

Targeted session: Intrusive thoughts and reframing

Session overview

This session is an opportunity to explore managing unhelpful or intrusive thoughts.

Information for practitioner

Working at changing our thoughts can be challenging as it feels as though thoughts come whether we want them or not. This session allows you and the young person to explore how we can change our thoughts and reframe them, so they help us feel better and move forwards.

Pre-session action

Select a “*Looking after yourself*” exercise in advance for the close of the session.

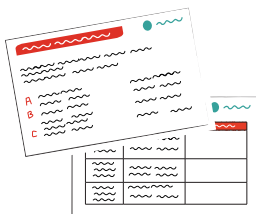
Resources needed for this session

- Big paper
- Pens
- Challenging and changing unhelpful thinking worksheet

Session

Check in with the young person as to how they have been since your last session together. Any thoughts or feelings that you may need to reflect on and address before you begin this session.

Inform the young person what we are going to do in this session, sharing the overview.



Worksheets



Paper and pens

Begin by working through the worksheet on challenging and changing unhelpful thinking – there’s lots in there, so allow time for discussion and examples with plenty of thinking time to come up with different ways to deal with different thoughts.

For the second worksheet ‘changing through challenge’, discuss any types of thinking that the young person recognises within themselves. Then, using some paper create thought bubbles and rewrite any thoughts that you can challenge or change together. They might be happy to share their own thoughts, or you may discuss hypothetical thoughts.

These worksheets will take most of the session, and you can then invite the young person to keep a record about some of their unhelpful thoughts. It might be a specific thought that keeps happening or a specific behaviour, for example not going to a particular lesson, and what thought prompts this.



Encourage them to record when it happened, where they were, who else was about, what was the situation. This can often help a young person spot any patterns in when the thoughts are coming (particular places or people for example). They might bring this to the next session to work on reframing those thoughts with you, or they may be happy to think of reframes and challenges as they go.



Looking after yourself exercise to close

Thoughts like buses would be a useful activity to end this session with if not already done – or revisited.

It doesn't always feel as though we have much control over our thoughts and feelings. When something horrible has happened we can hang on to this and our thoughts and feelings about the event keep coming back, making us feel worse. There are a number of different ways in which we can think unhelpfully, and these can become a pattern or a habit. We need to be able to recognise when we are doing this and work in some strategies to break the pattern. You do need to spend a bit of time and energy reframing your thoughts but the more you practise the easier it gets!

The **first question** to ask yourself is:

Is this thought useful to me?

If the answer is no, then it's worth either blocking it, changing it or challenging it. Try the ABC of negative thinking:

A

Accept the thought. It's just a thought. Having a thought doesn't mean it's true. See it, name it ("oh, there's the negative thought!") and accept that it's there (and that it's not helpful – or true).

B

Block it. Sometimes it's just enough to see it, recognise that it's unhelpful, and release it – let it go. This can take practice. You may find you keep returning to your thought. But every time you tell your brain to let it go, your brain finds it a bit easier to do so. This can be useful if you have an action to go with it. It might be a shake of the head (no I don't want this thought) or a flick of the hand (brush that thought away).

C

Change or challenge. If blocking works, there's no need to do any more – block it and get on. But sometimes it's good to challenge the thought and rewrite it into a different thought – a more useful one.

Changing through reframing:

Taking out the sense of it being **permanent** by adding time-bound words to our thoughts – yet, at the moment, up to now, right now etc:

- They're all talking about me **At the moment**, they're all talking about me (reminding ourselves that this won't go on forever)

Taking out the **all-encompassing** words (all, everyone, everywhere, no one, nowhere, nothing etc)

- They're all talking about me **Some people** are talking about me (reminding ourselves that actually it's not everyone)

Taking out the personal element – actually, I'm affected by the situation, but it's not just about me

- They're all talking about me They're all talking about **this situation** (reminding ourselves that it's wider than just me)

When we combine all three elements:

They're all talking about me **At the moment, some people are talking about this situation**

Challenging and changing unhelpful thinking

Some examples of reframing – talk about what the reframes bring and see if you can think of more...

Thought	Way of reframing it	Your ideas (go through the reframing above if you need to)
It's all my fault.	Things can go wrong for anyone.	
They did that because they don't like me.	There's lots of reasons why that might have happened – most of them are nothing to do with me.	
I must have done something wrong.	I wonder what this looks like from another perspective.	
My alarm didn't go off – my whole day is ruined.	I may be late but I can still get some good things out of today.	
I can't do this maths problem – I'm really stupid and can't do anything.	I can't do this maths problem at the moment. I might be able to if I try again. Or there are lots of things I can do though.	
Everyone will be talking about what happened!	Some people may talk about this, but most people are too busy worrying about their own stuff – and anyway the next thing will come along soon and then people will be talking about that.	
I'll never get over them.	Maybe I'm not ready to move on yet.	
I always lose my keys.	I have sometimes mislaid my keys; I usually find them again. It seems to happen when I'm stressed.	
Nothing's ever going to get better.	Things always change; nothing goes on forever.	

When you've done a bit of reframing, you can try challenging the thought, by identifying the way in which it is unhelpful.

What?	Questions and thoughts to challenge this thinking	Your notes and thoughts
<p>Catastrophising</p> <p>The importance of a problem is over-exaggerated and/or only the worst outcome is considered as a possibility.</p>	<p>What evidence do I have for this thought? Is it the only interpretation?</p> <p>How likely is this to come true? What are other possible outcomes?</p> <p>What's the worst that could happen? What's the most likely thing to happen? When has this worked out ok in the past? Is there anything practical I can do?</p> <p>What's more likely to make it ok? What will I think in one week/month/year?</p>	
<p>Generalising</p> <p>Thinking one event affects much more than its scope, such as over-sleeping ruining your day or struggling with your homework making you think you're rubbish at that subject.</p>	<p>What has this actually affected?</p> <p>Reset from now – every moment is a new moment.</p> <p>Has anything been gained from this?</p> <p>What has actually changed in the grand scheme?</p> <p>What am I pleased with/grateful for?</p>	
<p>Magical thinking and personalisation</p> <p>Assuming that you control more than you do, such as thinking things unrelated to you are 'your fault' or that not stepping on the cracks will make your day better.</p>	<p>Is this something I can control?</p> <p>Serenity mantra – look for serenity to accept the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that can and wisdom to know the difference.</p> <p>I can let this go – it's not about me.</p> <p>I can only control my own thoughts and behaviours, not those of other people.</p>	

What?	Questions and thoughts to challenge this thinking	Your notes and thoughts
<p>Unfounded expectations Of others: assuming what others are thinking Of events: predicting disaster/success with no evidence. Of self: 'I should...' thoughts</p>	<p>Do I really know what they are thinking? Can I ask them rather than assume? Where is the evidence for this? What is the evidence to the contrary? What would happen if I didn't...?</p>	
<p>One-sided vision Only seeing the negative and not the positive. Focusing only on what you need to do and not where others are working.</p>	<p>What is the other side of this belief? What would someone else say about this? Write down all possibilities from all perspectives. What would it look like if this went really well? Can I ask someone to help?</p>	
<p>Black and white thinking Permanent and absolute – when you use words such as always, never, every etc. If I'm not a success I must be a failure etc</p>	<p>What are the alternatives? What ideas are in the middle? What/where would be 'good enough'? What small change could I make? Write down all the different possibilities, however unrealistic.</p>	



**Finally we can have some mantras
that allow us to feel more accepting of the situation**

This too will pass.

I can only do my best.

It won't feel like this forever.

I can't control anyone else's behaviour, and I can decide my own.

It is what it is.

I've done all I can for now.

Everything will be ok. Everything is ok.

I am brave. I am strong. I have the power to accept what is happening right now.