

The background of the entire page is a photograph of three hot air balloons floating in a clear blue sky at dusk. The balloons are colorful, with one being yellow, another purple and green, and the largest one being multi-colored (red, blue, yellow, and purple). Below the balloons is a calm body of water reflecting the sky, and a dark, silhouetted shoreline in the distance.

Noticing our thoughts

Changing how we feel
by learning *how* we think.

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What is this guide?

This short guide is a resource designed for **all** colleagues at University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust to help support positive wellbeing in the workplace and outside of work.

Regardless of your role, as a member of the Trust you are hugely important to the care of our patients and to the running of a busy city acute Trust.

All of us can struggle at times with how we feel and can **all** get stressed at times.

This guide is one of a series of resources for you to use on your own, which may help you feel as well as you can.

However, if you feel further support would be helpful, please do speak to your Manager or other trusted colleague. Whilst this may not feel easy, it is very normal to struggle at times, and doing something proactive to seek support can be hugely positive. In addition to speaking to your relevant colleague, you can find further information at the back of this guide and on the Trust intranet within the Workplace Wellbeing section of [HRWeb](#).

If you have any difficulty in understanding the content or accessing this resource, please contact wellbeing@uhbristol.nhs.uk

How does this guide work?

It can be far more beneficial to our wellbeing to actually change things we are doing rather than just reading about ideas.

That is why this guide has a technique within it, which you can practice using the worksheets provided.

You may find that the more you do it, the easier it can become to apply.



Introduction

'How we *think* affects how we *feel*.'

If we wake up with thoughts in our heads like “my shift today is going to be awful”, then that **thought** can actually make us *feel* nervous or low in mood, and as a result we may just want to stay in bed to avoid going to work.

We all have thoughts, all the time. What is amazing about our thoughts is that they can affect us so powerfully, and yet sometimes we aren't even aware that we are having them, or of the affect they are having on us.

If we are stressed, anxious or depressed; learning to notice what is going on inside our heads can be a really helpful technique. Whilst we cannot learn to control our thoughts or stop having them, we can change how we **react** to them.

Some thoughts don't really affect us. For example, whilst you are reading this guide it might pop into your head that you really fancy a pizza tonight! A thought like this is unlikely to cause you much distress. However it might be that a thought pops into your head like “I shouldn't have made that comment in the meeting earlier, I'm sure everyone thought I was stupid.” This thought is much more likely to make us feel negative, and we can get lost in this thought by adding to it, and arguing with it in our head; looking for other times when we felt stupid. In this way our thoughts can grow and spiral out of control.

The first skill we need to learn is how to **notice** our thoughts; i.e. to notice when we are having certain thoughts and what they actually are.

This might feel quite a big task, so something that can be helpful is to start looking out for patterns or 'habits' in our thinking.



A note on working on our thoughts

There is a lot of positive therapeutic work that we can do with our thoughts to change the way they affect our mood, but it is important to acknowledge that it can often be quite tricky work which is helped by support from a therapist. So this guide offers a simple technique which you can do by yourself and may find helpful to start looking at your thoughts in a different way.

If you feel further work in this area might be helpful, it might be beneficial that you contact the Trust [Occupational Health Service](#) or your GP to access free therapeutic support which can be very helpful to many people.

If you are finding yourself struggling with worries or day-to-day concerns, there are a range of techniques you can try that some people find helpful. It may be useful to discuss with your manager or you may want to seek further support which you can read more about at the back of this guide.

Unhelpful thinking habits

Over time our brains get into habits of thinking in certain ways. You might relate to this given we have already mentioned how thoughts 'just happen' to us. It is very hard to measure, but many believe we have around 70,000 thoughts every day! So our brains understandably get a bit lazy and fall into patterns/habits of thinking to make life easier. Unfortunately a lot of these habits mean we tend to make assumptions and jump to conclusions when we don't need to. Whilst this might sound a bit confusing, the main thing to realise is that all of this means that our thoughts are not actually always **true**.

So often we just assume that what we think is true and take our thoughts as facts without question.

Starting to notice habits such as this can be a helpful step in stopping us getting carried down a dark tunnel with our thoughts. It's like learning to put the brakes on so we can get out of the car when our mood is rolling downhill.



Here are some examples you might recognise:

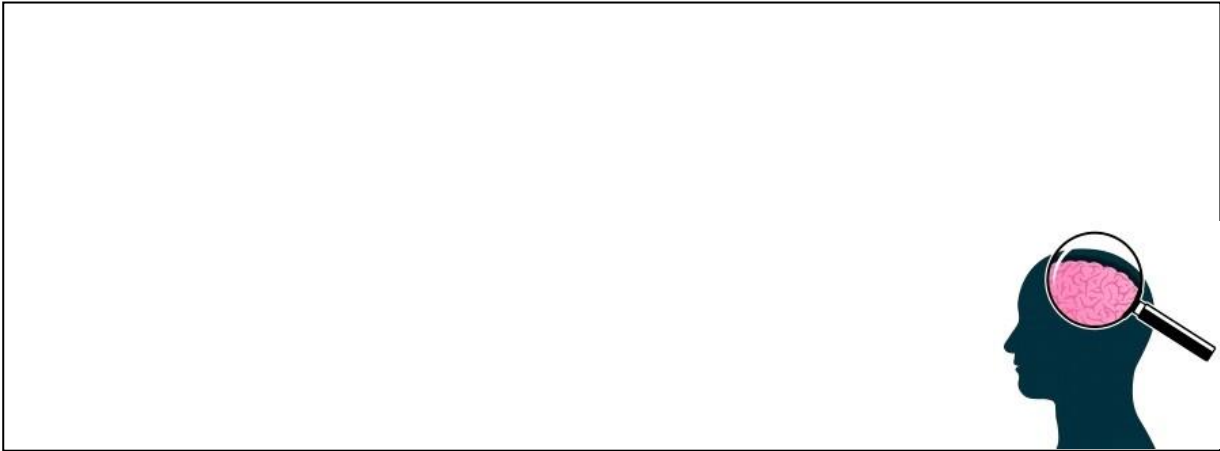
Predicting the future	Assuming we know what will happen.	<i>E.g. "I'm going to be exhausted after this shift."</i>
Mind reading	Assuming we know what others are thinking.	<i>E.g. "My colleagues on this ward don't like me."</i>
Personalising	Assuming something is because of us/our fault.	<i>E.g. "I didn't get asked to transport the Patient because I'm not good enough."</i>
Anticipating the worst	Assuming something bad will happen.	<i>E.g. "I will make an idiot of myself in the meeting."</i>
Shoulds and musts	Telling ourselves that we <i>have</i> to be a certain way.	<i>E.g. "I should have remembered the name of the Patient's mother."</i>
Worrying	Constantly think about the future and what might happen. Trying to plan for the unknown.	<i>E.g. "What if my friend has a car accident?"</i>
Focusing on the negatives	Disregarding positives and giving un-equal weight to the negatives.	<i>E.g. "I know that 9 of my patients said I helped them, but that 1 didn't, so I must be useless."</i>

E.g. You might have worked with a patient this morning and because of how dismissive they were, you had the thought "they really don't like me!" which made you feel bad. This thought would be 'personalising'; i.e. you are assuming that the way the patient behaved was a direct result of you, and it is your fault; when actually it could have been for any number of reasons that you thought the patient was being dismissive with you.

The list of habits above is not exhaustive and there can be some cross-over between the thoughts and habits. There may be other common thinking patterns that you have; so we'd encourage you to consider if there is a way that your thoughts often go, or a particular pattern in the thoughts you have.



What patterns regularly happen in *my* thoughts?



How to use the worksheet

The steps below and the worksheet contained in this guide can help you to start noticing

1. what thoughts you are having,
2. what unhelpful thinking pattern you are having,
3. how the thoughts are actually affecting how you feel,

By using this sheet you are practicing a skill which can help change how you **react** to the thoughts that automatically pop into your head. It will take time, because habits in thinking like any other habit, form over a long time and become second nature. But by continuing to practice, this can have positive impacts on how you feel.

Let's look at these steps in more detail now. **The technique is broken down into 3 steps so you can work through by yourself.**



- 1. Noticing what thoughts you are having.** For some people a thought will sound like an internal voice; for others it might be that they visualise scenarios playing out. We can all think in different ways, but all that matters is that we start to become aware of the thoughts in our heads. We don't need to notice every thought (it would be a full time job!) but if a thought has made us feel negative in some way then we need to notice what thoughts are *fuelling* that particular feeling in us.
- 2. What unhelpful thinking style is it?** Here we are identifying the habit. Consider if your thought falls into a particular 'habit' of thinking, or a thinking style that you know you can often do.
- 3. How did it affect me?** Here we are considering the impact the thought had on how we feel. Whilst it can feel a bit vulnerable and we often prefer to avoid accepting how we feel; it is useful to take a moment to actually notice how the thought has made us feel. This will help our desire to practice changing how we **react** to our thoughts.

NB: We experience thoughts in different ways. For some of us they sound like an internal voice. For others we will picture them like scenes playing out. However you recognise your thoughts, this simple technique will help you to start noticing your habits.



Noticing our thoughts worksheet

When	What was my thought? E.g. "He thinks I am incompetent."	What unhelpful thinking style is it? E.g. mind-reading.	How did it affect me? E.g. "it made me feel like going home."

Useful tips

When to use the worksheet?

It can take time for us to form new healthier habits in our thinking, and to remember to keep noticing our thoughts. Use this sheet (or make your own version of it on paper or on a mobile phone for ease) for as long as you find it helpful.

How often to use it?

It is most helpful to use the worksheet when you notice a decline in your mood; whether it is stress, anger, feeling anxious or low. Use it then to help understand:

- What happened to trigger it
- How your thoughts responded
- What impact your thoughts had on your mood
- How much you believe those thoughts to be true.

You may not feel able to use it straight away when feeling a negative emotion as you might feel too worked up. But as soon as you can, have a go at using it to help understand what your thoughts are doing and the role they are playing.



Further support

There are other guides in this range available on Connect (staff intranet).



Reading Well

Reading Well is a scheme where you can access self-help books through the library. It helps employees to understand and manage their health and wellbeing using helpful reading. The books are all endorsed by health experts, as well as people with living with the conditions covered and their relatives and carers (you can view the Reading Well list on Connect).

Staff can find the books in the UHB Library (The Education and Research Centre, Level 5).

Talking therapies

If you feel that you need additional support, then it is readily available free of charge both through the Trust, or externally if you prefer. These services are usually referred to as 'talking therapies'. Talking therapies are psychological treatments for mental and emotional problems like stress, anxiety and depression. There are lots of different types of talking therapy, but they all involve working with a trained therapist.



This may be one-to-one, in a group, over the phone, with your family, or with your partner. The therapist helps you find answers to the problems you're having. For some problems and conditions, one type of talking therapy may be better than another. Different talking therapies also suit different people.

All employees at UH Bristol are able to access talking therapies through work via Occupational Health, or outside of work through their local IAPT service. There is more detail below on each of these resources, but to explain a little more about different types of talking therapy you can and might like to access:

Guided self-help

Guided self-help is recommended as a treatment for depression, anxiety and panic disorder.

With guided self-help you work through a CBT-based workbook or computer course with the support of a therapist.

The therapist works with you to understand your problems and make positive changes in your life.

Guided self-help aims to give you helpful tools and techniques that you can carry on using after the course has finished.

During the course your therapist will support you with face-to-face appointments or phone calls.

Counselling

Counselling is a talking therapy where you talk in confidence to a counsellor. They help you find ways to deal with difficulties in your life.

Counselling on the NHS usually consists of 6 to 12 sessions.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

The aim of CBT is to help you explore and change how you think about your life, and free yourself from unhelpful patterns of behaviour.

You set goals with your therapist and may carry out tasks between sessions.

A course usually involves around 12 to 20 sessions.



CBT has been shown to work for a variety of mental health problems. You can enquire further about these different types of support through the following services.

Occupational Health

Avon Partnership Occupational Health Service offer free confidential onsite counselling service. To talk to an advisor or make an appointment, telephone Occupational Health on (0117) 342 3400.

IAPT

Anyone in England can get talking therapies like counselling for depression and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) on the NHS.

Referral can be through individual's GP or they can refer themselves directly to a psychological therapies service. Through IAPT, people can access different types of talking therapies, such as guided self-help, counselling, and CBT amongst others. There is more information below or by going to this website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/types-of-therapy/>

Private support

You may wish to access a service which is private and incurs a cost. The benefits of these services can be a greater flexibility in location, and a reduced waiting time.

You can search for accredited professionals by postcode using the following website: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists>

Spiritual, pastoral and bereavement care

The Healthcare Chaplaincy team provide spiritual care that is equal, just, humane and respectful to staff, patients and their visitors; irrespective of their faith or spiritual tradition. For further information about the services they provide contact the.chaplaincy@UH Bristol.nhs.uk or find further details at

<http://connect/Governance/patientexperience/spiritualcare/Pages/default.aspx>



Experiencing unacceptable behaviour from others

All employees have the right to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect, and we all have a responsibility to set a positive example by treating others with respect, and to act in a way which is in line with the Trust's Values. When this doesn't happen, we may benefit from help to sort out the problem.

The first thing to do if you are concerned about the way a colleague is behaving towards to you is to talk to someone about it -

- If you feel you can, speak to the individual and tell them how their behaviour is making you feel.
- Speak to your manager, another manager or a senior colleague and ask them to help you resolve the problem.
- If you have tried all the informal ways of resolving the problem and they haven't worked, the Dignity at Work policy includes information about the formal process. You can contact Employee Services on 0117 34 25000 for support and advice about the policy.
- If the problem is something which can't be resolved in an informal way, or is too serious to resolve in an informal way, please contact: Employee Services and Medical HR- 0117 34 (25000) or Freedom to Speak Up – 0117 34 (22888).





We hope that you have found this guide useful. If you have any feedback on this guide please email wellbeing@uhbristol.nhs.uk

Author

Mike Sheppard, Workplace Psychological Wellbeing Lead.

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