

# THINKING RIGHT

## the power that our thoughts have over our mood

It's crazy the power that our thoughts have over our mood. You could be hanging out with your friends and be miserable because your worries are pulling you a million miles away. If you dwell on your worries and stresses, it's hard to have fun and really enjoy the present moment.

### TAKE CHARGE

The good news is that you can take charge of your thinking and feel calm and in control.

It will take some effort and practice. But isn't it worth it?

Just because you think something doesn't mean it's true. Don't believe everything you think!

### OUR MIND

Our mind is constantly thinking about all sorts of things – annoying siblings, hilarious memories, stressful homework deadlines, etc.

There's a lot of brain electricity going on in there, like a machine with a switch that is always turned on.

**This constant background stream of thoughts is called your automatic thoughts and self-talk. It's important to find out more about these before you can conquer your anxiety**

## AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

When we perceive something – like a noise outside the bedroom window at night – very short, quick thoughts or images enter our mind almost automatically. These thoughts and images happen so fast that they are called automatic thoughts.

Automatic thoughts are part of our self-talk. Often, we are not even aware that we have them.

For example, if you heard a noise outside your bedroom window at night, what might your automatic thoughts be? Maybe something like:

**“Outside – attacker – dark – window locked? Break in – phone is where? Hide.”**

You might also have an automatic image flash in your head of a dark figure hiding in the shadows, peering around to see how to get in.

These automatic thoughts are what set off your anxiety alarm, BIG TIME.

So what if, instead of those alarming thoughts, your automatic thoughts were:

**“Noise outside – what? Animal? Tree branch? neighbour? Door is locked. I am safe. Listen more.”**

Noticing these automatic thoughts might alarm you a little at first, but you'll also be more composed and able to make rational choices and calmly take action if needed (instead of freaking out!).

## SELF TALK

**Self-talk is basically just the constant chatter that is going on in your head. It's important to remember that your self-talk is not always true or meaningful. It's definitely not always helpful or productive.**

Let's take an easy example. The night before a test you might have thoughts like:

*“What if I fail this test and then have to take summer school and none of my friends do.*

*Then I flunk out of high school and have to work a crappy job for the rest of my life, if I can even GET a job?”*

How would this chain of thoughts make you feel and behave? Nervous and irritable, develop a stomach ache or headache, have tight muscles, maybe lose sleep, yell at your friend. Not exactly the best state in which to take an test!

So you can reframe your thoughts like this:

*“I'm nervous about the test, but that means it's important to me, and I want to do well. I've studied for it, and all I can do is my best tomorrow. I will look at my reaching out to someone I trust tomorrow morning and talk through my worries with them. I won't let my anxiety stop me.”*

Thoughts like this will help you feel: Calmer, more confident and in control, and more likely to be able to sleep now that you have a plan.

**So how you react depends on the meaning you give to the thing or event, and what you say to yourself. It is how you are thinking about the situation that is giving you anxiety, not the situation itself!**

### Why do I make such a big thing out of little things?

Let's say you have to give a presentation in front of the whole class. You're not in any real danger, right? No tiger is going to jump out from under a desk and maul you if you don't do a good job. The other students won't attack you or throw eggs at you (um, probably not).

But in fact, giving a talk in front of the class actually IS a potentially “dangerous” situation, because it could hurt your pride or lead you to feel embarrassed and judged, or you could get a bad mark. If you tend to beat yourself up for mistakes or get embarrassed easily, talking in front of others is a big risk, and in a sense, really feels dangerous!

You may have some negative self-talk like:

***“Everyone will think I'm stupid and boring – my hands will shake – face red – stutter – what if I faint? Totally embarrassing. Want to die.”***

You have these types of thoughts because what others think about you is important to you. There is nothing wrong with that. So the “danger” if you mess up is that everyone might think badly of you, and you would beat yourself up too. So if these automatic thoughts pop up first, it makes total sense that you would feel anxious about the talk.

**Remember – just because a thought or image pops in your head quickly, doesn't mean it is accurate or even realistic. Catch and challenge these pesky automatic thoughts, they are sneaky and quick!**