



How does meth affect your life?

Noticing and changing unhelpful thoughts

Explaining thoughts

How we see or think about something and our beliefs can influence the way we feel and behave. Our thoughts are often automatic and outside our awareness. We can have helpful, unhelpful and neutral thoughts. Unhelpful thinking can often lead us to feeling distressed, anxious, sad or angry. It can also result in us behaving in unhelpful ways.

Unhelpful thinking styles

From time to time we engage in unhelpful thinking styles. Have a look at the list below and mark off the unhelpful thinking styles that you engage in.

All or nothing

This is the thinking in extremes, either something is all good or all bad. Black or white thinking. There are no shades of grey.

“If I have one argument with my child then I am a bad parent.”

Mental filter

Interpreting events based on what has happened in the past.

“I can’t trust people, they only let you down.”

Over-generalisation

This involves taking a past negative incident and expecting the same to happen in the future.

Look out for words such as “always” “I never” “everyone.”

“I never get things right.”

“I always lose.”

“Everyone thinks I am an idiot.”

Catastrophising

Exaggerating the impact of events. Imagining the worst-case scenario. “I am never going to be able to find a job, I won’t be able to pay my bills, I’ll lose my house and end up living on the streets.”

Mistaking feelings for facts

People are often confused between feelings and facts. It is important to be able to differentiate between these, no matter how strong the feelings are.

“I feel like a failure so therefore I am a failure.”

Alcohol and Drug Support Line

The service is available 24/7 via phone
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Emergency

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Magnification and Minimisation

You magnify the good qualities in others and minimise your good qualities.

"I am not clever. I was just lucky when I did well in the test."

Should and Must

Living in the world of "shoulds" and "musts" is one of the most common thinking errors. Thinking this way results in feelings of guilt, shame and failure when directed at self and anger when directed at others.

"I should always put others before me."

Personalising

People frequently blame themselves for any unpleasant event and take responsibility for someone else's feelings and behaviours.

"It's all my fault, I must have done something wrong."

Jumping to conclusions

We jump to conclusions when we engage in mind reading.

Your friend yawns when you are telling them something very important to you and you start thinking "She's bored, she thinks I am dull."

Changing unhelpful thinking styles

Once you have identified your unhelpful thoughts you will need to know how to change them. Use the A to F steps below to help you.

Activating the event or the situation. What is the situation?

Beliefs. What were your thoughts when the event was occurring?

Consequences. What were the consequences of the event? How did you end up feeling and what did you end up doing?

Disputing the automatic unhelpful thoughts. Recognising that what you automatically think might not actually be the case.

Explanation that better explains the situation. Now that you have disputed your automatic thought, write down your new helpful thought.

Forging ahead. Continue to move ahead, it may take some time for your helpful thoughts to become automatic.

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The first step in changing your thinking is to increase your awareness of your thoughts. This can be done by keeping a daily diary. An example is shown below.

Activating Event	Belief - Unhelpful thought	Consequence
My friend yawns while I'm talking to her.	She's bored, she thinks I'm really dull. I'm such a boring person when I'm not drinking. I need to drink to be interesting.	Feel inadequate, hopeless about giving up drinking, decide to have a drink.

You might want to write your own example of a situation that caused you distress or ended with a lapse below:

Activating Event	Belief - Unhelpful thought	Consequence

Disputing:

The next step is to dispute unhelpful thoughts. Use the following guide to help challenge unhelpful thoughts:

What is my unhelpful thought?

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What is the evidence that my thought is true?

Is there any evidence against my thought?

Are there facts that I am ignoring or overlooking?

What other explanations could there be?

How realistic are my thoughts/beliefs?

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In what other ways can I view the situation?

How would others view the situation?

What is the likelihood of this happening?

Is it helpful for me to think this way?

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Alternative Explanation:

After disputing your unhelpful thought write down your alternative explanation and any new helpful thoughts.

Forging ahead:

As new similar situations arise, remind yourself of your alternative explanations and new helpful thoughts.

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