Unhelpful thinking styles

Thinking Style	Thought	Challenge
Mind reading. Making the assumption that we know what other people are thinking.	"She thinks I'm useless"	How do you know what she thinks? Has she told you? Do you have any evidence for the thought or are you guessing? Are you able to read minds?
All or nothing thinking. When we think in pure black or white, all or nothing terms, rather than seeing things as a matter of degree.	"I need to get it all right or else I've failed"	Are things really this black and white? Try to think of things as a matter of degree. Sure, you may not be 100% at something, but does this really mean failure?
Emotional reasoning. When we base our decision-making upon an emotional state.	"I feel low, it's going to be a bad day"	Mood is variable. There could be a number of reasons as to why you feel a certain way – it doesn't necessarily say anything about the situation.
Personalising. This is when we take responsibility for situations which may not have been our fault, rather than taking other factors into account.	"It's my fault things are going wrong"	What else was involved in the situation? Make a list of all of the other factors involved in the task (time, people, resources, etc) and give them a percentage rating for how they influenced the task. Was it as much your fault as you initially thought it was?
Overgeneralising. This is when we assume one aspect of experience to be characteristic of all other similar experiences.	"Everything is going wrong"	Everything? There may be a lot of things that don't appear to be going so well right now, but are there just one or two things which are ok? Did you manage to raise a smile from your colleague this morning? Did the baby eventually settle to sleep?
Catastrophising. This is when we treat an otherwise ordinary event as something potentially catastrophic.	"The baby's got a cold, they might get really ill and end up in hospital."	Can we really assume that the worst is going to happen based upon this one event? Is it more helpful right now to assume the worst or to see the situation as it really is?
Awfulising. When we treat minor setbacks and events as being much more negative than they really are.	"This is awful – I can't get an appointment with	Are things really that awful? Is it helpful to think that things are this awful right now? What might be a more realistic way of looking at the situation?

	the Doctor until 11 O'clock."	
Must, Should, Ought-to Thinking. Using these thinking styles can put us under undue, unrealistic levels of pressure.	"A dad should be able to calm down the baby straight away."	Where do these rules come from? What is the effect of them? Do these rules help you right now, or do they put you under even more pressure? Is there a kinder way of thinking about the situation?
Magnification. This thinking style makes things appear much larger, and much more significant than they truly are, leading to feelings of anxiety or overwhelm.	"I've been asked to a meeting with the directors at work – this is massive, I'm not sure I can cope."	Take a step back and try to look at the reality of the situation. Is it really as big an issue as it initially seems or is there another way of looking at it? (e.g., just a gang of suits in a room). What are the costs or benefits to magnifying the situation?
Minimisation. This is when we take a potentially significant issue or event and distort it into something of low importance or value.	"I don't need to bother with the mortgage arrears, nothing will happen."	Is this view accurate? Is there any part of this event that I do need to respond to or think about? What are the costs or benefits of viewing this event in this way? Waht is a more realistic or balanced way of thinking about it?
Selective Abstraction (Mental filter). This is when we knowingly or unknowingly pay attention to things which support our beliefs, despite things which may challenge the belief also being present.	"I know I'm a failure, everywhere I look I can see it."	What is another way of looking at the situation? What evidence is there to support this alternative view? Use a positive data log.
Critical self. Holding a negative, critical view about yourself.	"I'm a failure."	How does this view serve you? Does it benefit you or does it carry a cost? If it doesn't help you, then what might be a more helpful or realistic belief to hold about yourself?
Compare and Despair (Negative Comparisons). When we evaluate ourselves, our behaviour and our qualities negatively in comparison to others.	"Everybody else is doing fine, I'm not doing well at all."	Even though others may give the impression that they are ok, or doing well, do we really have the full picture? How does comparing yourself to others help? Especially when you are feeling low already?

Fortune Telling (predictive thinking). When we assume that we know what is going to happen in the future.	"My partner will get fed up with me and leave."	How certain are you that this is inevitable? Are you able to see into the future? Can you predict the weather for tomorrow, or the lottery numbers for this week? If not, how can you be certain about these other predictions? Is there any way we can test out some of these predictions?
Perfectionist thinking. When we hold ourselves or others to perfectionist, typically unrealistically so, standards.	"I/others need to be perfect."	This is a tall order. Is it actually *possible* to be perfect? How do we know when we have achieved perfection? What are the costs or benefits associated with this expectation? What would be the consequences if I aimed for 90%, or even 80%? What would be the worst thing? How do my expectations of perfection effect my relationships with others?
Validation from others. This is when we will evaluate ourselves based upon how we feel others view us.	"If she thinks I'm useless, then I must be."	What are the costs and benefits of evaluating ourselves based upon others perceptions? Does this mean that I can only be happy when others are? What are the consequences of this for my depression? How do I know what others think of me anyway (see mind reading)?
Wishful thinking. When we believe that our situation or experience would be better if certain wishful (not necessarily realistic) conditions were met – wishful thinking can detract from taking action to develop useful coping behaviours.	"I wish I had better parenting skills, then I'd be able to cope."	Wishful thinking can feel nice to indulge in for a while, but how is it going to help you at present? What behaviours would be required if this wishful thinking would become true? How would *you* behave, think or feel differently? Is there anything you can do today to emulate the behaviours present in your wishful thinking? If not, what can you *do* to do this?
Regretful thinking. When we spend time focusing upon a past event, with the belief that our lives would be better if that event hadn't happened.	"If only I hadn't met my partner that night, then things might be different now."	You're right, if things had happened differently in the past then no doubt your current situation would be different right now. But how does focusing upon past events change your reality right now? Are there any benefits to thinking about the past in this way? Similarly, what is it costing you to regret the past?
Belief in a just world. When we believe that the world	"I come to work on time, do my job,	We only have to look at the news on TV to see that the world can sometimes be an

in and of itself works in a just and fair way, when in fact sometimes bad things happen to good people.	keep my head down – I can't believe I've been overlooked for promotion."	unfair, unjust place. Although we expect some degree of fairness, it can be helpful to anticipate alternative outcomes in situations. What is another way of looking at this situation? Is there any action I am prepared to take to remedy this unjust situation? If not, are there any ways I can learn to accept this?
Cognitive Dissonance. This is when we will rigidly hold onto a belief despite significant evidence to the contrary being available. The more the belief is challenged, the more rigidly we will hold onto it. Can often maintain arguments and disputes.	"I know you've been driving for 15 years, but women are still worse drivers than men.	Stop, take a minute. Look at the point you are holding on to. Is it accurate? What is the evidence to support your belief and what is the evidence against it? If it's inaccurate, then what would be the absolute worst thing that would happen if you changed your belief? (e.g., people will think I'm stupid, people will stop listening to me) How likely is it that this worst outcome would happen? (see catastrophising, mindreading).
Low frustration tolerance. This is when we "just can't stand" things the way they are and will engage in short term distractions, avoidance or unhelpful behaviours rather that persevere with a more significant task.	"I've had a stressful day, I can't face more stress at home – I'll need to have a drink before I get there."	What is the worst thing that could happen if you tolerated the presenting issue or situation? Is it truly as intolerable as you think? What are the short and long term consequences of not persevering with the issue? Do they outweigh the short term "fix"?
Can't live with/without thinking. This is when we falsely believe that we are unable to live or function without a certain condition being met.	"I can't live without her."	What is your evidence for this belief? Have you managed to live with similar situations in the past? What other strengths or resources do you have which can enable you cope in this situation?
Cognitive conformity. This is when we adopt the views and beliefs of the company in which we are in, even though they are not necessarily views which we held previously.	"Everybody in work thinks my partner should pull her weight more, and I do too."	Try to look at this critically. Has your view changed because of the company you are in? What are the costs and benefits of holding this view for you?
Attribution bias. This is when we assume that that someone else's performance in a situation is based upon their	"My partner made a mistake with the baby formula, I	What other factors may have contributed to the outcome? In the example above, the partner may have been overtired, it may be a new formula that she is unfamiliar with or

personal attributes rather than additional situational factors.	can't believe how stupid she is."	perhaps she was distracted with looking after the baby that she made a mistake. When you notice yourself using the attribution bias, make a list of all other possible factors which may have played a part – is your thought as accurate as you initially believed it to be, or is there a more realistic or balanced thought?
Assumed similarity. This is when we make the assumption that others will share our views and opinions based upon perceived shared characteristics. When it transpires that this assumption is inaccurate, this can lead to disappointment or low mood.	"He's a youngish male from Liverpool – I bet he likes Football" (happens to me all the time!)	Like many of the other unhelpful thinking styles, and negative automatic thoughts in general, this habit will be activated fleetingly. Allow yourself to notice when you are using this thinking style and then question the validity of the assumption. How could you possibly know much at all about this individual based upon limited information? Ask questions, speak to them. Use the situation as an opportunity to find out more.