

Slide Transcription for Coping Skills Seminar: Challenging Thinking

Coping Skills Seminar

Challenging Thinking

Counselling & Psychological Services

University of Waterloo

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In This Seminar...

You will learn to

- identify unhelpful thinking styles;
- challenge and modify unhelpful ways of thinking; and
- think in a more “balanced way.

You will learn a relaxation exercise.

- Mindful Meditation

Why Focus on Thinking?

Image: Happy woman in airplane seat

Travels a lot and has no concerns about the flight

Image: Nervous man in an airplane seat

Flying for the first time and is nervous about the flight

The Role of Thoughts

Research shows that depressed, anxious, and/or stressed individuals often have distorted ways of thinking about the world that can trigger or worsen their symptoms.

The Role of Thoughts

When Thoughts are Realistic

Reactions will probably be reasonable and in proportion to the situation

When There are Errors in Thinking

Reactions will probably be off base or extreme

The Role of Thoughts

Image: Happy woman in airplane seat

May not notice the turbulence or might find it exciting

Image: Nervous man in airplane seat

Afraid something bad could happen (e.g., thinks the plane could crash)

The Role of Negative Thoughts

“What if I fail?”

“I can’t do this!”

“I can never catch a break”

“I mess up everything”

Errors in Thinking

Not all negative thoughts are unrealistic

Not all unrealistic thoughts are negative

The key is to learn to recognize those distorted negative thoughts that cause unnecessary distress.

10 Common Errors in Thinking

1. All-or-nothing thinking
2. Overgeneralization
3. Mental filter
4. Disqualifying the positive
5. Jumping to conclusions
 - Mind reading

- Fortune teller error
6. Catastrophizing
 7. Emotional reasoning
 8. Labelling and mislabeling
 9. Personalization
 10. “Should” statements

Identifying Thinking Errors

What are some possible erroneous thoughts? What are some possible balanced thoughts?

Identifying Thinking Errors: Erroneous Thoughts

“I can’t do this”

“I will never get all this work done”

“I’m going to get poor marks and so I won’t get a good job or get into the grad program I was planning on”

Identifying Thinking Errors: Balanced Thoughts

“I’ve managed previous seminars when I had a lot of work and things turned out okay”

“If I prioritize my time and get to work I’ll be able to get a lot of work done”

“Let’s see where things are after I’ve worked for a couple hours”

“I don’t have to do everything perfectly, I’ll just do the best I can”

Challenging Thinking Errors

“I can’t do this!”

“I’ll never get all this work done”

“I don’t have to do everything perfectly. I’ll just do the best I can”

Two Benefits:

- a) More realistic appraisal of the situation
- b) Decrease your distress

When you have more rational thoughts, you feel physically and emotionally better.

Challenging Thinking

- Start by completing this exercise after the fact
- Slowly work toward completing at time of event
- Becomes more automatic over time

4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise

1. Place tip of tongue against ridge of tissue just behind upper front teeth
2. Exhale completely through your mouth
3. Close mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a count of four
4. Hold your breath for count of seven
5. Exhale completely through your mouth to a count of eight

Repeat steps 1 – 5 for another 3 – 4 breaths.

Identify

1. Identify a situation
2. Identify (and rate) moods/feelings
3. Identify thoughts
4. Identify the ‘hot thought’

Gathering Evidence

Gather evidence that supports the thought.

- Try to keep it ‘fact-based’
- Keep it related to the situation

Example: Failed Course

- Thought: “I’m such a failure”
- Evidence: I failed the course

Gathering Evidence

Evidence that does not support the thought. Try to keep it ‘fact-based.’

- What would you say to someone else who thought this?
- What would your best friend say about this thought?
- What about when you’re in a different mood/situation? How do you think about it then?

Generate Alternative

Weight the evidence and rewrite the thought with a more balanced/realistic thought.

- Shift in perspective
- Describe events in less extreme terms
 - Sometimes versus always or never
 - Inconvenient, disappointing, frustrating versus terrible, horrible, catastrophic

Re-Evaluate the Outcome

How do you feel thinking the alternative/balanced thought?

- Is there a reduction in a negative emotion or an increase in positive emotion?
- Is the situation more manageable?
- Do you feel better emotionally or physically?

Sample Thought Record

See handout: Thought Record.

Think of a situation where you experienced a small amount of stress. Don't pick a highly emotional event.

Participation is voluntary. If you're not comfortable doing the exercise here, don't do it.

If Nothing Else, Try the First Three

- Takes lots of practice
- Evidence against the distorted thought is the most difficult
- Ask a friend or family member to help, or work with a counsellor
- Try doing just the first three columns

Relaxation Exercise

Meditation is a practice in which an individual trains the mind to simply acknowledge its content without becoming engaged with that content.

Participation is voluntary. If you're not comfortable doing the exercise here, don't do it.

Relaxation Exercise: Mindful Breathing

See handout: Mindful Breathing.

It can be helpful to listen to someone guide you through these steps. Practise daily for best results.

Wrapping Up

Questions?

We would appreciate your input and encourage you to take a few moments to help us improve our seminars by completing the online evaluation form.