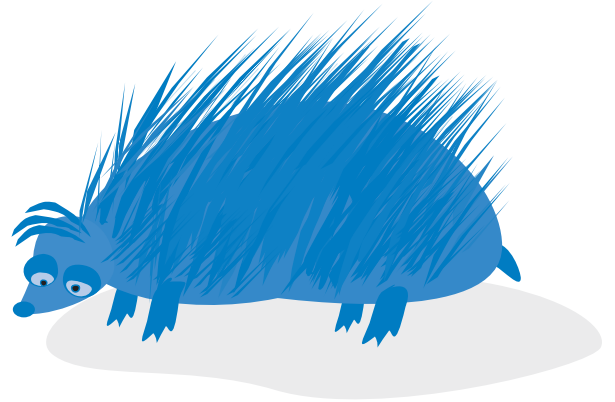


troubled by upsetting thoughts?

dwelling on the negative?

finding it hard to see things positively?



If you feel this way,
you are not alone

We all find ourselves coping with troubling thoughts from time to time—especially when we’re going through changes in our lives or when we feel depressed, anxious, sad, angry or stressed out.

What is healthy thinking?

Healthy thinking does NOT mean positive thinking! No one can look at things positively all the time. Sometimes bad things happen, like getting fired at work, having an argument with a friend or losing someone you love. It’s normal and healthy to feel upset and have negative thoughts when these things happen. Healthy thinking means looking at the entire situation—the positive, the negative and the neutral parts—and then coming to a conclusion. In other words, healthy thinking means looking at life and the world in a balanced way, not through rose-coloured glasses.

Did you know that your thoughts have a big influence on your mental health?

That’s because what you tell yourself about a situation affects how you feel and what you do. Sometimes your interpretation of a situation can get distorted and you only focus on the negative aspects—this is normal and expected. However, when you interpret situations too negatively, you might feel worse. You’re also more likely to respond to the situation in ways that are unhelpful in the long term. Fortunately, there are specific coping strategies to help manage difficult thoughts.

Read on to learn more about improving your mental health through healthy thinking strategies.



what are common thinking traps?

Everyone falls into unbalanced thinking traps from time to time. You're most likely to distort your interpretation of things when you feel sad, angry, anxious, depressed or stressed. You're also more vulnerable to thinking traps when you're not taking good care of yourself, like when you're not eating or sleeping well. See if you can recognize your own thinking traps in the list below:

thinking trap	example
Overgeneralizing Thinking that a negative situation is part of a constant cycle of bad things that happen. People who overgeneralize often use words like "always" or "never."	I wanted to go to the beach, but now it's raining. This always happens to me! I never get to do fun things!
Black and White Thinking Seeing things as only right or wrong, good or bad, perfect or terrible. People who think in black and white terms see a small mistake as a total failure.	I wanted to eat healthier, but I just had a piece of cake. This plan is a total failure! I might as well eat the whole cake now.
Fortune Telling Predicting that something bad will happen, without any evidence.	I've been studying hard, but I know that I'm going to fail my test tomorrow.
Emotional Reasoning Believing that bad feelings or emotions reflect the situation.	I feel anxious when I fly, so airplanes must not be safe.
Labeling Saying only negative things about yourself or other people.	I made a mistake at work. I'm stupid! My boss told me that I made a mistake. My boss is a total jerk!
'Should' Statement Telling yourself how you "should" or "must" act.	I should be able to handle this without getting upset and crying!
Mind Reading Jumping to conclusions about what others are thinking, without any evidence.	My friend didn't stop to say hello. She must not like me very much.
Mental Filter Focusing only on the negative parts of a situation and ignoring anything good or positive.	I met a lot of great people at the party, but one guy didn't talk to me. There must be something wrong with me.

T!P

For more information about the connections between thoughts and other aspects of mental health, see our other Wellness Modules at this series.

how do I get out of a thinking trap?

Here are helpful strategies to challenge common thinking traps. Many people find their mood and confidence improve after working through these skills. You can also find worksheets to help you go through each step at www.heretohelp.bc.ca

1. Try to separate your thoughts from actual events

Ask yourself the following questions when something upsetting happens:

- What is the situation: What actually happened? Only include the “facts” of the situation that everyone would agree on.
- What are your thoughts: What are you telling yourself?
- What are your emotions: How do you feel?
- What are your behaviours: How are you reacting and what are you doing to cope?

2. Identify the ‘thinking traps’

Take a look at the thoughts you’ve listed. Are you using any of the thinking traps and falling into distorted thinking patterns? It’s common to fall into more than one thinking trap. Go back to the thinking trap list on page 2 and identify which ones apply to you and your current situation.

3. Challenge the thinking traps

The best way to break a thinking trap is to look at your thoughts like a scientist and consider the hard facts. Use the evidence you’ve collected to challenge your thinking traps. Here are some ways to do that:

Examine the evidence: Try to find evidence against the thought. If you make a mistake at work, you might automatically think, “I can’t do anything right! I must be a terrible employee!” When this thought comes up, you might challenge it by asking, “Is there any evidence to support this thought? Is there any evidence to disprove this thought?” You might quickly realize that your boss has complimented your work recently, which doesn’t support the idea that you’re a bad employee.

Double-standard: Ask yourself, “Would I judge other people if they did the same thing? Am I being harder on myself than I am on other people?” This is a great method for challenging thinking traps that involve harsh self-criticism.

Survey Method: Find out whether other people you trust agree with your thoughts. For example, you might have trouble with one of your kids and think, “Good parents wouldn’t have this kind of problem.” To challenge this thought, you can ask other parents if they’ve ever have any problems with their kids.

Conduct an experiment: Test your beliefs in person. For example, if you think you think that your friends don’t care about you, call a few friends and make plans to get together. If you assumed that they will all say no, you may be pleasantly surprised to hear that they do want to see you.

Don’t try to get out of a thinking trap by just telling yourself to stop thinking that way.

This doesn’t let you look at the evidence and challenge the thinking trap. When you try and push upsetting thoughts away, they are more likely to keep popping back into your mind.

aim for a balance in your thoughts

Once you have worked through some challenges, try to think of a more balanced thought to replace the old thinking traps. Let’s use the following example:

Situation	Thoughts	Thinking Trap	Challenge
My friend didn’t say hello when I passed her on the street.	She’s so rude. She doesn’t like me anymore.	Labeling Mind Reading	Examine the evidence: She has never been rude to me in the past. I have no proof she even saw me.

→ Balanced Thoughts

There could be lots of other reasons why she didn’t say hello. She probably didn’t see me and still likes me. I’ll wait until the next time we meet before I jump to any negative conclusions about our friendship.

are all negative thoughts unhealthy thinking traps?

No—there are times when negative thoughts are realistic

It can still be helpful to find different ways of looking at the situation, though. Try to find a meaningful personal challenge in the situation. See if you can find any opportunities for personal growth or skills development. Many people coping with difficult situations find that their upsetting thoughts improve when they work on other coping skills, such as identifying the main sources of stress in their lives, problem-solving issues that they can control, and finding social support. For more on coping with stress, see the stress module in this series.

Help with healthy thinking

There are many workbooks and self-help manuals to help you to challenge thinking traps and build up your healthy thinking skills. We have listed some examples for you below. Healthy thinking is a key part of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT is an effective treatment approach for many substance use and mental health problems. Consider working with a qualified CBT practitioner if you need help developing your healthy thinking skills.

Frequent distressing, unwanted or strange thoughts may be a sign of a mental health or substance use problem.

Fortunately, help is available. If you or a loved one struggles with upsetting or unusual thoughts, it's best to talk to a doctor or mental health professional.

T!P

Practice your healthy thinking skills with our online worksheet at www.heretohelp.bc.ca

Select sources and additional resources

- Visit www.comh.ca for *The Antidepressant Skills Workbook* by Dan Bilsker and Randy Paterson.
- Visit www.anxietybc.com for AnxietyBC's realistic thinking guides and worksheets.
- Visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca to read the CBT issue of *Visions: BC's Mental Health and Addictions Journal*.
- Bourne, E. J. (2010). *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* (4th ed.). Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Burns, D.D. (1999). *The Feeling Good Handbook*. New York: Plume.

where do I go from here?

Ami Quebec

Visit <https://amiquebec.org> for information and resources regarding mental health or any kind of mental health disorders.

HealthLink QC

Call 811 or visit <https://amiquebec.org> to access free, non-emergency health information for anyone in your family, including mental health information. Through 811, you can also speak to a registered nurse about symptoms you're worried about, or talk to a pharmacist about medication questions.

Your Local Crisis Line

Crisis lines aren't only for people in crisis. You can call for information on local services or if you just need someone to

talk to. If you are in distress, call 1 866 APPELLE or 1 866 277-3553, 24 hours a day to connect to a QC crisis line, without a wait or busy signal. The crisis lines linked in through this number have received advanced training in mental health issues and services.

Suicide Prevention center

For suicide prevention centers in Quebec visit <https://suicideprevention.ca/quebec-suicide-prevention-centres>

Drugs: Help and Referral (DAR)

For information regarding support and referral to people coping with addiction in Montreal area call 514 - 527 2626 and everywhere in Québec call 1-800 265 2626.

The integrated health and social services centre (CISSS) and the integrated university health and social services centre (CIUSSS):

To find contact information for your family medicine clinic, your CISSS or your CIUSSS, go to [Finding a Resource](#).
<http://sante.gouv.qc.ca/en/problemes-de-sante/sante-mentale/>

The Ordre des psychologues du Québec

To find a psychologist or a psychotherapist who speak different languages, visit the Ordre des psychologues du Québec website. <https://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/>

ACCÉSSS

ACCÉSSS (<https://accesss.net/>) is a provincial group of community organizations whose goal is to represent the interests of ethnocultural communities in health and social services decision-making bodies. It is a non-profit organization (NPO). ACCÉSSS is a meeting place for the community, the health network and the university community. Due to the management philosophy of ACCÉSSS which is to work in consultation with its various partners, as well as the nature of the files treated, ACCÉSSS is more and more involved in the networks of consultation.

Telephone: 1-866-774-1106 (toll-free) and (514)-287-1106 Fax: (514)-287-7443
email: accesss@accesss.net

The Multicultural Mental Health Resource Centre (MMHRC)

For information regarding the availability of mental health services in Quebec or other provinces of Canada visit <http://www.multiculturalmentalhealth.ca/> to access information in different languages such as Farsi. This website is working under the supervision of Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry of McGill University.

More resources available for getting help or further information on mental health and stress:

- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [Mouvement Santé mentale Québec](#) (in French only)
- [Association des groupes d'intervention en défense des droits en santé mentale du Québec](#) (in French only)
- [Regroupement des ressources alternatives en santé mentale du Québec](#) (in French only)
- [Les porte-voix du rétablissement – L'association québécoise des personnes vivant \(ou ayant vécu\) un trouble mental](#) (in French only)
- [Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec](#)
- Visit <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/> for a stress journal to track stressors and how you respond to them.
- Maté, G. (2004). When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Paterson, R. J. (2000). The Assertiveness Workbook: How to Express Your Ideas and Stand Up for Yourself at Work and in Relationships. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions. (2009). Learn About...Stress [fact sheet]. Vancouver, BC: Author. <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/stress>
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2010). Info on Stress. Toronto, ON: Author. http://www.camh.net/About_Addiction_Mental_Health/AMH101/info_stress.html
- Ipsos-Reid. (2002). Canadians and Stress: A Special Report. Toronto, ON; Author. <http://www.ipsos-reid.com/search/pdf/media/mr020919-1.pdf>
- Statistics Canada. (2010). Perceived life stress 2008. Ottawa, ON: Author. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2010001/article/11108-eng.htm>