

The field of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) brings with it an emphasis on thoughts and beliefs and how we can change them in order to have a more fulfilling life. Nearly everyone experiences thoughts which are negative in orientation. As such unwanted or negative thoughts are not problematic until they became a habitual mode of operating in the world.

Nothing tears away at self-worth or esteem like a steady stream of disparaging thoughts. Sometimes these thoughts are bought up by anxiety provoking events, at other times they may just creep up on us slowly over time. In my experience it is not as important to always have positive thoughts as it is to end the negative mind chatter. It is the cessation of the negative thought cycles which take precedence. Though it has to be said that some kindness and compassion towards our self also goes a long way towards feeling grounded, whole and clear headed in life.

Changing our thought patterns comes in 3 parts:

1. Identify the beginning of the thought pattern. What triggered it and how did it lead to unwanted states of being. This process is akin to catching our thoughts as they occur.
2. In an objective manner identify how accurate the thought stream is. The emphasis should be on facts - facts that would also convince other people.
3. Change the thought to something more conducive to feeling good about oneself. Think of some helpful ways to replace the old thought streams.

Beck (1993) identified some ways that people distort their thinking and beliefs. The list is not meant to be exhaustive. It is meant as a prompt which can help people identify how their thinking may be leading them astray.

Failure: The belief that one is not good enough or cannot do anything right or is a loser.

Unlovable: The belief that no one cares about them, or is completely unlovable or unlikeable.

All or Nothing: People with this mindset tend to think in black and white or all or nothing.

Approval Seeking: The belief that everyone else's opinions are more important or more valid than ones own.

Emotional Reasoning: People can assume that because they feel a certain way it must be true. For instance, someone might say "I strongly feel such and such" but are unable to

provide objective evidence for their feelings.

Helplessness: The belief that one cannot cope with life vicissitudes - it can be a specific event or a general attitude.

Abandonment: The belief that significant others won't be there for them or will leave altogether. People with this fear generally have a low tolerance for being alone.

Entitlement: People with this belief set, think that they are special or superior to others. They can believe they are more deserving than others. Typically, this is a mask for low self-worth and esteem.

Mistrust: A belief that people are untrustworthy and always out to get what they can from the person. People with this belief have an elevated level of suspicion towards others.

Over - generalizing: Seeing a pattern based on a single event. For example, saying that nothing good ever happens based on not winning a bet.

Subjugation: People who subjugate often turn control of their lives over to others. As such this belief is strongly related to control and avoiding responsibility.

Mental Filters: Noticing one's failures but not noticing one successes. It is the filtering out of content which is not consistent with the underlying belief, (e.g., I am a failure and then not noticing material to the contrary).

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