

# **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



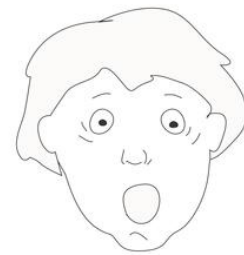
## ✘ Not helpful:

- 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

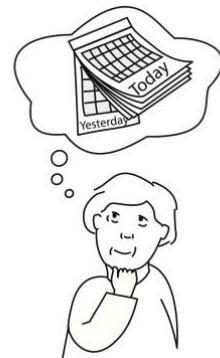
# Memories

## ✘ 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?



## **Modified from:**

- Carol Vivyan, 2009
- [www.getselfhelp.co.uk/unhelpful.htm](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/unhelpful.htm)

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## References

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Vivyan, C. (2009). *Unhelpful thinking habits or cognitive distortions*. Get Self Help.  
[www.getselfhelp.co.uk/unhelpful.htm](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/unhelpful.htm)