



# Thought Challenges (based upon thinking styles)



It is sometimes easier to recognise unhelpful thinking styles that might be going on for us in a situation. When we identify the thinking style, this gives us the opportunity to question the automatic process that has occurred (and may even be typical). The thinking style is normally part of the hot thought/negative automatic thought (NAT).

So, once we have worked on recognizing the thinking style and perhaps removing it, we can then work on using targeted open (socratic) questions to allow us to reconsider our thinking. It is helpful to do this, because we are testing the accuracy (veracity) of our thoughts. Below are questions that allow us to better target questions to break the hot thought or NAT down into its constituent parts.

Title	Challenge explanation	Thought Challenge
Labelling.	As humans, we need to distill information into 'bite-sized' chunks. A way of doing this is to label, when our emotions are affected, this is often a big over-arching label. Let's break this down.	How helpful is it to call myself/others this? Is it really true? What happened to make you use this label? What did you do? Are there any elements of you/others that does not fit this label?
Shoulds	Sometimes we have imperatives and expectations that seem to involve every situation. When we examine this further, sometimes these 'shoulds and musts' cannot fully exist.	How realistic is this expectation? Can I achieve this all the time? What's unhelpful about it? Is that an expectation I have of others? Do others expect this of me?
Self-blame.	It is often easier to explain situations by completely blaming others or blaming ourselves. Invariably, situations are more complex than this. Take some time to consider your role and the factors that led to this outcome.	Would others blame me as much as I do? What other factors were involved in the situation? How much responsibility would be reasonable for me to take?
Emotional reasoning.	As humans we have developed and survived by depending upon 'gut instinct'. However, in modern society, this does not help you be happy all the time. If we always go by our gut, how will we know if we were really correct?	If I did not feel like this, would I reach a different conclusion? What is that conclusion? What conclusions can I draw from the facts (when compared to my feelings)?
Over generalisation	Over-generalisation is the friend of prejudice. But this is a natural style of thinking. We attempt to apply previous experience to the present. But occasionally we neglect the relevant factors.	What are the exceptions to the generalisation I have come to? What doesn't fit with this? What is a more realistic conclusion based upon the evidence that I have identified?



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Catastrophising	Sometimes we have the tendency to focus upon the worst outcome. Commonly this is because we over-estimate the likelihood and/or threat but underestimate our own coping ability and/or things that may rescue us. Take some time to consider some other likely possibilities.	What are the other outcomes that are not so obvious to you right now? Is there anything that suggests the worst-case scenario is unlikely to happen? How have things turned out before in similar situations? If it did happen, how would you cope? In the long term, how would you see the situation? Is there anything positive to gain from this happening?
Fortune-telling.	Invariably we make predictions about the future. However, approaches such as 'prepare for the worst and hope for the best' are likely to leave us in a state of preparedness. How helpful is this right now? Will this really help to solve the problem you are concerned about?	Are there any facts to suggest that this might happen? How sure can you be that this will happen? What other outcomes are likely?
All-or-nothing thinking.	When we have views that are either true or false, this implies that we have pushed buttons in our moral centres. This also suggests that there may be a more helpful view that is less extreme.	This thought is an extreme, what is the opposite thought? What is the more balanced thought between the two? How might it be helpful to see it this way?
Discounting the Positive	On occasion, we can neglect to give ourselves credit or view good aspects of the situation for fear of impacting upon our performance in the situation. Ironically, this approach can have a significant effect on our performance and consequently become a self-fulfilling prophecy.	What are some of the good things in this situation that you are not seeing initially? Are there any strengths you have that you have ignored? How might another person be viewing the situation? What would it mean to you if you were noticing these?
Selective Abstraction/Mental Filter	Being human, we tend to select specific information from situations; this is because we are incapable to processing everything at once. Particularly when our emotions are involved. Take a moment to have a helicopter view of the situation.	Is there anything in the situation that you have not noticed in the first instance? Is there anything that a trusted friend would point out? What might be more helpful to focus upon to help you through the situation?
Mind-reading.	We sometimes believe that we can read people's thoughts. Whilst we can read human behaviour to some extent, one of the most unpredictable things in science is human behaviour! Let's just take a moment to reconsider their thoughts.	What is the evidence that they are thinking that about you? Is there anything else that they may be thinking? Would this be the way they normally see you? If they were thinking this, how would you cope?



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