this cycle by challenging negative thoughts. This can lead to happier moods, higher self-confidence, more constructive ways of living, and better relationships.

There are two steps to combating negative thoughts: IDENTIFYING them and CHALLENGING them in your mind.

Identifying Negative Thoughts

Negative thinking often follows common patterns. Check if your regular negative thoughts fit into any of these:

Types of thinking	As the thinker you.....
All or Nothing Thinking:	Perceive the world as a binary — a pair of opposites - there is no room for anything in between. 'If I don't get a first I've failed'
Overgeneralising	Make broad statements from a single event. "I always mess up."
Mental Filtering	Focusing only on the negatives and ignoring the positives.
Discounting the Positive	Downplaying your achievements. "It was just luck."
Fortune Telling	Predicting the future negatively. "I'll never succeed."
Mind Reading	Assuming you know what others think. "They think I'm boring."
Emotional Reasoning	Believing your feelings reflect reality. "I feel bad, so I must be bad."
Personalisation	Feeling responsible for things outside your control. "It's my fault they're upset"
What If-ing	Worrying about possible future scenarios. "What if I fail?"

Recognizing these patterns can help you challenge and change negative thoughts, leading to better moods and behaviours. Identifying these thoughts also helps you to distance yourself slightly and gain the perspective you need to challenge them.

Challenging Negative Thoughts

To challenge negative thoughts, ask yourself these questions:

Do I have enough information?:

Are there gaps in what I know? If so, get more info before jumping to conclusions.

What's the evidence?

Look at both sides. Is your view balanced?
What would be a fairer way to think?



Question Future fears:

What are the real chances of this happening?
Am I overestimating due to fear?
What other outcomes are possible?

Is this habitual thinking?

Is this a habit? Did I learn it from someone else?

The friend perspective

Would my best friend agree with my thinking?
Am I being harsher on myself than I would be on a friend?



The What ifs

Answer your "What if" questions. This can help reduce anxiety by generating options.

Banishing Negative Thoughts

Once you've challenged your negative thoughts, you can replace them with more positive or rational ones. This helps eliminate self-critical thinking and can lift your mood and self-esteem over time.

Practice makes perfect: Learning to challenge and change negative thoughts takes time and practice. Don't give up! You'll get better at catching and changing self-critical, fearful, or pessimistic thoughts over time.

On the next page there is a worksheet that you can print out and use to help you capture and challenge your thoughts.



Challenging Negative Thoughts



The Event What happened ?

Thoughts What were you thinking?

Feelings What were you feeling?

Behaviour What did you do / or not do

Supporting Evidence

What evidence is there to support your thinking

Non supporting evidence

What doesn't support your thinking

New thoughts Is there a more balanced way of thinking about this event