

# Self Help - Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

## Realistic Thinking

Effectively managing negative emotions involves identifying negative thinking and replacing negative thinking with realistic and balanced thinking. Because our thoughts have a big impact on the way we feel, changing our unhelpful thoughts to realistic or helpful thoughts is a key to feeling better. “Realistic thinking” means looking at yourself, others, and the world in a balanced and fair way, without being overly negative or positive.

### Unhelpful and unrealistic thought

I always screw things up. I'm such a loser. What's wrong with me?

### More realistic and balanced thought

Everyone makes mistakes, including me – I'm only human. All I can do now is try my best to fix the situation and learn from this experience.

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I can't do it, I feel way too anxious. Why can't I control my anxiety?

It's OK and normal to feel anxious. It's not dangerous, and it doesn't have to stop me. I can feel anxious and **STILL** go to the party.

Know what you're thinking or telling yourself. Most of us are not used to paying attention to the way we think, even though we are constantly affected by our thoughts. Paying attention to your thoughts (or self-talk) can help you keep track of the kind of thoughts you typically have.

Once you're more aware of your thoughts, try to identify the thoughts that make you feel bad, and determine if they're problematic thoughts that need to be challenged. For example, if you feel sad thinking about your grandmother who's been battling cancer, this thought doesn't need to be challenged because it's absolutely normal to feel sad when thinking about a loved one suffering.

But, if you feel sad after a friend cancels your lunch plans and you begin to think there's obviously something seriously wrong with you and no one likes you, this is problematic because this thought is extreme and not based on reality.

Pay attention to the shift in your emotion, no matter how small. When you notice yourself getting more upset or distressed, ask yourself, "What am I telling myself right now?" or "What is making me feel upset?"

When you're accustomed to identifying thoughts that lead to negative emotions, start to examine these thoughts to see if they're unrealistic and unhelpful. One of the first things to do is to see if you've fallen into thinking yaps (e.g., catastrophizing or overestimating danger), which are overly negative ways of seeing things.

You can also ask yourself a range of questions to challenge your negative thoughts, such as "What is the evidence that this thought is true?" and "Am I confusing a possibility with a probability? It may be possible, but is it likely?"

Finally, after challenging a negative thought and evaluating it more objectively, try to come up with an alternative thought that is more balanced and realistic. Doing this can help lower your distress. In addition to coming up with realistic statements, try to come up with some quick and easy-to-remember coping statements (e.g., "This has happened before and I know how to handle it") and positive self-statements (e.g., "It takes courage to face the things that scare me").

It can also be particularly helpful to write down your realistic thoughts or helpful coping statements on an index card or piece of paper. Then, keep this coping card with you to help remind you of these statements when you are feeling too distressed to think clearly.