



ATTENTIVE
HEALTH

healthy thinking skills

Research shows that how or what we think directly affects our moods and how we feel. Contrary to popular belief, events or situations do not determine your mood. Instead, how you think about the event or situation typically determines mood. Two people can face the same circumstances or event and have very different reactions. That's because the event is interpreted in the mind – and how you think about something affects how you feel about it. This relationship between thinking and feeling has been acknowledged in both ancient and modern times.

The good news is that if thinking affects our feelings, then we can change how we feel by changing how we think. Because thinking and feeling are so automatic, they seem like things that can't be changed, but thinking is a skill that can be practiced and strengthened, and feelings can be better controlled if we take the time to learn how.

Don't get stuck! You are constantly making decisions, taking action, and thinking thoughts that can change your perspective and your life. Inaccurate or irrational thinking is a major cause of negative moods such as sadness, anger, anxiety and guilt. Developing healthy thinking skills can help change those negative thought patterns and moods into positive ones. Here are some ideas on specific skills to work on:

1. **be precise in your thinking**. Instead of "I always mess up", think: "I didn't get it right this time".
2. **avoid words that are imperatives**: words like "Always", "Never", "Should", "Must".
3. **react to what is real not imagined**. React to the actual situation at hand, not the worst situation that you can conjure up in your mind.
4. **instead of guessing** or mind-reading about what others think about you or need from you, **ask**.
5. **consider the whole**. Instead of focusing on a single negative detail about yourself or others, try to balance your view with the positive. A balanced perspective will likely be more realistic and keep your mood balanced too.
6. **just because you feel something, doesn't make it true**. If you feel stupid, it doesn't mean that you are stupid. If you feel guilty, it doesn't necessarily mean that you are. Feelings come from thoughts, and if your thoughts are inaccurate or misguided, your feelings may be as well.
7. **fairness is relative, not absolute**. What you think is fair is guided by you: your needs, wants, responsibilities, etc. Other people's standard of fairness is also guided by their needs, wants, responsibilities... and the two often do not agree. Expecting people to agree with you about what is important or fair will ultimately build resentment and impair relationships.
8. **it's not always about you**. Thinking that things that happen around you are related to you can create unhealthy thinking and moods. Looking for your self-worth in comparison to others is an empty exercise that will leave you thinking and feeling that you don't measure up. Instead, let your own values and experiences be your guide.