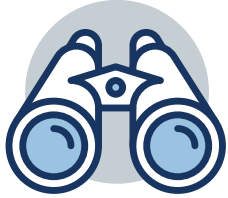


CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS



The way you interpret things determines how you react to them. Change the way you think about a situation, and you will be able to react differently. If you interpret situations in a more positive and constructive way, you'll be better suited to respond appropriately. Military experience taught you to be vigilant. By being vigilant in identifying negative thoughts, you'll be prepared to react effectively.



STEP 1: Identify negative or unhelpful thoughts

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



STEP 2: Understand that thoughts cause different behaviors and emotions

The way you interpret things affects how you feel and act in a situation. Interpretations are influenced by our past experiences, attitudes, and personalities. How you react in the moment is determined not by the situation, but rather through learned behaviors and previous events that are triggering your response.

★ **Example:** Different interpretations of being stuck in traffic can cause different reactions:

- ★ **A Negative Interpretation:** This will take forever! I'll never get home. Why does this always happen to me?
- ★ **B Positive Interpretation:** I'll be there soon. An accident could be what's holding up traffic. I'll try to relax and enjoy some music.

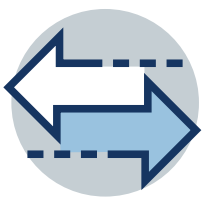


STEP 3: Challenging unhelpful thoughts

Ask yourself if there is evidence that your thought is helpful. Often, you'll find there is not a lot of evidence to support unhelpful thoughts. Try thinking about the situation differently, in a way that can be helpful and useful.

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

- Am I ignoring the positive?
- Am I using "exaggerating" words, such as never, always, forever, need, should, must, can't, or every time?
- Am I basing my thoughts on emotions rather than facts?



STEP 4: Replacing unhelpful thoughts with helpful ones

Once you've challenged an unhelpful thought, the last step is to replace it with a more positive, constructive thought. The new thought should be one that is clear and beneficial to your situation.

★ **Example 1:**

- ★ **A Unhelpful thought:** I always make mistakes and am a failure.
- ★ **B Helpful thought:** Mistakes are normal and I will learn from this.

★ **Example 2:**

- ★ **A Unhelpful thought:** I can't do that; I've never done that before.
- ★ **B Helpful thought:** This is an opportunity to learn something I've never tried!



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