

Understanding Thoughts

Our thoughts can be overwhelming at times and cause us to feel stressed and anxious. As the middle schoolers in the video explain, it can be easy to get stuck overthinking and making things bigger in our minds than they actually are. That's why it is important to take the time to pause and remember that thoughts are not facts and that we can change them. Changing our thoughts can help us decrease our uncomfortable emotions and manage difficult situations better.

Below is a 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 child to practice identifying unhelpful and helpful thoughts and describing how their thoughts make them feel.
- If you recognize that your child is expressing an unhelpful thought, encourage them to replace the thought with a more helpful or realistic thought.
- Model for your child 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 child has paused to consider their thinking.

Start with this →

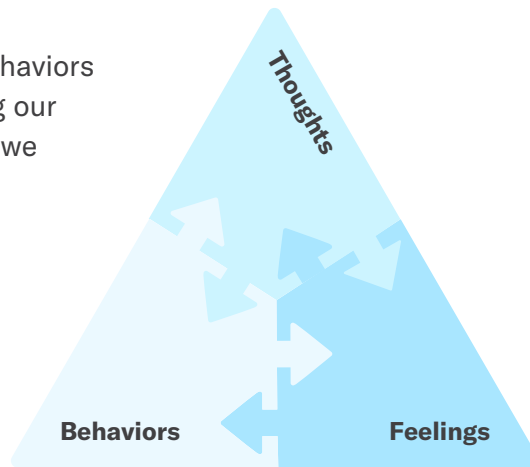
- Ask your child the following questions to get them to be more aware of their thinking:
 - *What thought are you having? OR What were you thinking in that situation?*
 - *How is this thought making you feel?*
 - *Do you think this thought is helpful or unhelpful?*
- Share some ways they can question 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 middle schooler 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!