



CENTER FOR  
Early Childhood  
Mental Health  
Consultation

Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development

### *Talk Back To Your Unhelpful Thoughts*

Stress comes from our perception of the situation. Technically, the actual situation is not stressful; it is our PERCEPTION that makes it stressful. Here are some common unhelpful patterns of thinking that we all make as well as ways you can think about challenging these thoughts.

***All-or Nothing Thinking:*** You see things in black-and-white categories. If your actions aren't perfect then they are seen as a failure.

***Challenge:*** Instead of thinking in an "either-or" way, try to think in shades of gray. Evaluate the situation on a scale of 0-10. Think again about partial success and reevaluate, on a scale of 0-10.

***Filtering out the Positive:*** You focus in on one thing that went wrong and filter out the positive events that occurred.

***Challenge:*** Try to be as kind to yourself as you would be with a friend. Review the day's events and focus on all of the positive things that went right. For every negative thing you think of, try to also focus on one positive thing.

***Overgeneralization:*** You see a single negative situation as never-ending and a "forever" pattern.

***Challenge:*** Remind yourself that a single negative event (or even multiple occasions) doesn't mean it will truly last forever. Think of a specific time when a single negative experience did not have a long lasting outcome.

***Jumping to Conclusions:*** You make a negative interpretation even though you don't have all of the facts.

*Challenge:* Ask yourself, “Do I really know this to be true?” If no, focus on the things that you do know are true and which pieces of information you still need to make a realistic assessment.

***Catastrophizing:*** You negatively exaggerate the importance of things.

*Challenge:* Try to take the event for what it is and do not let your mind go astray.

***Emotional Reasoning:*** You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are. “I feel it, therefore it *MUST* be true.”

*Challenge:* Seek out the opinions of trusted friends or family to evaluate whether your thoughts are accurate.

***Should Statements:*** You try to motivate yourself by saying, “I should or shouldn’t” do something.

*Challenge:* Think about the advantages and disadvantages of your thoughts, feelings and or behaviors. Are you gaining anything from your thoughts or feelings? Discuss with a friend or family member to determine the accuracy of your thoughts.

***Personalization:*** You see yourself as the cause of a negative event for which you were not entirely responsible.

*Challenge:* Carefully evaluate the situation to figure out if you really have any responsibility for the results. Identify other, outside factors that may be impacting the outcome.

*(Burns, D.D 1989)*