

Using coping statements to avoid common thinking traps

Did you know that your thoughts affect how you see yourself and the world around you?

- You may look at a situation one way, even though there are many other ways to see it.
- You may think things are going to be a certain way, even though there is no proof to support this idea.

Distorted ways of thinking affect how you feel and add to your anxiety. The medical term for this is “cognitive distortions”. We call them “thinking traps”.

Common thinking traps

Put a checkmark next to the ones that have been a problem for you at some point.

Thinking Trap	Examples of these thoughts
<input type="checkbox"/> Polarized thinking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You see things as black or white, good or bad, wrong or right, always or never. • You see the extremes and nothing in between. No middle ground and no room for mistakes. • This oversimplification is common for perfectionists. • Your emotional reactions are also extreme; from despair to elation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I never have fun when I go out.” • “People always make fun of me.” • “I need to get 100% or I’ve failed myself (or others).”

Thinking Trap	Examples of these thoughts
<input type="checkbox"/> Catastrophizing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You expect disaster, even picture it. • You notice a problem and ask “What if...” • You become overly concerned about small things. • People say you “make mountains out of mole hills” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If I gained weight today, I’ll just keep gaining and gaining.” • “What if I don’t get into university?” • “I don’t think I could handle it if someone saw me sweating.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Magnifying	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You see negative or difficult things as worse than they are. You “turn up the volume” on anything bad and make it loud, large or overwhelming. • You make negative things more important than they are. Small mistakes become tragic failures. Minor suggestions become scathing criticism. Minor setbacks are a cause for despair. Slight obstacles are overwhelming barriers. • This is like looking at life through a telescope that magnifies problems. It creates a sense of doom and pessimism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You use words such as huge, impossible or overwhelming. • You are really bothered by a comment or criticism and can’t stop thinking about it.
<input type="checkbox"/> Minimizing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You make positive things less important than they are. • This is like looking through the wrong end of the telescope, so that everything positive is minimized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You think your assets, such as your ability to cope and find solutions, are not good enough. • When someone gives you a complement, you think he or she doesn’t really mean it.

Thinking Trap	Examples of these thoughts
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Should's</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have a strict list of rules about how you and other people should act. People who break the rules make you angry. You feel guilty when you break the rules. • You have incorrect or exaggerated assumptions about the way things should be. You criticize yourself when you don't live up to your expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I should be studying." • "I should always be busy." • "I should know, understand and foresee everything." • "I should be self-reliant." • "I shouldn't enjoy eating." • "I should never say no to a request." • "I should never make mistakes." • "I should never feel certain emotions, such as anger or jealousy."
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Mind reading</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without them saying so, you know how other people are feeling and why they act the way they do. In particular, you think you know how people think and feel about you. • You make snap judgments about others and assume you know their feelings and motivations. • You think you can read people's minds. You interpret things people do as negative responses to you. Even though there is no proof of this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Everyone thinks I'm fat." • "Everyone is wondering why I am eating." • "Nobody likes me, they think I'm...." • He didn't say hello, he must hate me." • If someone slams a door, you assume it is because he or she is angry with you, even though nothing has happened between the two of you.

Thinking Trap	Examples of these thoughts
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Personalization</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You think that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to you. You compare yourself to others. • Even though situations are complex and determined by many things, you accept too much responsibility and blame yourself for negative outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “She is smarter (or more competent, better looking, etc.) than I am.” • Your team loses and you think “It’s all my fault that we lost.”
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Filtering (tunnel vision)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You focus on the negative details, while ignoring all the positive aspects of a situation. • You pass over positive experiences and dwell on memories that leave you angry, anxious or depressed. • Fears, losses and irritations become exaggerated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I didn’t get the MVP award.” (although you did receive other awards or recognition)
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Overgeneralization</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You make broad conclusions based on a single incident or piece of evidence. • One bad experience means that whenever you are in a similar situation, the result will be bad. • This pattern restricts your life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You use absolute words such as “all, every, none, never, always, everybody, nobody.” • One dropped stitch makes you believe “I’ll never learn how to knit.” • “No one would stay friends with me if they really knew me.” • “I always screw up.” • “Everyone thinks I’m”

Thinking Trap	Examples of these thoughts
☐ Probability overestimation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have exaggerated beliefs about the chances of something bad happening. Even though, in reality, it is unlikely to occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You assume that everyone notices your shaking hands, even though most people are not aware of your hands.
☐ Fortune telling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You predict the future, usually with a high likelihood of a negative outcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You think “I know I’m going to fail that test”, even when you have been studying and the chances of failing are low.
☐ Emotional reasoning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You base your views of things on what you are feeling rather than what is really going on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You feel tired and unhappy, so you think “My life totally sucks”.
☐ Labelling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You call yourself names instead of just describing an event or behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you make a mistake, you are a “stupid loser” instead of just telling yourself that you made an error.

Coping statements

Coping statements remind you that you are able to handle the situation and have ways to deal with problems. To work well and lower your anxiety, coping statements need to be personal and directly apply to the situation that is causing your anxiety.

On the next page, we share some examples of coping statements that others have found helpful. It is important to use statements that fit you and your situation.

Example 1	
Anxious thought	Coping statements
You have the thought “I’m never going to get any better” stuck in your head.	<p>Replace this thought with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Don’t beat yourself up. It takes time and effort to recover.” • “Just take one meal (or day) at a time.” • “I’ve made changes before, I can do it again.” • “I’m not alone. People care about me and they are going to support me through this.”
Example 2	
Anxious thought	Coping statements
“If I eat this muffin, I’ll gain weight.”	<p>Replace this thought with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s necessary for energy.” • “It’s part of my snack (or meal).” • “I ate one last week and nothing happened.” • “One muffin cannot make you gain weight.” • “A lot of people eat muffins and they are OK.” • “There are no forbidden foods. You can eat anything in moderation.” • “Eating the muffin will help my concentration.” • “One food doesn’t have that kind of power.”

More common coping statements

- There is no need to panic...
I can get through this.
- It doesn't need to be perfect...
my best is good enough...
- Just breathe and relax...
- This feeling isn't comfortable or
pleasant but I can accept it...
- I can be anxious and still deal
with this situation.
- This will pass...
- I'll ride through this...
I don't need to let this get to me.
- I deserve to feel ok right now...
- This anxiety won't hurt me...
it just doesn't feel good.
- Nothing serious is going to
happen to me.
- These are just thoughts...
not reality.
- I don't need these thoughts...
I can choose to think differently.
- Balance
- I have time for me
- I deserve a break
- Practice, practice
- I can face the fear
- I am brave
- One step at a time
- In 10 years (will this matter)
- Nobody is perfect
- I am not alone
- I am exactly where I need to be
- I can ask for help
- I can make it through this
- I matter
- I'm an inspiration
- Dream big
- I learn a new thing every day
- Each step is up to me
- I can trust my intuition
- My life is up to me
- Today I accept change
- I make good choices
- Strong, healthy, smart
- I can resist the urge
- Food is medicine
- Food is fuel
- Food makes muscles
- I am NOT my illness
- A calorie is a calorie
- It's a new day
- Start...end
- I have time for me.
- Don't think...just eat
- Just do it!

It will take some time and practice to use coping statements effectively and avoid thinking traps.

If you have any questions, please talk with your therapist

Notes and questions

