



# Thinking Differently

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## About This Kit

Most people who suffer from stress believe they have no control over the events in their lives. You may or may not have control over specific events, but you can learn to have control over your thoughts, which, in turn, affect your feelings and behaviours.

Learning to feel more in control of your thoughts is an important stress management technique. By learning to analyze your thoughts, you can challenge irrational thoughts and substitute accurate, rational thoughts in their place.

The rewards of rational thinking are numerous. You will experience a greater feeling of well-being and wholeness and feel freer to act in a self-enhancing way. Self-enhancing attitudes and actions are associated with a positive self-image, esteem, motivation, discipline, and goal attainment. In this kit you will:

- Step 1.** Understand the relationships between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours
- Step 2.** Know the difference between rational and irrational thinking
- Step 3.** Analyze your inner dialogues





## Step 2

# Know the Difference Between Rational and Irrational Thinking

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Most people think irrationally at least some of the time. An important stress management goal is to learn to think rationally most of the time. Dr. Albert Ellis has identified 12 basic irrational ideas that may underlie your thoughts in a given situation. The first four are the most important and most common. It will be helpful for you to learn to recognize these ideas because you are likely to be thinking one or more of them when you feel upset or stressed.

### Irrational Ideas

1. *Approval* – You feel you must have sincere love and approval almost all the time from all the people you find significant.
2. *Perfectionism* – You must prove yourself thoroughly competent, adequate and achieving, or you must at least have real competence or talent at something important to be worthwhile.
3. *Demanding* – You view life as awful, terrible, horrible, or catastrophic when people or things do not go the way you would like them to go.
4. *Blaming* – You consider people who harm you or commit misdeeds against you as generally bad or wicked individuals, and you should severely blame, damn, and punish them for their actions.
5. *Borrowing Future Trouble* – If something seems dangerous or fearsome, you must become terribly occupied and upset about it.
6. *Perfect Solution* – People and things should turn out better than they do, and you have to view it as awful and horrible if you do not quickly find good solutions to life's hassles.
7. *Misery* – Emotional misery comes from other people or things, and you have little ability to control your feelings or rid yourself of depression and hostility.
8. *Irresponsibility* – You will find it easier to avoid facing many of life's difficulties and self-responsibilities than to undertake more rewarding forms of self-discipline.
9. *Ancient History* – Your past remains all-important and because something once strongly influenced your life, it has to keep determining your feelings and behaviours today.

10. *Inertia* – You can achieve happiness by inaction or by passively and uncommittedly “enjoying yourself.”
11. *Dependency* – You must have some person or persons you can depend on at all times to survive.
12. *Shame* – Because you did one embarrassing or devastating thing, you are bad and always will be bad.

## **Overcoming Perfectionism**

If you are a perfectionist, you are setting yourself up for failure and disappointment. If your goal is perfection, you are guaranteed to be a loser at whatever you do, no matter how hard you try.

It is hard to let go of perfectionism because it can be habit forming. Giving up on perfectionism *doesn't mean* you have to:

- stop working hard
- quit doing your best
- refuse to see or act upon your mistakes
- compromise your high standards
- give up overly ambitious goals

These techniques can help you overcome perfectionism.

- Realize that it's not to your advantage to be a perfectionist. Weigh the “pros” and “cons” of perfectionism.
- Break the connection between perfection and satisfaction. You don't have to perform perfectly to receive a great deal of satisfaction, and, performing exceptionally well won't necessarily make you happy.
- Study your environment to see if a model of perfection ever really fits reality. You will usually find some way that everything could be improved.
- Attempt to discover the fear that drives you to “perfectionism.” Ask yourself, “If this were true, why would it be a problem for me?” Deal with your fears.
- Focus on the processes rather than the outcomes as the basis for evaluating things. For example, focus on following your food plan, achieving your fat gram goal, and following your exercise plan, rather than how much weight you lose.
- Set time limits on your activities. Quit at a set time whether you have finished or not, and go to the next activity or project. Remember there is a point of diminishing returns. You will improve your satisfaction and productivity.
- Learn to feel comfortable making minor mistakes and learn from them. Don't be afraid to take risks that don't put you or others in danger. You will grow from the experience.
- Count the things you do right rather than highlight things you haven't done. Focus more on the positives in your life and you will feel better about yourself.
- Share your feelings with others in situations where you feel nervous or inadequate.

- Don't try to cover up your mistakes. You don't have to feel shame or embarrassment if you make a mistake.
- Set realistic goals and expectations.
- Make happy memories of pleasurable situations that were not perfect.

## Step 3

# Analyze Your Inner Dialogues

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Learning to think differently takes practice and effort. It requires that you become aware of your inner dialogues – the thoughts that go through your mind in a given situation.

### Being Aware of Inner Dialogues

Recalling specific inner dialogues is not always easy because the thinking occurs so quickly and automatically. If you have difficulty recalling your inner dialogues, try this:

- Recall how you were feeling (sad, glad, mad, scared). Say “I felt \_\_\_\_\_” and insert a feeling word.
- Then say “I felt \_\_\_\_\_ because I thought that \_\_\_\_\_.” For example, “I felt disappointed because I thought about how many times I had tried to lose weight and failed. This seemed to be proof that I was destined to be fat.”

### Analyzing the Accuracy of Thoughts

These questions will help you determine if your thoughts are accurate or inaccurate. Be prepared to accept the thoughts that are accurate, even if they are unpleasant, and put them in perspective so you can deal with them.

Ask yourself:

- What is actually true about the situation?
- What facts may you be forgetting or ignoring?
- What is not true? Look for “must,” “should,” “need to,” and exaggerations?
- How might you be exaggerating your thoughts and feelings by catastrophizing and thinking that there are no other options?
- What’s the worst thing that could happen? How likely is that to happen? How awful is that worse thing?
- What is probable or likely to happen?

### Challenging Inaccurate Thoughts

When you find that you are thinking inaccurate, irrational thoughts, you need to challenge them and replace them with more accurate, rational statements. When you do, you are more likely to be in control of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and experience fewer symptoms of stress.

Ask yourself:

- What specific thoughts do you need to think to yourself to reduce and cope with the feelings you are having?

- How do you want to feel and act in this situation?
- What do you need to think to feel and behave the way you want?
- What can you say to yourself to keep from punishing yourself if you're not handling the situation as well as you'd like?

### **An Example**

Review the thoughts from the example in Step 1: “*What’s the use. I tried to follow the meal plan and I gained weight. This program will never work. I’ve always been fat. I’ll never be able to lose weight. I’m terrible. I might as well eat all I want.*”

- What is actually true about the situation?

This HIPRC participant gained two pounds since the last visit two weeks ago.

- What facts may he be forgetting or ignoring?

This is the first time that he has not lost some weight between visits. Overall, he is still progressing toward his short-term healthier weight goal. He is also making progress toward limiting his sodium and lowering his blood pressure. His blood pressure is lower than it has been since starting the program.

- How might he be exaggerating his thoughts and feelings by catastrophizing and thinking that there are no other options?

Gaining two pounds doesn’t mean life is terrible or horrible (*irrational idea #3: demanding*). It is not true that because he has been overweight in the past that he will always be overweight (*irrational idea #9: ancient history*). It is not realistic that he will weigh less at every visit. Weight management requires a long-term commitment. It’s not a “quick fix” (*irrational idea #6: perfect solution*). The program is working because he has lost weight and his blood pressure is improving. Weight loss is not the only goal of HIPRC. He is not a terrible person because he gained two pounds (*irrational idea #12: shame*). Saying “It’s no use” is catastrophizing and thinking there are no other options (*irrational idea #8: irresponsibility*).

- What’s the worst thing that could happen?

Continuing to overeat, returning to his poor eating habits of the past, and giving up on exercise completely would be a bad thing. It could mean that his blood pressure and cholesterol increase, which would increase his risk for heart attacks and strokes.

- How likely is that to happen?

It is likely that he will slip from time to time, but a slip doesn’t mean that he will return to his old ways. In previous HIPRC kits, he has learned ways to deal with slips and learn from the experience. Also, the mentor will not allow him to “slip through the cracks.” If



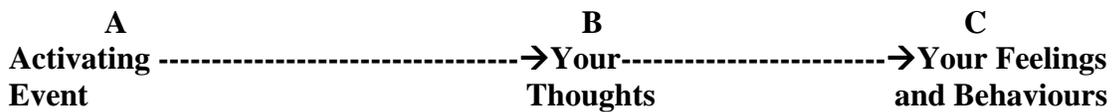
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## Before Your Next Visit

**In the time between your visits with your mentor, you should read and complete your educational kits. Use this sheet to record your work. Think of this as “homework.”**

- Identify any situation that occurred recently. It may be pleasant or unpleasant. Try to recall what you were thinking before, during, and after the situation. Write down your thoughts and inner dialogues. Consider what you were thinking about yourself, others, about the situation.



*Situation*

*About yourself:*

*Feelings:*

*About others:*

*About the event:*

*Behaviours:*

- Related to your efforts to achieve your HIPRC goals, have you experienced any of the emotions listed below? If yes, what irrational thoughts, if any, have lead to your feelings? If you have not experienced the feeling, write “not applicable.”

*Feelings*

*My Irrational Thoughts*

- *Sad or depressed*
- *Guilty or shameful*

- *Angry or irritated*
  - *Frustrated*
  - *Inferior or inadequate*
  - *Lonely*
  - *Discouraged*
- Practice challenging any inaccurate, irrational thoughts that you may have had. How accurate are these thoughts? Develop new, rational thoughts to replace them. Practice saying the rational thought over and over. Notice how you are feeling when you think in self-enhancing ways.

*Irrational Thoughts*

*How Accurate?*

*New, Rational Thoughts*

- Complete the statements in “Check Yourself” to be sure you understand the key concepts in this kit.

***Check Yourself***

1. Between events and your feelings and behaviours, you \_\_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ dialogues can significantly influence how you feel and what you do in a specific situation.
3. Dr. Albert Ellis developed the \_\_\_\_\_ model.
4. Rational thinking is \_\_\_\_\_, realistic, logical, and self-enhancing.
5. Irrational thinking is inaccurate, illogical, and self-\_\_\_\_\_.
6. Most people think \_\_\_\_\_ at least some of the time.
7. It is not to your advantage to be a \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Be prepared to accept thoughts that are \_\_\_\_\_, even if they are unpleasant, and put them in perspective so you can deal with them.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ inaccurate thoughts and replace them with more accurate, rational statements.

*Answers: 1) think; 2) Inner; 3) A-B-C; 4) accurate; 5) defeating; 6) irrationally; 7) perfectionist; 8) accurate; 9) Challenge*

**Write any questions for your mentor here.**

