

Challenge your...

NEGATIVE THINKING

Thinking is a wonderful ability. However, sometimes we can be haunted by negative and unhelpful thoughts. These thoughts can distract us, make us feel bad, or even induce physical pain.

How can we cope with these negative thoughts?

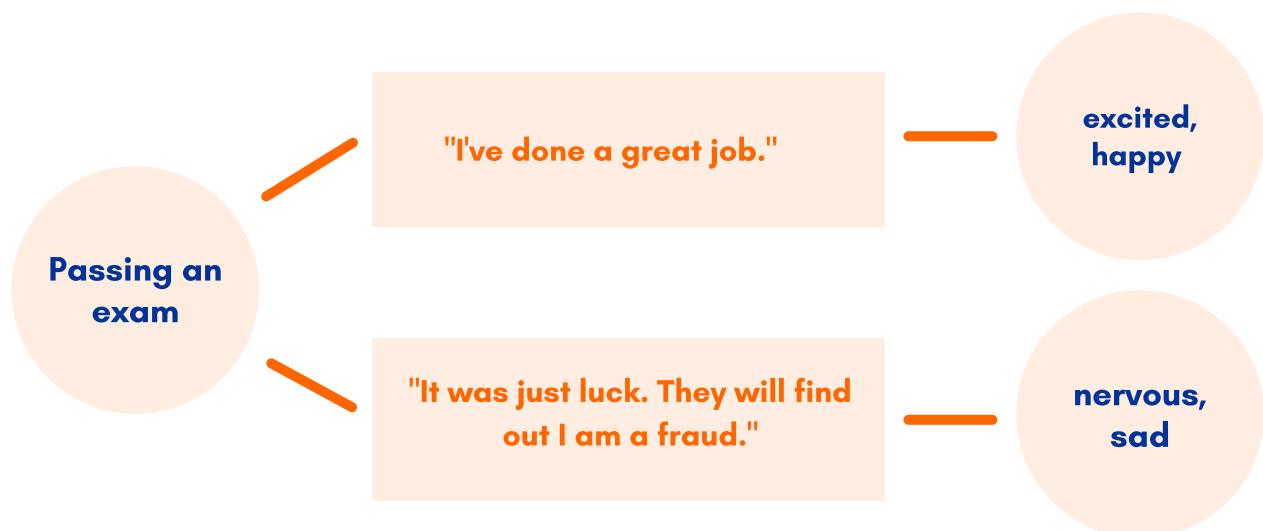
First of all, it is important to know that all thoughts have a survival function. They want to protect us from potential threats. However, it is important to understand that there is a difference between an objective situation and the way we view this situation. An interpretation is not always an accurate representation of reality. In other words, thoughts can be distorted. Interpretations and automatic thoughts are sometimes so frequent that we start to convince ourselves that they are true. It then becomes harder to embrace a different perspective because we truly believe that what we are thinking is the only possible reality.

Read the example below and reflect upon your way of reacting to certain situations.

Objective situation

Thoughts/Interpretations

Emotions



"What really frightens and dismays us is not external events themselves, but the way in which we think about them. It is not things that disturb us, but our interpretation of their significance."

- Epictetus

Exercise...

How can we recognize if a thought is biased and how can we create more helpful alternatives? Try out this exercise once or twice a day!

Try to notice when your emotions are **changing** and **record** what is happening in that moment following the instructions you find here below.

1. Situation

Try to objectively describe the situation you are in. Leave out subjective interpretations.

I failed an exam.

2. Automatic thoughts

What automatic thoughts are popping into your mind? Write them down and challenge them one by one in this exercise.

I am a failure.

3. Emotions

Which emotions are arising? Ask yourself: what am I feeling in this moment?

Acknowledge that these emotions are serving you and let them inform you about how to take care of yourself.

Sadness, anger, disappointment, shame...

4. Distortions

Try to find the cognitive distortions in your automatic thoughts.

Some examples: All-or-nothing thinking/black and white thinking, Worst-case scenario, Selective perception, Emotional reasoning, Overgeneralization, Mind reading, Personalize, Making Unfair Comparisons, "Should" statements, Jumping to conclusions, Disqualifying the positive.

5. Alternative perspectives

Try to challenge your automatic thoughts and formulate helpful alternative thoughts. You can help yourself by answering these questions:

- Is my thought accurate? Is there a way to rephrase my thought so that I am kinder to my need?
- How would I support a friend with a similar problem?
- What would a good friend tell me about this thought?
- Have I ever experienced something different?
- What will I think about this situation in 5/10/15 years?
- What reassuring thing do you want to say to yourself about this thought?

6. Outcome

How do you feel now that you have considered alternatives scenarios?

Try to be aware of your emotions now.

You can also read what you've written out loud.