

We all have times when we get caught up in negative or unhelpful thinking patterns. We may worry over and over about the future and imagine the worst happening. We can judge ourselves harshly for making a mistake. Other times we can have extreme “black-and-white” thoughts like: “Things will never get better.” The good news is that we can learn and practice effective ways of managing negative thoughts. Learning to manage negative thinking has many benefits. It can help us feel better, be more present in our lives, and make healthier choices.

Learning Point # 1 → *Awareness of thought patterns*

We can learn to be more aware of our own thought process. Our mind is constantly offering us thoughts and coming up with commentary, stories, interpretations, and predictions. Often, thoughts just “pop up” automatically and we may not be fully aware of them. We can learn and practice how to be more aware of our own thought process. By being more aware of our thought process, we get better at “catching ourselves” in negative thinking patterns.

- For you personally, why do you think it might be useful to become more aware of your thought patterns in daily life?

Learning Point # 2 → *Challenging our thoughts*

Challenge thoughts and come up with alternative thoughts. All thoughts about a situation are just ONE WAY of thinking about it. There are always alternatives. We can practice actively coming with alternative thoughts. EXAMPLE:

Initial Thought: *“Nobody has texted me in a while. I don’t think anyone likes me.”*

Challenge Question: *“What’s an alternative possibility I’m not considering?”*

Alternative Thought: *“Maybe people are just busy. It’s only been a few days. Plus, it’s been a while since I’ve reached out and texted others.”*

- Why is it important to see a situation from multiple perspectives, not just one?

Learning Point # 3 → *Acknowledge thoughts and let them be*

Another option is to just acknowledge thoughts, let them be, and move on. We don’t always need to challenge thoughts. Sometimes the same automatic thoughts pop up again and again and we already know they are not true and it’s best not to listen to them. We can briefly acknowledge the thought and then move on. We can talk to our own brains and say: *“Hi Brain. Thank you for that thought, but I’m all set. I’m going to move on with my day now.”*

- From your own perspective, what do think it means to “see a thought as just a thought, and not a fact or truth?”

Daily Practice

Your brain is like a muscle. DAILY PRACTICE makes it strong.

Research studies show that daily practice...

- Makes your brain healthier and stronger
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Increases positive emotions

Recommendations for Daily Practice

- Set aside a little time every day to do ONE lesson or exercise. The lessons focus on *learning* key concepts. Exercises focus on *strengthening* your skills.
- The key is to CHOOSE what works for you. Develop a personalized practice of your own. If you miss a day, no worries. You can always get back on track the next day
- An exercise that goes well with this lesson is the **Adjust your Thinking Exercise**, available in the *Guided Journaling Category* of the Exercises section at MindfulCoping.com

Plan for Your Daily Practice

	What date/day of week will this be for me?	What Lesson or Exercise will I plan to do on this day? <i>(Tips: Consider repeating the “Managing Negative Thinking” lesson or trying the Adjust your Thinking Exercise)</i>	When and where will I practice?
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

Keep in mind, the Mindful Coping Program is designed to be FLEXIBLE. Don't worry about doing the lessons or exercises in a particular order. You can go through the lessons and exercises in any order you prefer.
