



Thinking Errors Practice

Your thoughts are so powerful they create your reality. Where do your feelings come from? What happens, or how you think about what happens? For example, it could start raining, and I could think, "Oh no- this is going to ruin everything, I'm supposed to go fishing!" I could be really mad about the rain, and stay mad about it all day. Or, I could think, "Awesome! I'm so glad it's raining! I hope it rains all day, then my grass won't need to be watered, and maybe the river will fill up so I can go canoeing!" I could be happy about the rain all day. So it's the same event- the rain- and depending on how I think about it, I could be either happy or mad. There's where your choice and power lie.

Read the above passage and then the items below, and see if you or the person you are working with can identify the category of thinking error from the Thinking Errors sheet. Then try generating a smarter or better feeling way to think- make a better thought.

1. Sam raises his hand in class, and the teacher calls on someone else. Sam thinks, "My teacher doesn't care about me."
2. Beth has trouble figuring out the answer to the first problem on her Math test. She thinks, "I can't do anything right. I'm terrible at Math!"
3. Steve wakes up and doesn't feel all that great. He thinks, "If I have to go to school today, I'll die!"
4. Peter's Mom is running late to pick him up from school. He thinks, "Oh my God, she must have had an accident and gotten killed!"
5. Mary realizes there is a small hole in her shirt sleeve. She thinks, "Oh no, everyone is going to think I'm a slob!"
6. Matt asks if he can join a group in a game at recess, and they tell him no. Matt thinks, "Nobody ever wants to play with me. The kids at this school are all mean."
7. Leo sees someone cut into the lunch line up in front of him. He yells at the other student, goes up to him and pushes him when he doesn't respond, and here comes the principal, who tells him to stop and go back to his place in line. Leo argues with the principal, refuses to go back in line, and ends up going to the office. He thinks, "That's not fair. I always follow the rules, and that kid needs to learn his lesson. I'm going to get him back tomorrow."
8. Leah's counselor asks her to try asking some classmates if she can sit with them at lunch. Leah says, "I can't."
9. Tanya kicks a girl for telling her she's stupid. Tanya tells her teacher, "It's not my fault, she called me stupid!" When Tanya goes home she pushes her little brother and tells her parents she can't help it, because the kids at school were mean to her and her teacher isn't fair.
10. Bart says that the best player in the NBA ever was Michael Jordan. Kevin disagrees and says it's Magic Johnson. Bart argues, and keeps insisting he's right after the teacher tells him to be quiet.
11. Karen is at home and her parents are arguing. Karen thinks, "I must have done something really bad."



12. Mike goes home and his mother tells him to take out the trash. Mike thinks, "I hate taking out the trash. My life sucks."
13. Alex has been good in school all year and made almost all A's. He tries out for the school play and doesn't get the part. "That's not fair. The kid who got picked isn't even as good a student as me. I never get what I deserve."
14. Barbara asks Kara over to play after school. Kara says, "I can't, I have a lot of homework. Barbara thinks, "Kara's just being mean and doesn't like me." Barbara tells Kara, "Fine, see if I ever ask you over again."
15. Nelson is playing baseball and he strikes out. He throws the bat and marches off the field saying "I'm never playing this game again. I never get a hit."
16. Mason works really hard on a writing assignment, and Mr. Nelson gives him a B. Mason crumples up the paper and throws it in the trash. He tells Mr. Nelson, "That's not fair, I did everything right, you should have given me an A."

Many people have difficulty stepping outside of their thoughts to think about what they are thinking about or doing. This is a vital thinking skill called metacognition. How do you edit your thoughts, inhibit impulses, or recognize your behavior does not fit in the context if you don't think about what you are thinking or doing? Some people think in pictures and don't use self-talk at all, which makes it hard to question, correct, and guide yourself. Emotional control and behavior control aren't there. This is why teaching self-talk is so important. Then you can make a thought, and think about it. Is this true, correct, accurate? You don't have to believe all your thoughts. You are not your thoughts, you are the observer of your thoughts, because you can notice a thought that isn't right or feels bad, and make a better thought.

Sometimes I explain daydreaming to people, and make sure they understand the concept, and then ask them, "Do you ever daydream?" and they say, "No." When asked what they are or were thinking, they will say, "I don't know," or "Nothing."

We use the term "train of thought" to describe our stream of consciousness. I like to ask, "Where are you on your thought train? Are you on the caboose, just along for the ride, a victim of your thoughts? Would you rather be on the caboose as a passenger, or up in the engine as the conductor or engineer, driving the train, slowing down by putting on the brakes or speeding up, switching tracks when you don't like where you're going?"

Your brain makes thoughts all the time. Many of these thoughts are just garbage. They can be wrong, repeated unnecessarily, they can be worry thoughts about the future or angry thoughts about past regrets. What would happen if you tried to drive by watching the rear-view mirror? And if you are staying upset about past events, well, I like to tell this story. You've seen that image of Santa Claus with his big bag of toys over his shoulder, right? What if someone had a bag like that, and everywhere they went, when they found dog poop on the ground, they scooped it into the bag. Then they said, "Man, I hate this stuff. It's heavy and it stinks. What would you tell this person? And if you are worrying about something bad happening in the future, isn't that like living as if the bad event were true now, and living with the fear all the way from now until the future



moment when the bad thing may or may not happen? Why would you want to do that? Make a list of all your worries and fears on one side of a page, and on the other, write down what those worries ever did for you. Nothing, right? You see, your body doesn't know the difference between what you think, what you imagine, what you dream, and what's real. Have you ever had that dream where you are falling or someone is trying to get you, and you wake up, and your heart is beating really fast and you feel scared for a few minutes until you tell yourself, it's alright, it was just a dream, I'm okay? See, all of what happens in your mind is real for your body, and while you don't have complete control over your thoughts, you can decide which ones to believe and you can make new, better things to think or think about. You can practice thought replacement, or thought stopping. You can say to your thoughts, inside your head, "That's nonsense, I don't believe you."

Another strategy for feeling better is called "mindfulness." This means to try and focus all your awareness on the present moment. What do you hear? Try to hear at least three different sounds. What do you feel? Try to notice at least three different sensations. What do you see? Here's the thing. The past isn't real, it's gone, it's not now. The future isn't real, either, it's not here, we can't know what it will be. The only thing that is real is right now, the present. This is all we really have, the only place we exist. We don't exist in the past or the future. Right now, what do you have to be grateful for? Make a list of what you like about yourself. Maybe you have a healthy body, all your arms and legs, everything may work the way it's supposed to. Maybe you are a good artist, friendly, funny, creative, good at Math, and so on. Do you have people in your life who love and care for you, a home with a roof that doesn't leak, air conditioning for the summer to keep you cool, a bed to sleep in, food to eat? This is called gratitude. Make this a list you can look at as school starts, write it on your mirror with a dry erase marker, review it before you go to sleep. Stay focused on what is good and right. One more thing about the present. The present is eternal, it always is. You have always been in the present moment and always will be. And in this present moment, you have everything you need. If you don't have it and you are still here, you must not really need it. You always have had and will have everything you need, as long as you are here, it can't be any other way. Mind bending, right?

Make a dream book, use the form I created called "garden of the mind." Start planting your mindgarden, growing what you want and pulling the weeds of negative thoughts.

Next I want you to start using the "Thought Record" every day to record the thoughts you have either right before or during a time you are upset or stressed. Bring your "Thought Record" sheets back to me so we can look at them and make sure you are learning how to notice and correct your thoughts. This way, you are learning to use your smart brain in even smarter ways. Because if your brain makes thoughts that are inaccurate, not true, or feel bad, and you can make new thoughts that are more accurate, you are becoming smarter and able to feel better more often. Would you be okay with being smarter and feeling better?