The first step is to pay attention to your thoughts, so you become aware of how you tend to interpret the world around you. These thoughts are the things we say to ourselves and the things that go through our minds as we face various life challenges.

**Identify inaccurate or unhelpful thoughts**

Ask yourself if there is evidence that your thought is actually accurate or true. Often you’ll find there is not a lot of evidence to support unhelpful thoughts. If you find this is true, why not try a different way of thinking about the situation — a way that can be helpful and useful?

Here are some other useful questions to ask yourself when challenging your thoughts:

- Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms or ignoring the positive?
- Am I using “exaggerating” words, such as never, always, forever, need, should, must, can’t, and every time?
- Am I basing my judgments on feelings rather than facts?

**Understand that thoughts cause different behaviors and emotions**

How we feel and act during a situation depends on how we interpret things. Interpretations are influenced by our past experiences, our attitudes, and our personalities. Reactions to events that are not life-threatening never really pop up out of the blue; they are always influenced by our thoughts and the way we interpret situations.

**EXAMPLE — Different interpretations of being stuck in traffic can cause different reactions:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEGATIVE INTERPRETATION</th>
<th>POSITIVE INTERPRETATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• This will take forever! I’ll never get home.</td>
<td>• I guess I’ll be late. Hopefully not too much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Why does this always happen to me?</td>
<td>• Well, since I’m stuck here anyway, I might as well listen to my music.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Re REPLACING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS with helpful ones**

Once you’ve challenged an inaccurate or unhelpful thought, the last step is to replace it with a more realistic, positive, and constructive thought. The new thought should be believable and balanced rather than too “rosy” or naïve.

To learn more about Wounded Warrior Project® mental health programs, visit woundedwarriorproject.org/experienceCSRP.