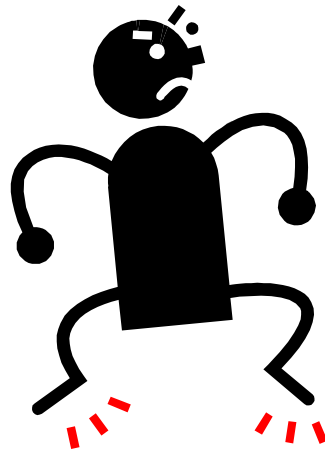


Looking After Me!



My Feelings

Imagine you are feeling very stressed or angry. Now label the figure below.
Write what happens to you when you feel stressed or angry.



Situations that I find difficult

What situations would make you feel like the figure you have just labelled?

Why do they make you feel like this?

What usually happens when you find a situation difficult to deal with?

What are the consequences of this for you?

What are the consequences of this for others around you?

Why I feel this way

It is likely that you labelled the "angry" figure with words that suggested or described an increase in heart rate; an increase in temperature; feelings of aggression and feelings like you want to run away. You may also have labelled things like wanting to shout, scream or swear.

When you were asked to identify situations that caused you to feel like this you may have identified situations in which you felt threatened or angry. You most probably identified unpleasant situations. However it is not always an unpleasant situation that can cause feelings like this. Can you think of a good situation that causes an increase in your heart rate? Is there an enjoyable situation that may make you want to scream? What about the night before Christmas? Or watching a scary film? Going on a rollercoaster? It is likely that these scenarios will cause you to feel many of the same sensations that you described on the "angry" figure. So, why do we feel like this?

Stress!

Stress is what occurs when anything challenges you. This challenge may be good - a rollercoaster; or it may be bad - someone picking on you. When you feel challenged your body produces adrenaline. This is a hormone that is secreted by the adrenal gland that is situated on your right kidney. Your brain will have identified that you are facing a challenge and will send a message to your adrenal gland. Adrenaline will then be released in order to give you the extra energy that is needed in order to deal with a challenging situation. Adrenaline is a hormone produced by the adrenal gland in the body of many animals. When it is produced in the body it stimulates the heart-rate, dilates blood vessels and air passages, and has a number of more minor effects. Adrenaline is naturally produced in high-stress or physically exhilarating situations.

The term "fight or flight" is often used to characterise the circumstances under which adrenaline is released into the body. It is an early evolutionary adaptation to allow better coping with dangerous and unexpected situations. With dilated blood vessels and air passages, the body is able to pass more blood to the muscles and get more oxygen into the lungs in a timely manner,

increasing physical performance for short bursts of time. This would have been very handy in the days when you had to hunt a wild boar to get a bacon roll in the morning!

Stress is the feeling of being under pressure. A little bit of pressure can:

- increase productivity
- be motivating
- improve performance

However, too much pressure or prolonged pressure can lead to stress, which is unhealthy for the mind and body. It can cause symptoms such as:

- difficulty sleeping
- sweating
- lack of appetite
- difficulty concentrating

It is therefore important to recognise that sometimes we need adrenaline and that stress is not always bad. It is also important to know how to deal with stress and stressful situations well so that this stress is not prolonged and so that we make the most of our adrenaline boosts in a way that does not have negative consequences for ourselves.

First it is important to work out why it is that sometimes adrenaline is a great feeling and why it is sometimes horrible!

This is to do with the *thought* that we have about the situation. We *think* that a rollercoaster is *great* and so we *feel good* about it. We *think* that being shouted at is *bad* and so we *feel bad* about it. When we *feel good*; our *actions* or *behaviour* tends to be *positive*. When we *feel bad*; our *actions* or *behaviour* tends to be *negative*.

Thought, Feeling, Action

If I was to ask you to stop your heart beating - could you do it? Could you put your digestive system on hold for half an hour? What about your kidneys? Could you stop them functioning through willpower? Of course not! You are perfectly designed. Your body has a system of working that you don't even have to think about. It just goes ahead and does its job. Your mind is similar in many ways. It is designed to work in its own way too.

For example: did you know that you always have a "thought" before you have a "feeling" before you have an "action"?



This is **very** important! Just think about how many times you have acted in a way that has created unpleasant consequences for yourself. How many times have you wished you could control your actions, or your behaviour, better? Have you ever been **told** to change your behaviour? Have you ever wondered how this is possible?

You are not alone!!

The truth is you can't change your **behaviour** until you change the **feeling** behind that behaviour. You can't change that **feeling** until you change the **thought** behind the feeling. If you can work this out then you can respond more positively to situations.

- **A Situation** - a problem, event or difficult situation occurs

From this can follow:

- **Thoughts**
- **Emotions**
- **Physical feelings**
- **Actions**

Each of these areas can affect the others. How you think about a problem can affect how you feel physically and emotionally. It can also alter what you do about it. There are helpful and unhelpful ways of reacting to most situations, depending on how you think about them.

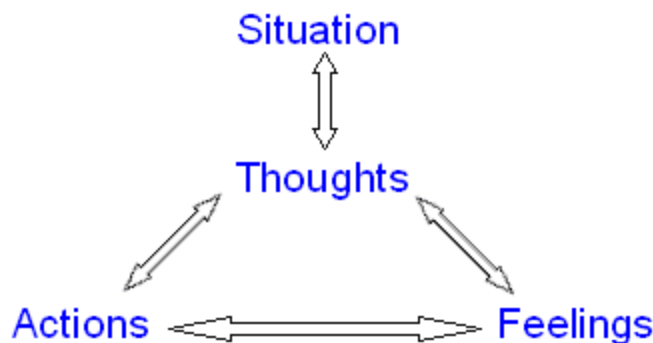
For example:

Situation:	You've had a bad day, feel fed up; so go out shopping. As you walk down the road, someone you know walks by and, apparently, ignores you.	
	Unhelpful	Helpful
Thoughts:	He/she ignored me - they don't like me	He/she looks a bit wrapped up in themselves - I wonder if there's something wrong?
Emotional: Feelings	Low, sad and rejected	Concerned for the other person
Physical:	Stomach cramps, low energy, feel sick	None - feel comfortable
Action:	Go home and avoid them	Get in touch to make sure they're OK

The same situation has led to two very different results, depending on how you thought about the situation. How you **think** has affected how you **felt** and what you **did**. In the example in the left hand column, you've jumped to a conclusion without very much evidence for it - and this matters because it led to:

- a number of uncomfortable feelings
- an unhelpful behaviour.

If you go home feeling depressed, you'll probably brood on what has happened and feel worse. If you get in touch with the other person, there's a good chance you'll feel better about yourself. If you don't, you won't have the chance to correct any misunderstandings about what they think of you - and you will probably feel worse. This is a simplified way of looking at what happens. The whole sequence, and parts of it, can also feedback like this:



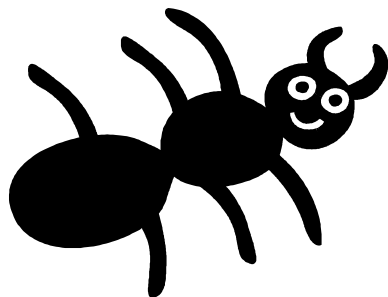
This "vicious circle" can make you feel worse. It can even create new situations that make you feel worse. You can start to believe quite unrealistic (and unpleasant) things about yourself. This happens because, when we are distressed, we are more likely to jump to conclusions and to interpret things in extreme and unhelpful ways.

Here is a possible school example:

Situation:	You're in class talking to a friend when the teacher walks in and asks you to be quiet.	
	Unhelpful	Helpful
Thoughts:	He/she is picking on me - I'm not the only person talking.	He/she wants to get the class started and just so happens to know my name.
Emotional: Feelings	Anger at being treated unfairly	
Physical:	Feel sick, heart rate increases, flush.	None - feel comfortable
Action:	Answer back and speak rudely to the teacher.	Settle down and get on with work.

- What emotional feeling do you have if you change your thought from an unhelpful one to a helpful one?
- What are the consequences of each action for you?
- Can you see the positive benefit of working on changing your thoughts?

It is not always easy to change your thoughts as we all develop bad thought habits without realising it. These are sometimes called "automatic negative thoughts" and often we think these without being aware we are doing so.



Not that kind of ANT!

EXAMPLES OF AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS (ANTs)

The way we think about things is important. There are times when our thoughts are unhelpfully negative. Recognising these ANTs is the first step in learning to change them.

Here are some of the more common types of negative thoughts.

Top Ten ANTs

Generalising too much: This means coming to a *general* conclusion based on a single event or one piece of evidence. If something bad happens *once*, you expect it to happen again and again. Such thoughts often include the words "always" and "never".

- *I forgot to finish that project on time - I **never** manage to do things right.*
- *He didn't want to go out with me - I'll **always** be lonely.*



Focus on the negatives: Concentrating on the negatives while ignoring the positives. Ignoring important information that contradicts your (negative) view of the situation.

- *I know my teacher said most of my essay was great but he also said there were a number of mistakes that had to be corrected...he must think I'm really hopeless.*

All or Nothing Thinking: Thinking in black and white terms (things are either: right or wrong, good or bad). A tendency to view things at the extremes with no middle ground.

- *I made so many mistakes...If I can't do it perfectly I might as well not bother.*
- *I won't be able to get all of this done, so I may as well not start it.*
- *This job is so bad...there's nothing good about it at all.*

Personalising: Taking responsibility for something that is not your fault. Thinking that what people say or do is some kind of reaction to you, or is in some way related to you.

- *John's in a terrible mood. It must have been something I did.*
- *It's obvious she doesn't like me, otherwise she would've said hello.*
- *I didn't get picked for the team because of my appearance.*

Exaggerating: Overestimating the chances of disaster. Expecting something unbearable or intolerable to happen. Such thoughts often begin with "What if...?"

- *I'm going to make a fool of myself and people will laugh at me.*
- *What if I haven't turned the straighteners off and the house burns down.*

Mistaking feelings for facts. Negative things you feel about yourself are held to be true because they feel true.

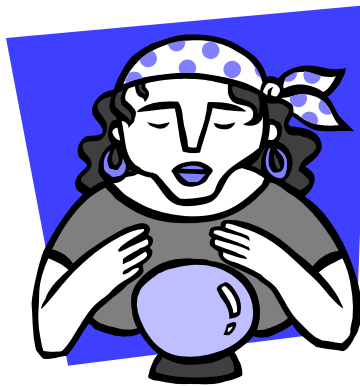
- *I feel like a failure, therefore I am a failure.*
- *I feel ugly, therefore I must be ugly.*
- *I feel hopeless therefore my situation must be hopeless.*

Mind Reading: Making assumptions about other people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours without checking the evidence.

- *John's talking to Molly so he must like her more than me.*
- *I can tell he hates my shirt.*
- *I could tell he thought I was stupid in that group work.*

Negative Fortune Telling: Anticipating an outcome and assuming your prediction is an established fact. These negative expectations can be self-fulfilling: predicting what we would do on the basis of past behaviour may prevent the possibility of change.

- *I've always been like this; I'll never be able to change.*
- *It's not going to work out so there's not much point even trying.*
- *This relationship is sure to fail.*
- *I'll never be able to control my temper.*



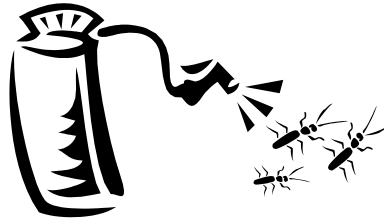
Should Statements: Using "should", "ought", or "must" statements can set up unrealistic expectations of yourself and others. It involves operating by rigid rules and not allowing for flexibility.

- *I shouldn't get angry.*
- *People should be nice to me all the time.*

Magnifying the negative and minimising the positive: A tendency to exaggerate the importance of negative information or experiences, while trivialising or reducing the significance of positive information or experiences.

- *He noticed I spilled something on my shirt.*
- *I know he said he will go out with me again, but I bet he doesn't call.*
- *Supporting my friend when her mother died still doesn't make up for that time I got angry at her last year.*

The good news is these unhelpful thoughts can be changed!



ANTs are bad habits - we are not always aware that we are thinking them. A bit like someone who bites their nails or plays with their hair - often they are doing this without being aware of it. We can often think negative thoughts without being truly aware of it. As with all bad habits - the first thing to do is to recognise them.

The first thing you have to do is recognise the ANTs that **you** have that **you** need to get rid of. Look at the list above - which of these do you sometimes think?

My ANTs

Positive Thinking

Once you have recognised your own nasty ANTs - you need to change them! The best way to get rid of a negative is with a positive. You have spent a long time learning to think negatively so it will take some practice learning to think positively. The first stage is to learn to think positively about you!

Imagine the figure on the page is you! Label this figure with all your good qualities and skills.



Positive Me!

- How easy did you find that?
- Do you need a hand?
- Start by writing all your experiences around the figure. Do you go shopping for someone you know? What hobbies do you have? What subjects interest you? What words would your best friend use to describe you?



Now - work out what positive skills and qualities you have from these experiences. Write these into the diagram. Look at the positive vocabulary to help you think of some words to use.

Positive Vocabulary

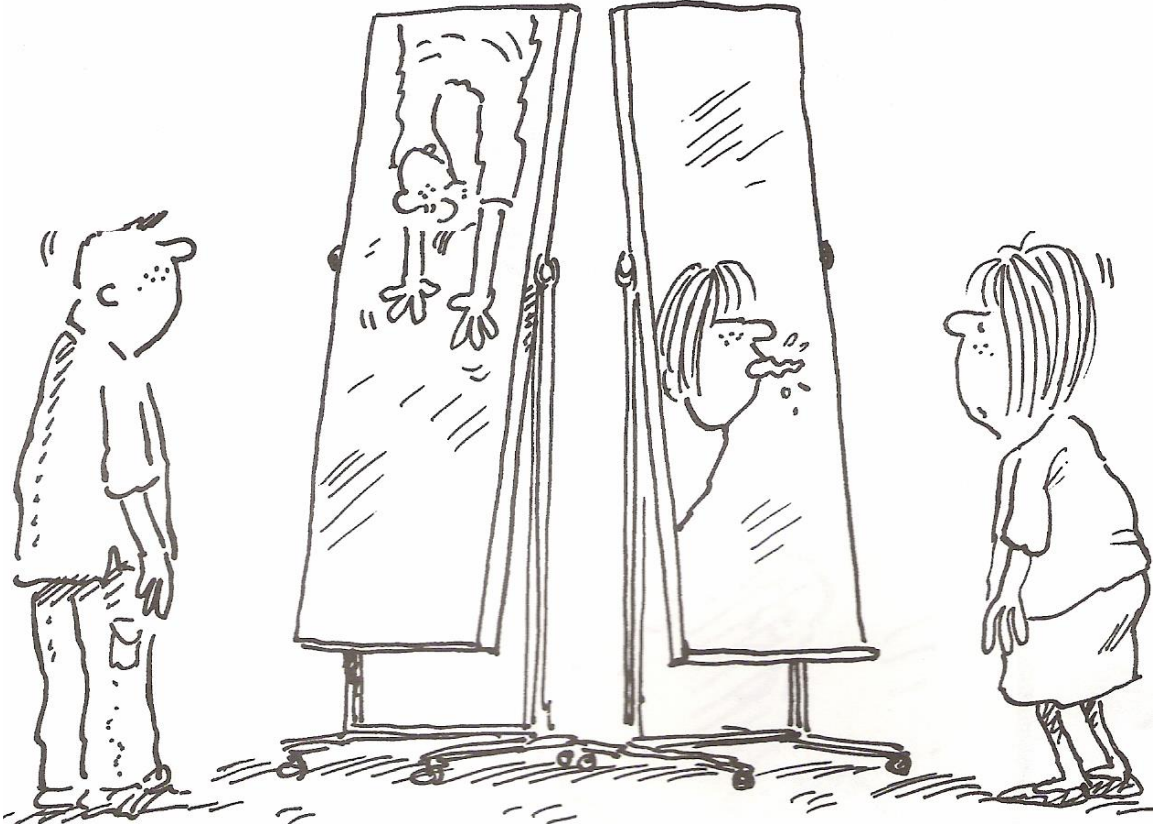
How many of these apply to you?
Add some of them into your "Positive Me" diagram.



*adaptable alert ambitious bold brilliant capable charming
cheerful competent confident content courageous creative
credible decisive dependable devoted diligent diplomatic
dynamic efficient eloquent enduring energetic enterprising
enthusiastic fantastic fearless focused fun gorgeous grateful
happy healthy hilarious imaginative immaculate imaginative
impressive industrious influential intelligent joyful keen
knowledgeable laudable lively loyal lucky magnetic mature
modest natural open-minded original perfect powerful
practical pragmatic precious productive professional proud
punctual receptive relaxed remarkable resolute responsible
satisfied self-assured sensible shrewd skilful solid spontaneous
steadfast successful talented thorough tough trustworthy
unique upbeat valiant vivacious wise witty wonderful worthy*

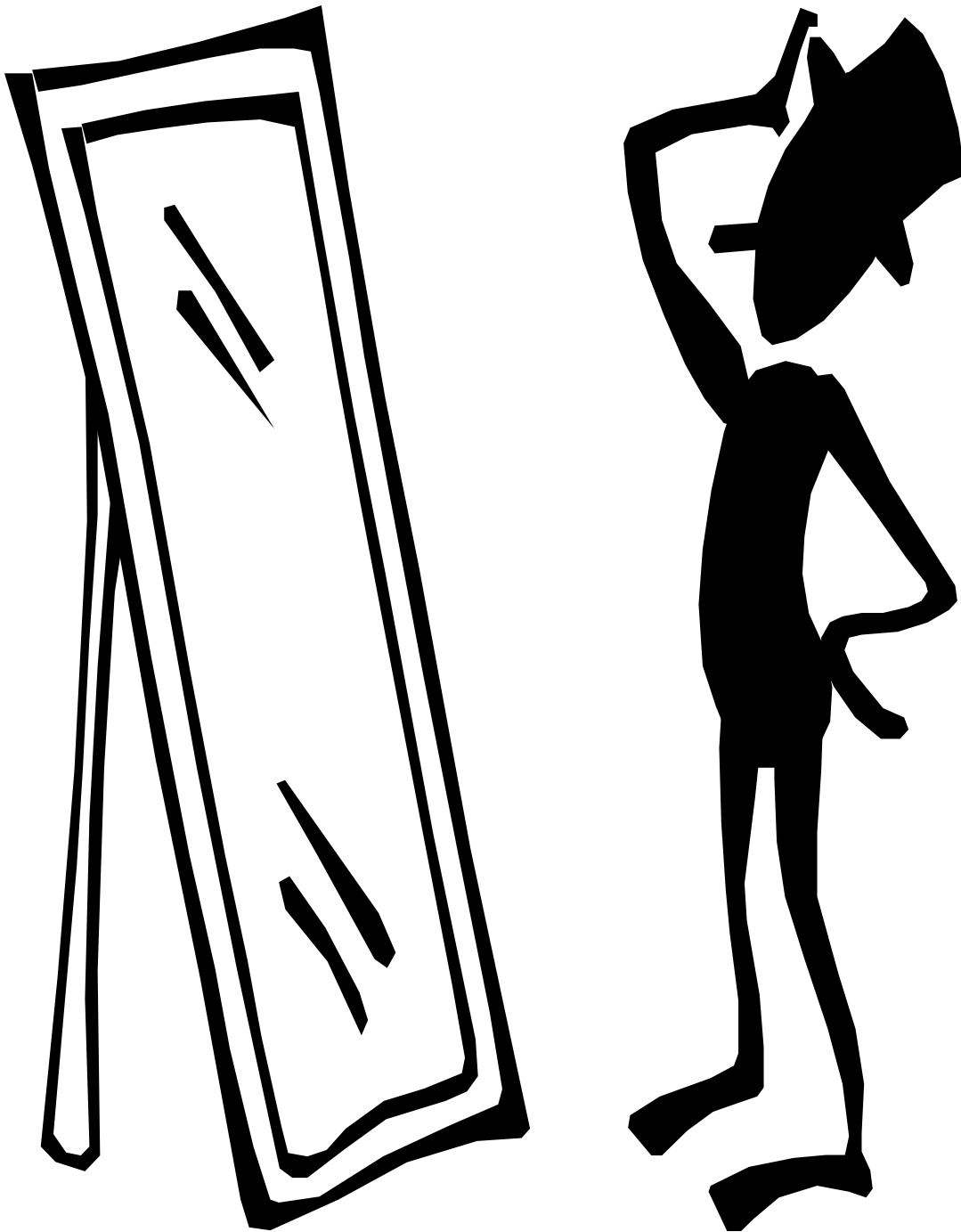
Now that you have learned to think more positively about yourself - the real work begins! Remember to be kind to yourself when you look at you!

All About Me



Often when we look in a mirror we look at what we don't like! We see what we want to change rather than what we like about ourselves. Imagine you are your own best friend - what would you say to your best friend when you look at them? Why don't you try being just as positive to yourself as you are to your best friend? You should do this **at least** once a day.

Fill the mirror with words that describe what you like about you!!



Fill the mirror with positivity!

It is very difficult to get through life on your own! Make a note on this page of all the people in your life that are important to you.

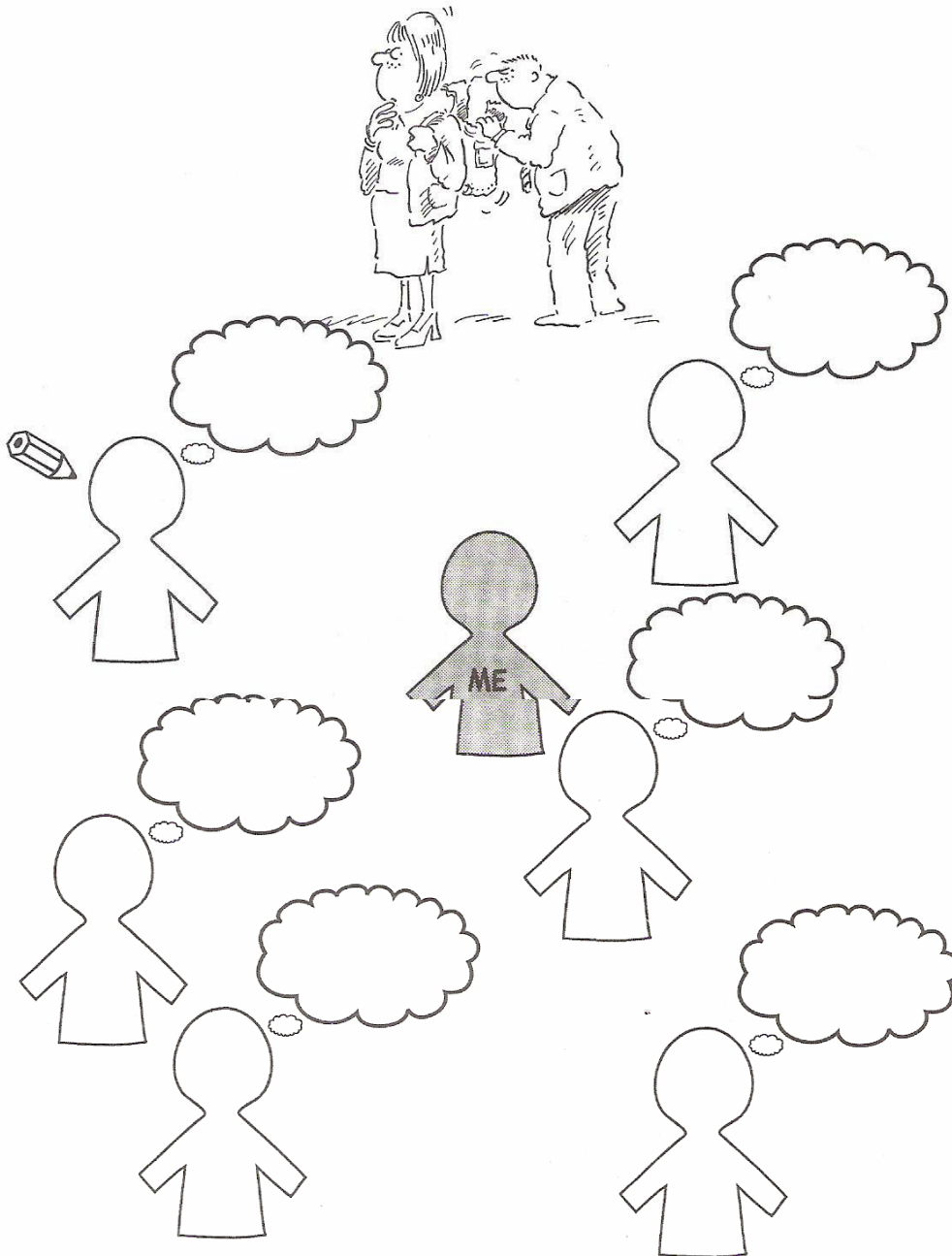
Important People in my Life



Now add a note to each explaining why these people are important to you.

Who Do I Trust?

Name those people who are closest to you and who you trust. In the thought bubbles write down why you trust them.



How can we Change our Thoughts?

It's easy to think that we can't change the way we think - that thoughts just happen and that we have no control over them. That last bit is certainly true. We cannot stop our thoughts, and we can't control them. Whatever we do, the thoughts are going to happen anyway. But we can choose how we react to them.

Thoughts are generated randomly, automatically, messages from our brain. They are not necessarily true, and not necessarily helpful. We can learn to react to thoughts differently.

Let's use an example from primary school.

The Playground Bully Metaphor

School playgrounds tend to be secured with high fencing to protect the children from outsiders, to stop the children wandering off, and maybe to stop balls being lost. All good things. But it does mean that within this secured playground, all the children have to be together, whether they get on or not. Most if not all primary schools have a playground bully. You know the type. This particular bully is all talk, he (or she) threatens violence, but he just uses name calling, spiteful, horrible nasty stuff. He has a gang of mates around him, who encourage him and join in with him. For the people he picks on of course, it's all very upsetting and humiliating. Or need it be?

The bully laughs and shouts, pointing and humiliating each pupil in turn, "You're so stupid" and the like. Maybe much worse. Consider these three pupils:

1. **Pupil number 1** hears the abuse, becomes upset and runs away crying. How does the bully react? Right - it's great entertainment, what a laugh! It's likely the bully will carry on targeting this young person.

2. **Pupil number 2** hears the bully, thinks about it, then responds with, "Hang on a minute. I got 8 out of 10 in my spelling test this morning, and you only got 4. I'm not stupid!" How does the bully react? Taken aback maybe? He might carry on and have another go, but eventually, the bully will give up on this one.
3. **Pupil number 3** hears the bully, looks at him (acknowledges him), doesn't react at all, and just walks away to go and play football with his friends. The bully's reaction? No entertainment to be had here. Might as well give up.

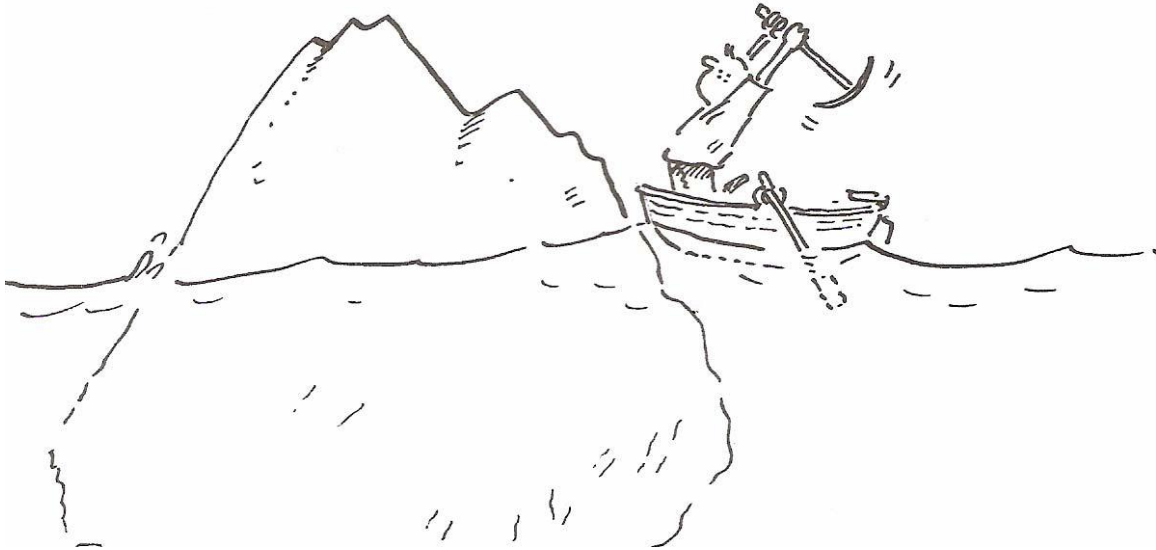
It can be like that with our thoughts. If we imagine our thoughts as our own internal bully, then maybe we have similar options that we can use to respond to our bully.

At the moment, we're believing the thoughts (the bully). We're being upset by them, and reacting to them automatically. The thoughts keep on coming, and we continue to believe and be upset by them. Just like pupil number 1.

Pupil number 2 challenged the bully - the bully got his facts wrong. Pupil number 2 isn't stupid at all; he did better than the bully in the spelling test! We can learn to challenge our thoughts. Ask whether the thought is accurate or not - and we can look for hard evidence to check that out, like the spelling test.

Pupil 3 didn't react to the bully at all. He acknowledged him, then walked away, and moved his focus of attention elsewhere. We can learn to do that with our thoughts. Learn to just notice and acknowledge them - 'Oh there's that thought again!', realise that it is just a thought, choose not to believe it, dismiss it and move our attention onto something else.

Changing my thoughts!



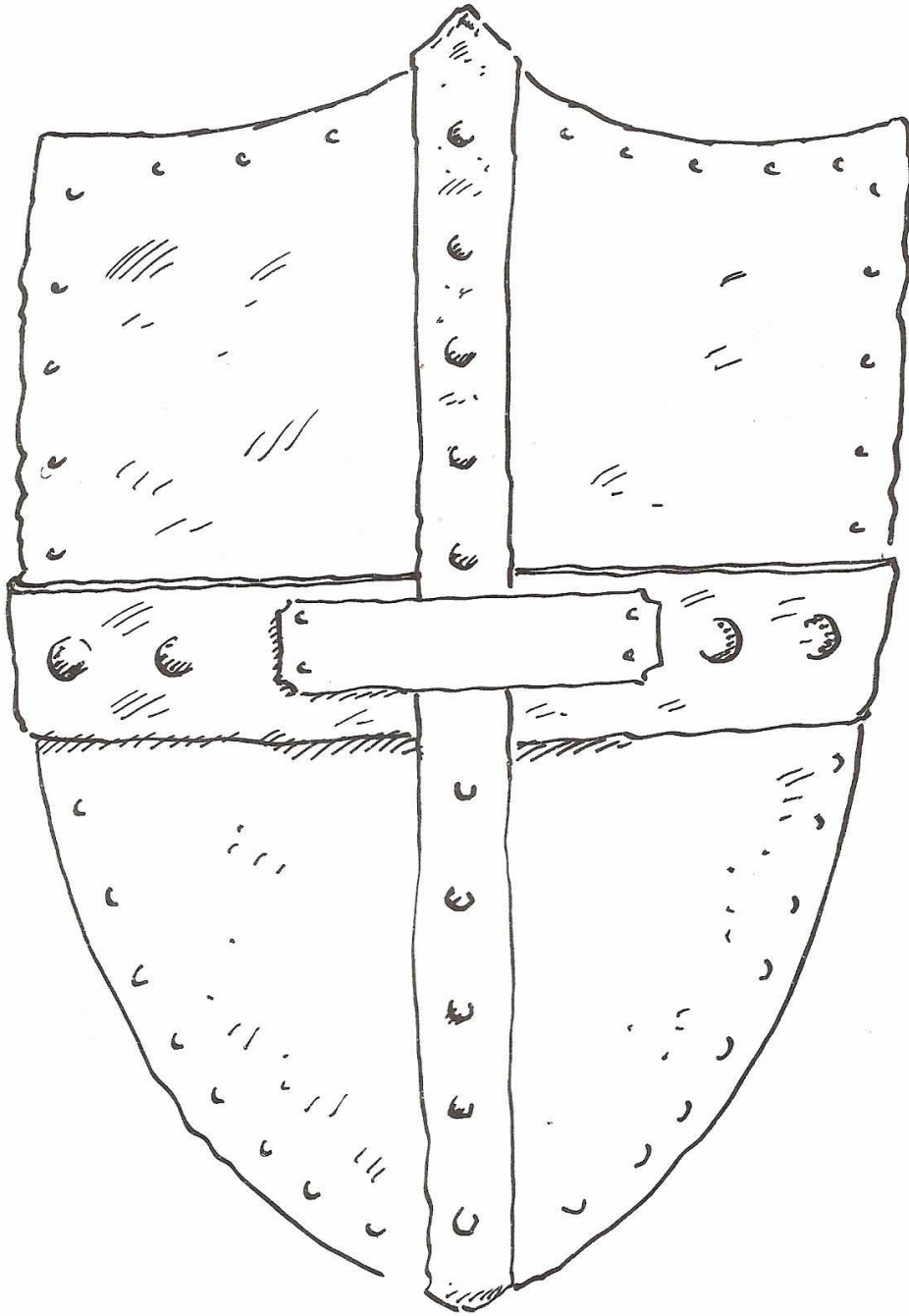
So far we have looked at:

- Some of the negative ways we can all think about situations.
- How changing a thought from an unhelpful thought to a helpful one can change how you feel and then how you act or behave.
- Ways to think positively about yourself.
- Important people who can help you.
- People you trust.

All of these things should help you begin to work on changing how you think about situations and this will then help you control how you feel and how you act. If you look at the drawing above you will see that most of the iceberg is below the water line. This is a bit like our behaviour, thoughts and feelings! The behaviour is what other people see but the things that cause that behaviour - the thoughts and feelings - are all below the water!

You are now going to begin to work more seriously on some situations that you find difficult. You are going to work out why you behaved in the way you did and you are going to work on changing your thoughts in order to change your feelings and then your behaviour. Before you start it would be useful to look at the preparation work you have done and to arm yourself! What positive thoughts **about you** can you use as a power shield to help you fight the ANTs? Write these on the shield as a useful reminder.

Power Shield



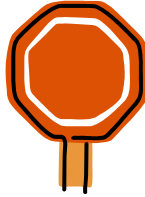
Fighting to be Positive!

Now that you have created a shield - you are partially protected against ANTs and other negativities that would enjoy bringing you down or hurting you. In order to fight the rest of these nasty enemies - read through the following list of positive weapons you can use to arm yourself!



CHANGE VIEW: 10 key facts	
C hange: your thoughts and actions	
H omework: practice makes perfect	V iew: events from another angle
A ction: don't just talk, do!	I can do it: self-help approach
N eed: pinpoint the problem	E xperience: test out your beliefs
G oals: move towards them	W rite it down: to remember progress
E vidence: shows practice can work	

STOPP!



- **S**top and step back from the situation in your mind
 - **T**ake a breath - breath slowly once or twice
 - **O**bserve - What's happening?
 - What am I reacting to?
 - What am I thinking and feeling?
 - What are the words that my mind is saying?
 - What physical sensations do I notice in my body?
 - Where is my focus of attention?
 - **P**ull back - and put in some perspective
 - How would someone else see this?
 - How important will this be in months?
 - What will the consequences of my actions be?
 - What advice would I give my best friend?
- P**ractise - what works. What is the best thing I can do to address this situation? What techniques have I learned that can help me deal positively with this?

ABC

Think about what activated the event, what your beliefs were at the time and what the consequences of the event and your reaction to it are.

A - activating or triggering event (a trigger can be a thought)

- What was happening just before I started to feel this way?
- What was I doing?
- Who was I with?
- Where was I?
- When was it?

B - beliefs

- Thoughts and/or Images e.g. *What was going through my mind at that time?*
- Meanings & interpretations - *What did this say or mean about me? What was the worst thing that could happen?*

C - consequences

- Emotions - Describe in words and rate intensity 0-100%
- Physical sensations - *What did I feel in my body?*
- Behaviours: actions & urges - *What did I do? - What did I feel like doing?*

Positive Steps to Wellbeing

Be kind to yourself

We all have bad days.

Be kind to yourself. Encourage rather than criticise yourself. Treat yourself the way you would treat a friend in the same situation.

Take up a hobby and/or learn a new skill

Increase your confidence and interest, meet others, or prepare for finding work.

Help others

Get involved with a community project, charity work, or simply help out someone you know.

As well as benefiting others, you'll be doing something worthwhile which will help you feel better about yourself.

Eat healthily

Eat regularly, eat breakfast, eat healthily, eat fruit and vegetables, drink water.

Connect with others

Stay in touch with family and friends - make regular and frequent contact with them.

See the bigger picture

We all give different meanings to situations and see things from our point of view. Broaden out your perspective and consider the bigger picture ('the helicopter view')

What meaning am I giving this?

How would others see it?

Is there another way of looking at this?

How important is it, or will it be in a year's time? What can I do, right now, that will help most?

Exercise regularly

Being active helps lift our mood, reduces stress and anxiety, improves physical health, and gives us more energy.

Get outside, preferably in a green space or near water.

Find an activity you enjoy doing, and just do it.

Have some fun and/or be creative

Having fun or being creative helps us feel better and increases our confidence.

Enjoy yourself!

Relax

Make time for yourself. Allow yourself to chill out and relax. Find something that suits you - different things work for different people.

Breathe... (imagine a balloon in your belly, inflating and deflating as you breathe in and out)

Balance sleep

Get into a healthy sleep routine - including going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.

Beware drink and drugs

Avoid using alcohol (or non-prescribed drugs) to help you cope - it will only add to your problems.

Accepting: 'It is as it is'

We tend to fight against distressing thoughts and feelings, but we can learn to just notice them and give up that struggle.

Some situations we just can't change. We can surf those waves rather than try to stop them.

Allow those thoughts and sensations just to be - they will pass.

ANGER

Thoughts

- It's not fair
- Others are treating me badly
- I won't stand for it. I must defend myself.

Body reaction

Adrenaline response - Body's alarm system - Energised for fight or flight.
Blood is diverted to the big muscles to help us fight or escape the situation, and blood is therefore taken away from other body systems.

You might notice in your body:

- Heart rate increases, breathing speeds up, breathless, choking feeling
- Muscles tense, aching, shaking, hot, Sweating
- Lightheaded, Blurred vision
- Butterflies in tummy, urge to go to toilet
- More alert - scanning for danger
- Urge to go towards whatever is making us angry

Thinking differently

- What am I reacting to? What's pressing my buttons?
- How important is this really?
- What would someone say about this?
- Am I over-reacting? Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event?
- I feel like I'm being unfairly treated, but maybe they didn't mean it that way. Am I misreading things?
- What's the best thing to do?

Doing differently

- Take a breath.
- Walk away - or don't walk towards source of anger
- Do the best thing - best for me, for others and for the situation.
- When feeling calm, if still appropriate, do something about it in a calm, non-aggressive but assertive way.

Self Esteem

We tend to go through life evaluating ourselves and others according to a scale of worth. The idea of self esteem is the amount of value that we consider we are worth. These values vary from person to person. Whilst we might rate ourselves as being of little value, others might rate us much higher. If we get into the habit of thinking negatively about ourselves, then low self esteem, or placing little value on ourselves, is the result.

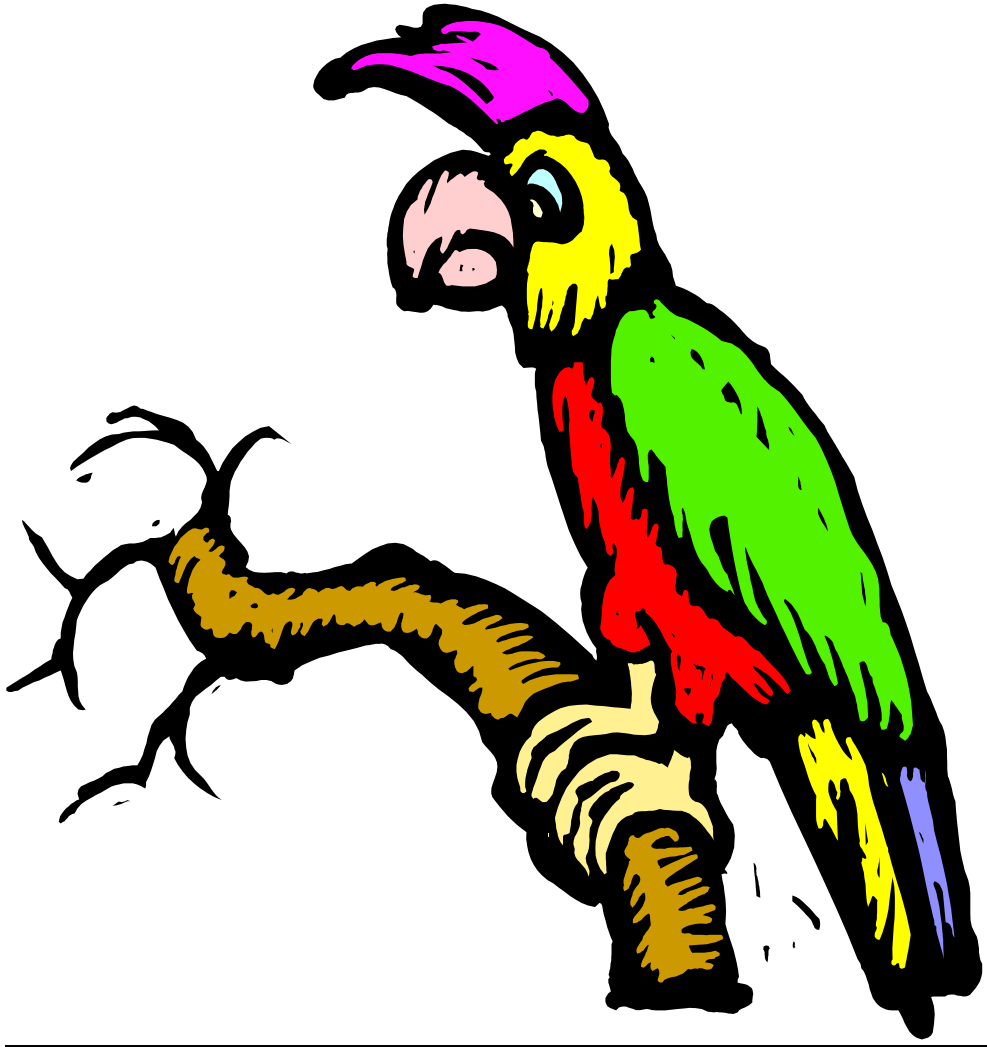
Low self esteem can be a result of negative life experiences, particularly when we're young and most vulnerable. These experiences may include being criticised or judged negatively, such as from a parent or school bullies. As adults, abusive relationships and very stressful life events can also cause low self esteem.

Low self esteem can stay low, because of our own self-critical thoughts, which can be triggered by criticism, or perceived criticism (even if none is intended, we believe we are being criticised).

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We have already looked at the idea of ANTs and how damaging they can be. In order to picture how they can affect you - read the story, "The Poisoned Parrot". Once you have read the story - have a think about what your poisoned parrot says to you and about what antidotes to his poison you have. How will you cover up your poisoned parrot and stop him from bringing you down?

The Poisoned Parrot



Imagine you're given a parrot. This parrot is just a parrot - it doesn't have any knowledge, wisdom or insight. It's bird-brained after all. It recites things "parrot fashion" - without any understanding or comprehension. It's a parrot.

However, this particular parrot is a poisoned and poisonous parrot. It's been specifically trained to be unhelpful to you, continuously commenting on you and your life, in a way that constantly puts you down, criticising you. For example, you miss the bus, and you arrive at school 5 minutes late. The parrot sits there saying: "There you go again. Late! You just can't manage to get there on time can you. So stupid! If you'd left the house and got the bus on time you'd have arrived with loads of time to spare and the teacher would be happy. But you? No way. Just can't do it. Useless! Waste of space. Absolutely pathetic!"

How long would you put up with this abuse before throwing a towel over the cage, or getting rid of the parrot?

Yet we can often put up with the thoughts from this internal bully for far too long. Decades. We hear that "parrot", believe the "parrot", and naturally get upset. That then affects the way we live our lives - the way we behave towards others, how we are, what we think about others, what we think about the world, and how we think and feel about ourselves.

We can learn to use the antidote: just notice that parrot, and cover the cage! "There's that parrot again. I don't have to listen to it - it's just a parrot". Then go and do something else. Put your focus of attention on something other than that parrot.

This parrot is poison though, and it won't give up easily, so you'll need to keep using that power shield and be persistent in your practice!

Eventually the parrot will get tired of the towel, tired of you not responding. You'll notice it less and less. It might just give up its poison as your power shield overcomes it, or perhaps fly off to wherever poisoned parrots go.

Adapted from "The Malevolent Parrot" - Kristina Ivings

How Low Self Esteem Affects Us

Emotions

We might feel:

- depressed
- hurt
- angry
- frustrated
- anxious
- ashamed
- guilty....

Thoughts

We might think the following negative and self-critical thoughts:

- I'm so stupid
- I'm worthless
- It's my fault
- I'm a failure
- I'm not good enough
- I'm incompetent.

We might also fall into unhelpful thinking habits and let those ANTs through our minds!

Behaviours

We might:

- try to please others
- get defensive when we believe we're being criticised
- under-achieve or work harder to compensate and cover up our incompetence
- be shy and passive around others
- avoid situations and people
- neglect or abuse ourselves

Making Changes

Doing things differently

- Communicate with others assertively
- Set achievable and realistic goals. When you achieve them, congratulate and treat yourself, and allow others to congratulate you.
- Accept compliments - say thank you, and smile
- Act the person you want to be - play the role for long enough and you can become that person
- Visualise positive change
- Look after yourself - eat healthily, exercise, do more things you enjoy doing
- Stand, walk and talk confidently
- Change your image - hair, clothes, make-up
- Take up a new hobby or interest
- Learn a new skill
- Reward yourself for achievements and successes - however small
- Thank others - show your appreciation, and others will appreciate you
- Do things for others - help someone out. It makes us feel better about ourselves
- If you can do something well, let others notice - when they notice your work, their opinion of you will be raised, which in turn, raises your own self esteem

Thinking differently

STOPP! Pause, take a breath. Ask yourself:

- What am I reacting to?
- What have I been thinking about here?
- Is that "Internal Critic" operating again?
- Am I looking at things through those gloomy specs again?
- Am I getting things out of proportion?
- How important is this really? How important will it be in 6 months time?
- Am I expecting something from myself that is unrealistic?
- What's the worst (and best) that could happen? What's most likely to happen?
- What would I think about someone else in this situation? What would I say to a friend?
- Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?
- Am I jumping to conclusions about what this person meant? Am I misreading between the lines? Is it possible that they didn't mean that?
- What do I want or need from this person or situation? What do they want or need from me? Is there a compromise? How could I act in a way that was more effective or helpful?
- Am I just focusing on the worst possible thing that could happen?
- What would be more realistic?
- Am I focusing on the negative, putting myself down? What would be more realistic?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- Am I doing that Compare & Despair thing: exaggerating the good aspects of others, and putting myself down?
- Or am I exaggerating the negative and minimising the positives? How would someone else see it?
- What's the bigger picture?
- Things aren't either totally white or totally black - there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?

- This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it's not actually happening again right now.
- What would be the consequences of doing what I normally do?
- Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and effective action to take? (for me, for the situation, for the other person)
- Be compassionate with yourself - just as you might be with someone else
- What would a caring friend say to me in this situation?
- What is a kind and constructive way to think about how I
- Can improve this situation?
- Whoever said human beings are supposed to be perfect?
- Would a caring mother say this to her child if she wanted the child to grow and develop?
- How will I learn if it's not okay to make mistakes?
- Acknowledge your strengths - start by writing out a list of things you're good at, or what others have or do say about you.
- Notice the positives - carry a notepad around, and write down whenever you notice something good or helpful that you've said, or done, or what others have said about you
- At the end of each day, ask yourself: What have I done or tried today that I've never done or tried before? What have I done to help other people today? Who has helped me? What have I enjoyed doing today?

Positive Affirmations

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/affirmations.htm www.get.gg

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Over the years, we tend to get into unhelpful thinking habits, and think negatively about ourselves and situations. Using positive statements can help us develop a new attitude to ourselves and our situations.

Choose a statement from those below, or make one that means more to you, and repeat, repeat, repeat throughout the day, every day, of every week, of every month. You might want to make or print out a card with your affirmation, and carry it with you.

For the positive affirmations to work, you must use it whenever you notice you have that negative thought - immediately turn it around by using your affirmation.

Use a statement that starts with "I" and use the present tense. See the examples below - choose one, adapt one, or make up your own. Make it something broadly realistic, even if you don't believe it right now.

☐☐I am strong

☐☐I have strength

☐☐I am determined and successful

☐☐I am a good and worthwhile person

☐☐I am a unique and special person

☐☐I have inner strength and resources

☐☐I am confident and competent

☐☐I hold my head up high

☐☐I look good because I am good

People like me - I am a likeable person and I like myself

I care about others, I am needed and worthwhile

I am a loving person

I have a lot to be proud of

I have all that I need

I am in control of my life

I can achieve anything I want to achieve

I make wise decisions based on what I know

I'm moving towards my goals

I accept myself as a unique and worthwhile person

My life has meaning and purpose

I am in control of my choices

I am strong and healthy

I am calm and confident

I have many options and can make wise decisions

Everything is getting better every day

I am calm and relaxed

I am healthy and have all that I need

☐☐Today is the first day of the rest of my life and I will take notice of the many positive things this day has to offer

☐☐I live a healthy and positive lifestyle

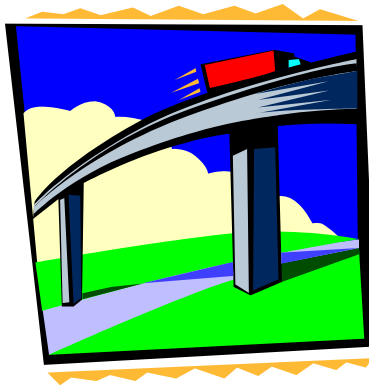
☐☐I know I can master anything if I practice it continually

☐☐I have my wise mind - I can seek inner guidance whenever I need to

☐☐My life purpose can be whatever I choose it to be

☐☐All is well, right here, right now

Creating the Bridge to Middle Ground



□□ Move away from “either - or” thinking to “both - and” thinking. Avoid extreme words: “always”, “shoulds”, “never”, “you make me...”

□□ Practice looking at different sides of a situation and alternative points of view. Find that kernel of truth in each view.

□□ Remember, there is often no absolute truth. Truth can be found in both sides.

□□ Other views can be valid even if you don't like or agree with them.

□□ Don't stand on one side or the other, try to find a middle way between the tension or conflict.

□□ Practice balancing acceptance with change by saying things like:
“This is really hard for me, *and* I am going to keep trying.”
“I am doing the best I can, *and* I am going to try harder”.

□□ Practice sitting with feelings and notice feeling more than one emotion. An example might be: Loving someone and being angry at them at the same time.

Beyond our Control

Recently the authorities banned flying for a few days due to the volcanic ash cloud lying over Europe. Many thousands of people all over the world felt anxious, sad, angry or frustrated about their situation at not being able to fly.

In that situation, what is within our control? As frustrating as it is, as anxious as we feel about the consequences of not getting to our destination, as sad as we feel about missing important events, there is little we can do. The air safety organisations have to put safety first, and order no-flying. A volcanic ash cloud from Iceland is totally beyond our control.

If it's out of our control, then what can we do about it? In this situation, there are things we can do - contacting others and making arrangements for accommodation or alternative travel.

We could fight and struggle; we can get mad and upset, and perhaps blame others. But in struggling, we're just adding to an already difficult situation. Many times, even though we'd like to change the situation we're in, or change other people, all we can change is ourselves - what we think; our attitude towards it; what we do.

If some situations are beyond our control - we can struggle and fight, or we can accept that's just the way it is. "It is as it is". Acceptance is not about judging it to be good or agreeing with it, not giving it permission to go on forever and not giving up on our options.

We are faced with many similar situations all the time. Situations that we find ourselves in, that we can have little control over - bereavements, losing a job, illness, being bullied by others, debt, relationship break-ups or difficulties. Perhaps some can be situations that we have been partly responsible for bringing about, but have little control over now. There are situations where we have a little control over, some we have a lot. We can only influence those areas where we have some control.

□ How much control do I have? What is outside my control?

□ "It is as it is". I'm not agreeing with or giving up on it, but I can let it go for now.

□ If I can't change the situation; can I change the way I think or do about it?

□ What can I do that is within my control?

□□ **STOPP**

□□ **Take a breath**

□□ **Observe** - What am I reacting to? What am I thinking and feeling?

□□ **Pull back & Put in some Perspective** - What's the bigger picture? What would someone else make of this situation? What advice would I give a friend?

□□ **Practise what works** - What can I do about this? What's within my control? What would help? What's the best thing to do - for the situation, for others, for me?

Imagine...

Visualise yourself handling this situation in a calm non-aggressive but assertive way, respecting the rights and opinions of everyone involved.

Visualise blue for calm, or green for balance.

Breathe in green/blue & breathe out red.

Writing it Down!



Shakespeare said that: "The pen is mightier than the sword"! Writing can be a powerful weapon in helping us deal with thoughts and feelings. We can use thought record sheets and mood or activity diaries. Writing can: "get it out of our head" and to help us to see things from another perspective. Just putting words on paper seems to really help. You might choose to set a time limit for your writing.

Rainy Day Letter to Self

Some people find it helpful, when they're feeling well and able to cope with daily life, to write a letter to themselves, to read when they're not feeling so good, or are struggling to cope. The well, stable and strong you, writes a letter to the more vulnerable you.

If you don't feel you're ever in a good enough place to write a letter in this way, you could try imagining that you are feeling well, strong and able to cope, or perhaps older and wiser, and write a letter from the future, to your present more vulnerable self, offering guidance and support for how to get to that better place. To help you with this you could imagine a time when you were younger that you thought you would never get over! What kind of letter would you write to that younger you now?

You might decide that you can read this letter at certain times, when you're feeling a certain way, or when you're struggling with particularly dark thoughts.

In your letter, include:

- What helps you feel better at those times
- What you've found that helped in the past
- Guidance on what you need to do (e.g. talk to someone, do something, be with others)
- Advice on what not to do - as you know from experience that it doesn't help you in the long run
- Your personal strengths and resources
- What you need to know at that time

You might include some of the following phrases:

- I understand
- I've been there
- I care
- Others care - even though it might feel like they don't
- You can get through this, you've done it before
- Remind yourself to use particular techniques to help get you through
- It will pass

□ Be compassionate, caring, supportive, understanding, encouraging to your vulnerable self

Writing your story

It can often be helpful to write down what's happened to you, either over your lifespan, or perhaps a particular distressing memory. Take some time, when you won't be disturbed, and write down everything you can remember about that time. Get it all on paper. Once it's there, you might choose to re-arrange it so that it reads like a chronological story, as it happened. You might choose to write it as a story, or in note form, using bullet points with a brief description. The more you can write: the better. You can build it up over time.

Describe the circumstances, the ages and size of people involved. Perhaps consider the bigger picture - what was going on not only for your self but for others involved too. Describe what you felt, thought and did at that time. This helps to put the story together (it's often fragmented in our memories), helps get it out of our heads, and often enables us to see a different perspective on what happened.

Once it's on paper, we can read it through as often as we need to, in order to put the memory in its proper place - as a story, a memory, from the past that belongs in the past.

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Letters to others

Sometimes it's helpful to write a letter to others, perhaps about what you really think or feel about them or what they did that hurt you so much, or to express how much you appreciate someone, or want to say sorry, or that you want to forgive. You might want to wait a while, and perhaps discuss it with a wise friend, before deciding whether it's a good idea to actually send the letter (if the person is still alive and known to you), or you might choose to deal with it differently.

Some people find it helpful to (go outside and) burn the letter, watching the smoke rise up, particularly if the person has died. Or just imagine the letter arriving at its destination, the person reading it, and seeing the reaction you want them to have. Or maybe it's enough just to have written it, so another option may be shredding it, or watching it slowly disintegrate whilst soaking in water.

A Better Future

Sometimes, when we're feeling really hopeless, believing things can never change, it can be helpful for us (or have a trusted someone else) to write an account describing us in a desired future, maybe in one, five or many years from now. Someone who's been depressed, anxious, in debt, worried about being unemployed or failing exams - may write (or have written by someone else) a letter describing them finding a satisfying job, getting on with colleagues, positive feedback from the management about how you're getting on at that time, bringing home the money your family needs in order to cope, and even put some aside for a holiday. Describe how the family relationships are so much better.....

Random Writing - The Mind Dump

It can be helpful to just write down whatever comes into our heads, perhaps for a certain period of time - 10 minutes or half an hour. It may read as nonsense, and that's okay. That's how our minds work. Write down all the random, apparently nonsensical words and sentences, anything that comes to mind. You might include brief descriptions or sketches of any images that come to mind. Don't change or edit anything. Simply write.

You might then look back and see if there's anything there worth spending time thinking about, or you might decide that it's okay to just leave it there, on the paper. You can choose what you then do with the paper - to keep or destroy it, and how to do that.

Keep a notepad with you

If you have trouble sleeping, it can be useful to have a notepad and pen or pencil on your bedside table, so you can jot down any worries that come to mind, and tell yourself you can deal with or pay attention to them in the morning. Carrying a notepad in your handbag or pocket means you can write down anything, anytime.

Keeping a Journal

You can write, whatever you want to write, every day, or whenever you need to, your thoughts, feelings, responses. These can be intensely private, what you wouldn't share with anyone else. Write at times when you feel just okay, when you feel great, and times when you're really distressed or struggling to cope. It helps to put things in perspective, get it out of your head and onto paper (or on a computer), and means you can look back on it at another time, if that would be helpful - to see how you coped, that things can and will be better, that you can survive, that this will pass.

THE WORRY TREE

Notice the Worry

Ask yourself: "What am I worrying about?"

Ask: "Can I do something about it?"

NO

Let worry go

YES

Action Plan

Change focus of What? When? How?

Attention

NOW?

Do it!

LATER?

Schedule it

Let worry go

Change focus of
Attention

Let worry go

Change focus of
Attention