Unhelpful Thoughts

Carol Vivyan

- Unhelpful thoughts are common
- Unhelpful thoughts can become habits
- Everyone has unhelpful thoughts
- You use unhelpful thoughts in stress

What to do

- You can notice unhelpful thoughts
- You can change unhelpful thoughts
- You can choose helpful thoughts
Mental Filter

❌ Not helpful:

● Only noticing bad things
● Not noticing good things

➞ Ask:

● Are you only noticing bad things?
● Are you noticing good things?
● What is more realistic?

Prediction

❌ Not helpful:

● Thinking you know what will happen

➞ Ask:

● Do you guess what will happen?
● Is this event likely to happen?
Mind Reading

✖ Not helpful:

● Guessing what people think

➜ Ask:

● Do you guess what people think?
● What is the evidence?
  ○ You know your thoughts
  ○ You do not know other people’s thoughts
● What is realistic?

Compare and despair

✖ Not helpful:

● Comparing yourself to other people
● Only seeing good in other people
● Only seeing bad in yourself

➜ Ask:

● Do you compare yourself?
  ○ You know your own life
  ○ You do not know other people’s lives
● What is realistic?
Critical self

✖ Not helpful:

● Criticizing yourself
● Blaming yourself

➜ Ask:

● Are you responsible for the problem?
  ○ Are other people involved?
● Would your friends blame you?
● What is realistic?

Thinking “Should”

✖ Not helpful:

● Thinking you **should** do something
● Thinking you **must** do something
● Putting pressure on yourself

➜ Ask:

● Are you putting pressure on yourself?
● What is realistic to expect?
Judgments

✖ Not helpful:

- Judging instead of describing
- Judging yourself
- Judging other people
- Judging events

➔ Ask:

- Are you making judgments?
- Can you observe without judging?
- Is there another point of view?

Catastrophizing

✖ Not helpful:

- Thinking the worst will happen

➔ Ask:

- What is likely to happen?
- Is this thinking helpful?
Emotional Reasoning

✖ Not helpful:

- Thinking feelings are facts
- Letting feelings control you
- “I feel bad” → “The situation must be bad”

➜ Ask:

- How do you feel?
- Is your thinking making you feel bad?
- How can you change your thoughts?

Mountains and Molehills

✖ Not helpful:

- Exaggerating the bad
- Minimizing the good

➜ Ask:

- Are you exaggerating the bad?
- How would other people see the situation?
- What is realistic?
Black and white thinking

✖ Not helpful:

- Expecting things to be all good
- Expecting things to be all bad
- Not seeing shades of grey

➜ Ask:

- Do you expect only good?
- Do you expect only bad?
- Is the situation more complex?
  - Nothing is all good
  - Nothing is all bad

Memories

✖ Not helpful

- Hanging on to the past
- Worrying about the past
- Thinking the past will repeat

➜ Ask:

- Are you upset about the past?
- Are you okay now?
- What is happening now?
References
