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How to Manage Unhelpful Thoughts During COVID-19

Aims of this module

- To recognise our interpretations of current events
- To explore the nature of our thoughts
- To identify unhelpful thinking styles
- To introduce techniques to challenge unhelpful thoughts
- To introduce further techniques to manage worry including Acceptance and Mindfulness



<https://www.wallpaperflare.com/game-characters-isolation-isolated-loneliness-away-team-wallpaper-gcula>

How do you interpret the current events?



How do you interpret the current events?

- External events are constantly impacting on our thoughts
- We interpret those events through our personal filters, which include our values, beliefs about the world, memories and experiences
- Each of us has a different set of filters - this is why two people can witness the same event yet experience it differently
- It's as though every external event goes through a personal sieve and everyone's sieve has different holes in it
- Once the information enters our filters we make pictures in our heads, hear sounds, have feelings and form beliefs

How do you interpret the current events?

- This means we change reality as it goes through our filters
- Our interpretations are unique to us, they are our way of perceiving the world
- These are our interpretations of reality, but they are just that – **interpretations** of reality and **not reality itself**
- So, if we work on creating positive interpretations of events it can lead to a more positive emotional state and greater wellbeing
- Having a more positive outlook is also likely to influence our behaviour which in turn can have further benefits

The Anatomy of Thoughts

- Thoughts can be conscious or automatic
- Conscious thoughts are controlled and are within our awareness
- Automatic thoughts are a 'reflex' response to events and our environment
- All thoughts can be helpful or unhelpful
- Thoughts can affect our feelings, physical sensations and behaviour
- **A thought is just a thought**



Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs)



- They are always negative
- They can make us feel bad about ourselves or others
- They can be self-sabotaging
- They can be unhelpful, critical, hurtful or limiting
- They can occupy our mental time like daydreams-
heard like voices, seen like pictures or experienced
like recurring memories
- They are simply part of our 'mental furniture'

so we aren't always aware of them which
means it can be hard to challenge them



Identifying Commonplace Unhelpful Thinking Styles

- Bias against myself
- Having a gloomy view of the future
- Putting a negative slant on things
- Jumping to the worst conclusion
- Mind reading
- Taking all the responsibility
- Making extreme statements (e.g. “things ALWAYS go wrong for me”)



‘Catastrophic’ Thinking

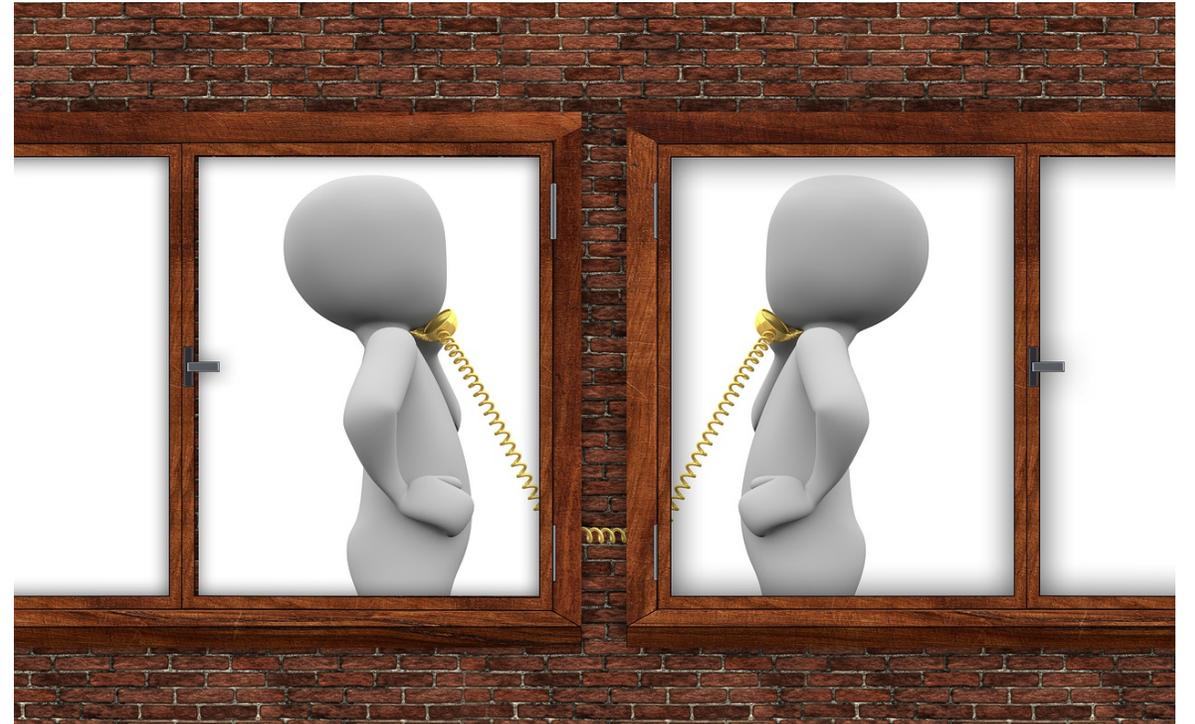
- Thoughts that focus on worst-case outcomes
- They can increase stress and anxiety
- They can lead to ruminating about an imagined future ‘catastrophe’ and cause unhelpful associated feelings
- They can lead to distraction and inaction in cases of crisis
- Consider your thoughts about the pandemic
 - can you recognise any catastrophic thinking?



<https://pixabay.com/photos/avalanche-mount-everest-snow-552114/>

Positive Self Talk

- Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings
- Pinpoint the worry
- Challenge the worry
- Replace the worry with a more helpful thought



<https://www.needpix.com/photo/1235076/car-communication-talk-self-talk-inner-dialog-communication-faces-man-figure-comic>

Adapted from Powell, T.J. (2009) *The Mental Health Handbook: A Cognitive Behavioural Approach*. 3rd Ed. London: Speechmark Publishing Limited

Techniques to Manage Worry

- Thought Diffusion Technique – give the worry a name
- Worry Time – set a worry period to address any worries you have
- Distraction – use other activities to purposefully distract yourself from your thoughts

Worry
Worry
Worry
Worry
Worry

Techniques to Manage Worry

- Thoughts on trial – Look at the evidence for and against the worrying thought you have as if you were gathering evidence to take to a court room
- Evidence can only be observable facts
- Rate how true you felt the thought was before and after this exercise

Unhelpful Thought: % Rating before: % Rating after:	
Evidence for:	Evidence against:

Acceptance and Worry

- When an unpleasant thought, problem or symptom occurs, see if you can notice it. What does it feel like? Where do you feel it?
- Imagine yourself holding that thought or sensation and see if you can let it sit beside you or with you without it being your primary focus
- When an intrusive thought or sensation occurs practise saying “I’m noticing that I’m having a thought that...” This can help create distance between us and our thoughts
- Practise mindfulness techniques. These can help to bring us back to the here-and-now rather than focussing our energy on the problem

Mindfulness

- Learning and practising Mindfulness can help bring our thoughts to the present moment – whereas anxiety and worry can lead our minds to focus on regrets from the past or concerns about the future
- Mindfulness can be practised through simple techniques, using our senses to focus on the here-and-now
- It can be done wherever we happen to be, with whatever we have in our immediate environment, or we can seek calm and beautiful places to embrace the present moment



<https://pixabay.com/photos/oilseed-rape-field-of-rapeseeds-2135026/>

Summary

In this module we have:

- Recognised our interpretations of current events
- Explored the nature of our thoughts
- Identified unhelpful thinking styles
- Introduced techniques to challenge unhelpful thoughts
- Suggested further techniques to manage worry including Acceptance and Mindfulness



In Work Support service

The In-Work Support service provides individual, tailored support to help people with health conditions to keep working. You can access this support FREE as long as you are:

- Employed or self-employed AND
- Living or working in Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot or Bridgend

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