

Identifying and questioning unhelpful thoughts

1. Define the situation you found yourself in.
2. Describe how it made you feel and any particular thoughts that were at the forefront of your mind.
3. Final challenge: Replace the unhelpful thoughts with helpful ones during stressful situations

Addressing unhelpful thoughts sheet

What happened?

What did I feel?

What did I think?	What types of thoughts are those? (select all that apply)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Perfectionism <input type="checkbox"/> The tyranny of the should <input type="checkbox"/> 'Black and white' thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Overgeneralisation <input type="checkbox"/> Selective focus <input type="checkbox"/> Discounting the positive <input type="checkbox"/> Jumping to conclusions <input type="checkbox"/> Magnification <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional reasoning <input type="checkbox"/> Negative labelling <input type="checkbox"/> Personalising and blaming
What might have been a more helpful thought?	

Find an example on how to complete this sheet on the next page.

How to complete the unhelpful thoughts sheet

As an example, let's take the quote from a dentist who was concerned about the patient who they believed would complain about their treatment:

“I used to look in the appointment book each night before I left ... and if I saw this one name, Patient A, I’ll call her, that’s it I’d be up all night worrying if she would be happy with her treatment or complain”

Here’s how the dentist might have completed the thoughts sheet:

What happened?

I looked in the diary and saw that Patient A was booked in for treatment tomorrow. I started to think about the last few occasions when the patient had attended. She had not been happy with her treatment. I started to think that she was going to be unhappy again, and possibly complain about me.

What did I feel?

I felt like I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I was anxious and kept going over it in bed. I found it difficult to sleep. I was thinking of what I would do if she complained.

What did I think?

- ▶ She will not be happy
- ▶ She will complain
- ▶ It will be my fault and I will get in trouble with the regulatory body
- ▶ It could ruin my career as a dentist
- ▶ It will all be my fault

What types of thoughts are those? (select all that apply)

- Perfectionism
- The tyranny of the should
- ‘Black and white’ thinking
- Overgeneralisation
- Selective focus
- Discounting the positive

- Jumping to conclusions
- Magnification
- Emotional reasoning
- Negative labelling
- Personalising and blaming

What might have been a more helpful thought?

How likely is it that the patient will make a complaint even if she is unhappy?

What is my strategy if she is unhappy or wishes to make a complaint? Offer her a second opinion. Explain the complaints procedure to her. Possibly offer her a refund on treatment costs.

Is there anything I would have done differently? If not then I have done my best and there may be other factors that explain her dissatisfaction.

Not everything is my fault, there may be other things going on here.

One complaint is not likely to ruin my career.

How helpful is it going over these thoughts more than once or twice. Once I have my strategy I need to stop thinking about it – perhaps writing it down would help.