

Understanding Thoughts

Teens have a lot on their minds. Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all connected, and it's common to fall into unhelpful thinking patterns where their thoughts make them feel overwhelmed, anxious, sad, or frustrated.

The good news is that teens can learn to manage their thoughts. By recognizing how their thoughts make them feel, asking themselves how helpful or realistic their thoughts are, and reframing unhelpful or unrealistic thoughts into ones that are more helpful or realistic, teens can decrease uncomfortable emotions and better manage difficult situations.

Summary of the key skills from the video:

- Thoughts are not always facts and are temporary.
- Thoughts can be either helpful or unhelpful.
- You can practice changing unhelpful thoughts to thoughts that are more realistic or helpful.

Practice Skills:

- Help your teen to practice identifying unhelpful and helpful thoughts and describing how their thoughts make them feel.
- If you recognize that your teen is expressing an unhelpful thought, encourage them to replace that thought with a more helpful or realistic thought.
- Model for your teen by sharing your own personal examples of moments when you engaged in unhelpful thinking and how that made you feel.
- Use positive feedback when you recognize that your teen has paused to consider their thinking.

Start with this →

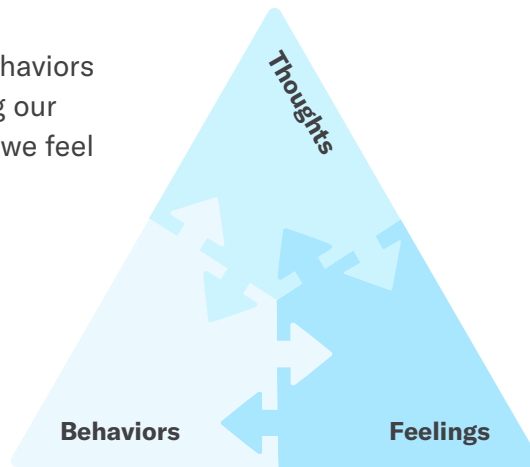
- Ask your teen the following questions to get them to be more aware of their thinking:
 - *What thought are you having? OR What were you thinking in that situation?*
 - *How is this thought making you feel?*
 - *Do you think this thought is helpful or unhelpful?*
- Share some ways they can question their thoughts:
 - What are the facts about the situation?
 - What is the evidence that this thought is true or false?
 - What is the worst that could happen? If it does happen, what can you do to handle it?
 - Is this thought kind to you? If not, how can you be fair to yourself?
- Remember that recognizing and changing unhelpful thoughts takes practice.

On the next page there is an activity that you can share with your teen to help practice understanding and changing thoughts.

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

Remember thoughts are not facts, and sometimes thoughts are unhelpful to us. One way of practicing understanding your thoughts is by keeping track of them when you notice uncomfortable feelings. Below is a thought log. Practice identifying what was happening at the time, what your thought was, how you felt, and what you did. If you notice that the thought was unhelpful, try to change it to a more realistic or helpful thought, and then see if that would change your feelings and behaviors.

Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all connected. By changing our thoughts, we can change how we feel and how we behave.



Event	Unhelpful Thought	Feeling	Alternative/Helpful Thought

Here are some things you can ask yourself when trying to change your thoughts:

- What is the likelihood that this will happen?
- Is this realistic?
- What is the evidence that this is true?
- Is there another way I can think about this?

Follow-Up

When you notice how your thoughts are connected to how you feel, you're gathering data about yourself. If you notice that certain ways of thinking are not all that helpful or lead to uncomfortable feelings, remember that you have the power to slow down and consider when there might be other ways of thinking about the situation. The skills reviewed in the additional videos and worksheets of this curriculum can also help!