

Patterns of Thinking

Make a Difference in your Life

How you think actually does make a difference: it affects your mood, it affects how you feel about yourself and others, and it affects what you think is possible in your life and in the world.

Then it is a domino effect: your mood affects what you tell yourself and others, and what you do. Understanding more about your own patterns of thinking can help you change what you habitually think, and can help you feel more positive and have more positive relationships.

- Notice your own thought patterns!
- People who have chronic depression and anxiety actually have more negative patterns of thought.
- They tend to be pessimistic—a style of thinking that believes bad events will persist, will undermine or ruin everything, and are their own fault—as opposed to optimistic—a style of thinking that believes misfortune is temporary, that its causes and effects are confined to a single area, and that they are not their own fault. Pessimism is self-fulfilling.
- Many people with chronic depression also have a pattern of thought and behavior called learned helplessness: they have explained the world to themselves in such a way that they have a “giving-up” reaction, a quitting response, that comes from a belief that whatever they do does not matter.
- Notice any repetitive thoughts or negative thinking patterns you have:
 - Do you tend to expect the worst?
 - Do you get discouraged easily?
 - To focus on the negative and not see or remember the positive?
 - To exaggerate the bad?
 - Or to go over it and over it in your mind?
 - To think that when something bad happens it is your fault or responsibility?
- Be aware of the “truths” you keep telling yourself, and the assumptions you habitually make that may not be true and may actually make your life worse.
- Pessimism and learned helplessness are correlated not only with depression and anxiety, but with poorer health, more conflicted relationships, and increased substance use.
- So: Catch yourself! You can learn to have more control over how you think, more comfortable perspective on how you feel, and thus develop more sense of satisfaction and mastery in your life.
 - Learn the connections between an experience of *adversity* (A), which leads to a certain interpretation or *belief* (B), which leads to certain behavior on your part or a *consequence* (C).
 - Learn to *notice* and then *dispute* your negative thinking patterns.
 - Learn to *distract* yourself from habitual negative *rumination*.
- Learning to be optimistic works not through a fake or unjustifiable positivity about the world, but through the real power of “non-negative thinking.”