



LIFEWORK

Psychotherapy Center

STRATEGIES FOR REPLACING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Identifying the Distortion. Write down your negative thoughts so you can see which of the common negative thinking patterns is trapping you. This will make it easier to think about the problem in a more positive and realistic way.

Examining the Evidence. Instead of assuming your negative thought is true, examine the actual evidence for it. For example, if you feel that you never do anything right, you could list several things you have done successfully.

The Double Standard Method. Instead of putting yourself down in harsh, condemning ways, talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you would talk to a friend with a similar pattern.

The Experimental Technique. Do an experiment to test the validity of your negative thought. For example, if you're having a panic attack and terrified you're about to die of a heart attack, try jogging up and down several flights of stairs, to show yourself your heart is healthy and strong.

Thinking in Shades of Gray. Instead of thinking about your problems in all-or-nothing extremes, evaluate things on a range of 0 - 100. When things don't work out as well as you hoped, think about the experience as a partial success rather than a complete failure. See what you can learn from the situation.

The Survey Method. Ask people questions to find out if your thoughts and attitudes are realistic. For example, if you believe that public speaking anxiety is abnormal and shameful, ask several friends if they ever felt nervous before they gave a talk.

Defining Terms. When you label yourself "inferior" or a "fool," ask, "What is the definition of a fool?" You'll feel better when you see there is no such thing as a fool or a loser.

The Semantic Method. Simply substitute language that is less colorful and emotionally loaded. This is helpful for should statements. Instead of telling yourself, "I shouldn't have made that mistake," try saying, "It would be better if I hadn't made that mistake."

Re-attribution. Instead of automatically assuming that you are bad and blaming yourself entirely for a problem, think about the many factors that may have contributed to it. Focus on solving the problem instead of using up all your energy blaming yourself and feeling guilty.

Cost-Benefit Analysis. List the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling (like getting angry when your plane is late), a negative thought (like "no matter how hard I try, I always screw up") or a behavior pattern (like overeating and lying around in bed when you're depressed). You can also use it for self-defeating beliefs as "I must always try to be perfect."

References:

Burns, D. D. (1980). *Feeling good: The new mood therapy*. New York: New American Library.