

# REPLACE UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS: LET GO OF EXAGGERATED THINKING

Sometimes our minds can make things seem much worse than they really are. This is called exaggerated thinking. It often happens when we feel anxious, upset, or unsure about ourselves. These thoughts might include words like “always,” “never,” or “everyone,” and they make us feel more hopeless or scared.

For example:

- “I always mess things up.”
- “Nobody likes me.”
- “I will never get better at this.”

These thoughts are often not completely true. They are a way our brain tries to protect us, but instead, they can make us feel worse and stop us from trying new things.

## Why it matters

Exaggerated thoughts can get in the way of us feeling confident and doing our best. If we can notice these thoughts and gently challenge them, we can replace them with more balanced, helpful thoughts that support us to keep going.

## Task 1: Notice and Change the Thought

Read the example below. What exaggerated thoughts do you notice? Then, rewrite the thoughts in a more helpful way.

“I said something stupid at lunch. Everyone went quiet and probably thought I was weird. They are all close friends and I don’t really fit in. They were probably just being polite by including me. I always mess things up in group situations. I should just stop trying to talk to people.”

1. What are some of the exaggerated or untrue parts of this thought?



2. What could this person say to themselves instead, that is kind, realistic, and supportive?

3. What could they do next to feel more confident or improve their skills?

## Task 2: Think About Your Own Experience

Think of a time when you felt worried, embarrassed, or unsure.

Try to remember what you were thinking. Were your thoughts exaggerated in any way?

What happened?

What were you thinking?

Were any of your thoughts extreme or unhelpful?

What would you tell a friend in the same situation?

What can you do next time to feel more in control?

# Helpful Thought Starters

If you struggle to find more balanced thoughts, here are some ideas:

- “I made a mistake, but everyone does sometimes.”
- “I can try again – that's how I learn.”
- “This is hard right now, but it won't always feel this way.”
- “I don't have to be perfect. I just need to try.”
- “Just because it felt awkward doesn't mean it was a disaster.”
- “One bad moment doesn't ruin everything.”
- “They might not be ignoring me – they're probably just busy.”
- “I can't control what other people think, but I can control what I do.”
- “It feels like a big deal now, but it probably won't matter in a few days.”
- “It's okay to feel nervous – it doesn't mean I'm weak.”
- “Not everything I think is true. Sometimes my mind gets carried away.”
- “I've felt like this before and got through it. I can do it again.”
- “Even if it was awkward, that doesn't mean I'm awkward.”
- “Feelings aren't facts – they just show me what I might need.”
- “I'm allowed to speak up, even if I'm not sure what to say.”

## Example of reflecting on own experience:

### What happened?

I sent a message to a friend, and they did not reply. I could see they had read it but just left it.

### What were you thinking?

I thought they were ignoring me on purpose. I felt like I had done something wrong or annoyed them. I started thinking maybe they do not really like me or want to be friends anymore.

### Were any of your thoughts extreme or unhelpful?

Yes. I assumed the worst straight away, even though I had no idea what was going on. I let one message ruin my mood for the whole evening.

### What would you tell a friend in the same situation?

I would tell them that people get busy or forget to reply sometimes. It does not always mean something is wrong. There could be loads of reasons.

### What can you do next time to feel more in control?

Try not to keep checking or overthinking it. Distract myself with something else and wait a bit. If I am still worried later, I could just check in with them another day.

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