# CHANGING EXTREME AND UNHELPFUL THINKING

From the workbook
*Changing extreme and
unhelpful thinking*

## IDENTIFY AND RATE A SINGLE EXTREME AND UNHELPFUL THOUGHT

- Choose just one thought to question at a time

- Clearly identify and write down what the thought is

- For the time being avoid thoughts such as *"I am.. people are.. the World is.."* because these sorts of thoughts are often very difficult to challenge at first.
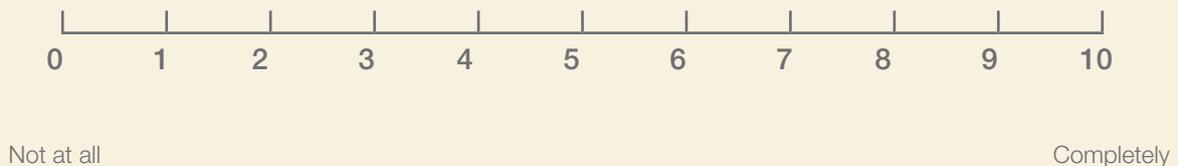
### Once you have picked out a thought write it here:

**At the time you felt worse:**

Rate how much you believed the thought

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

Not at all          Completely
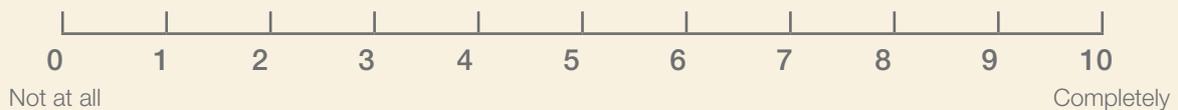
Rate how much it worsened how you felt emotionally

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

Not at all          Completely

Rate the impact it had on your behaviour/activity level

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

Not at all          Completely

# CHANGING EXTREME AND UNHELPFUL THINKING

From the workbook
*Changing extreme and
unhelpful thinking*

## STEP 1: LABEL THE THOUGHT AS 'JUST ONE OF THOSE UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS'

Look at the thought you are going to work on (that you wrote down on the previous page). Which unhelpful thinking styles does it show?

| ✓ | Unhelpful thinking style | Some typical thoughts | Tick here if you have noticed this —even just sometimes |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Being your own worst critic/bias against yourself | • I judge myself harshly<br>• I overlook my strengths/positive things<br>• I dwell on my failures<br>• I downplay my achievements | ☐ |
| | Putting a negative slant on things (negative mental filter) | • I see life through dark, tinted glasses<br>• The glass is half empty rather than half full<br>• Whatever I've done its never enough to give me a sense of achievement<br>• I tend to focus on the bad side of every situation | ☐ |
| | Having a gloomy view of the future (make negative predictions) | • I predict things will stay bad or just get worse<br>• I always expect to fail | ☐ |
| | Jumping to the very worst conclusion (catastrophizing) | • I tend to predict that the very worst will happen | ☐ |
| | Having a negative view about how others see you (mind-reading) | • I often think that others don't like me or think badly of me without any reason for it | ☐ |
| | Unfairly taking responsibility for things | • I feel guilty about things even if they aren't really my fault | ☐ |
| | Making extreme statements or rules | • I use the words 'always' and 'never' a lot<br>• If one bad thing happens to me I say 'just typical' because it seems this always happens<br>• I make myself a lot of 'must,' 'should,' 'ought' or 'got to' rules | ☐ |

## STEP 2: STOP, THINK AND REFLECT—DON'T GET CAUGHT UP IN IT

Simply noticing that you're experiencing an unhelpful thinking style can be a powerful way of getting rid of it.

- **Label** the upsetting thought as **just another** of those unhelpful or even silly thoughts. These are just a part of what happens when you're upset. It will go away and lose its power. It's part of distress—it's not the true picture. You could say to the thought: *"I've found you out—I'm not going to play that game again!"*
- Allow the thought to **just be**. Don't allow yourself to get caught up in it. Don't bother trying to challenge the thought, or argue yourself out of it. Like a celebrity, such thoughts love attention. They're just not worth your attention. Take a mental step back from the thought as if observing it from a distance. Move your mind on to other more helpful things for example, the future, or recent things you have done well, or even better on to the task at hand. Really engage in what you are doing so that task or person is the focus of your attention. Don't be distracted by the unhelpful thought.

**Reflect again—how does the thought look now?**

## STEP 3: EXPERIMENT—ACT AGAINST IT. DON'T BE PUT OFF FROM WHAT YOU WERE GOING TO DO

Unhelpful thinking worsens how you feel and unhelpfully alters what you do.

The thought may try to push you to:

- Stop, reduce or avoid doing something you were going to do. This leads to a loss of pleasure and achievement, or you may ignore other people. In the longer term it will restrict your life and undermine your confidence.
- Respond unhelpfully, like drinking alcohol to cope. This ends up backfiring and worsening how you or others feel.

Make an **active choice** not to allow this to happen again. This often means acting against the thought and choosing to live by your values/the things that really matter to you.

## STEP 4: RESPOND BY GIVING YOURSELF A TRULY CARING RESPONSE

When you feel low, you may often be very critical of yourself. People can say things to themselves that they would never say to someone they cared for. And they say it in an angry, dismissive and nasty tone. If a friend was troubled by a thought or worry, you would offer words of advice to soothe and encourage them. You would be compassionate to them. How can you give yourself similar compassionate and encouraging words?

**Write their caring advice here:**

Reflect on this—choose to apply their words to your own situation. Trust what they say. Allow that trust to wash over you and take away the troubling thoughts.

**STEP 5: PUT THE THOUGHT UNDER A MICROSCOPE AND ASK YOURSELF THE SEVEN THOUGHT CHALLENGE QUESTIONS**  As well as being extreme, our upsetting thoughts are often incorrect and untrue. Pretend you're a scientist, and look at the thought in a logical way.

## COMPLETE THIS TABLE TO HELP YOU WORK THROUGH THIS PROCESS

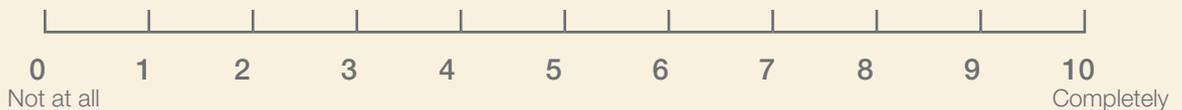| Put the thought under the spotlight | Your response |
| --- | --- |
| What would you tell a friend who said the same thing? | |
| Are you basing this on how you feel rather than the facts? | |
| What would other people say? Would they be more encouraging? | |
| Are you looking at the whole picture? What are you overlooking? | |
| Does it really matter so much based on the wider picture in the world today? | |
| What would you say about this looking back to now from six months in the future? | |
| Do you apply one set of standards to yourself and another to others? Are you harder on yourself than on others? | |

**Review the impact of your thought on you now. Look at the thought again. Write it here:**
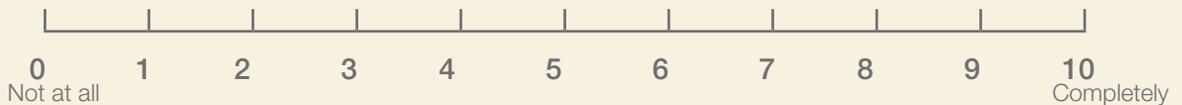
**When you think about the thought right now:**

Rate how much you believe the thought at the moment

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
Not at all                  Completely

Rate how much worse it makes you feel emotionally right now

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
Not at all                  Completely

Rate the impact it has on your behaviour/activity level at the moment

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
Not at all                  Completely

**Reflect—is this different from how you felt at the time? Has your view changed during the thought change process? If so, which of the five steps helped the most?**