

HOW TO REDUCE NEGATIVE MOODS BY CHANGING YOUR THINKING

INTRODUCTION:

Although there are a number of ways to reduce negative moods, one of the most effective is to change your thought patterns. Like all other skills, this technique takes some practice; however, once you get control over your thinking, you will feel much better.

THE COGNITIVE MODEL:

First, it is important to realize that our moods are determined by our thoughts. We may experience the same event, but depending on how we think about it will determine how we feel about it. For example, if someone criticizes us, and we take it personally, we might feel depressed and/or anxious. On the other hand, if the same person criticizes us, and we think how this person actually goes around criticizing everyone, instead of feeling sad or angry, we might feel sorry for them.

THE TECHNIQUE:

There are three main steps to changing your thoughts: Identify, Evaluate, and Respond.

- **Identification:** First, you need to identify what thoughts you have that immediately come before your negative feelings. So, when you feel bad, say to yourself, "What just went through my mind?" Write down negative thoughts-especially thoughts you have about yourself. Example: "I am so stupid."
- **Evaluation:** Second, determine if the thought is true. As human beings, we are not perfect, and we tend often to think in negative ways, especially when we are depressed or anxious. Evaluate whether the thought is true by seeing if matches one of the types of "cognitive distortions" listed on another sheet. Also, question, "Is there evidence this is not true?" You can also ask yourself what you would say to a friend who had this thought. Essentially, you are "attacking" your negative thought-saying to yourself why it is wrong. Example: "This kind of thinking matches the distortion called 'labeling,' the evidence actually is that I am smart, at least at time, and I would tell a friend in my situation that overall they are a nice person (which is what you can tell yourself)."
- **Responding:** Third, once you have determined the thought is distorted, untrue, not backed up by evidence, or simply not helpful-respond to the thought with a better thought-one that is not distorted, is true, is backed by evidence, or is more helpful. Example: "I am smart. Occasionally, I make mistakes- but that is human. I am a good person. I feel bad for this person who criticizes everyone."

WHEN and HOW:

This technique is best learned at the beginning by writing everything down-the unhelpful thoughts, the evaluations (including distortions), and the responses. Writing can be done immediately, if possible, or later in the same day or same week. The sooner you get it written, the more clearly you will remember your thoughts, and the more quickly you will feel better. After doing this many times on paper, you can begin to do it in your head. Eventually, it will become an automatic process, and your thoughts will not lead you to depression nor anxiety.

For more information on feeling better through changing your thoughts, we recommend:

- [Feeling Good](#) or [The Feeling Good Handbook](#) by David D. Burns, M.D.
- [Mind over Mood](#) by Dennis Greenberger, Ph.D. & Christine A. Padesky, Ph.D.
- [The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook](#) by Edmund J. Bourne, Ph.D.