

An exercise to  
strengthen reflective skills

# CHALLENGING YOUR THOUGHTS

**INWARD OUT PSYCHOLOGY**

Dr Marianne Torres

 [inwardout.com.au](http://inwardout.com.au) |  0401 453 116

When you are struggling with depression and anxiety, you may start to accept that critical inner voice that believes the situation is bleak and hopeless.

We can get pulled into a thought or prediction and find ourselves going into a battle with our mind.

Our brain and body may react as if it is under attack and can be experienced as breathlessness, muscle tension or panic.

When this happens, depression and anxiety can begin to take hold and convince you that enjoyable and meaningful experiences are no longer worthwhile.

**/ There are ways to get  
out of this “stuck ness”.**



Our brain makes connections between thoughts, ideas, actions and consequences that are at times completely inaccurate.

Becoming more aware of unhelpful thoughts and then challenging them strengthens our minds to think flexibly. This provides the opportunity for us to decide what helps us thrive and feel more hopeful.

**/ Using the below table, or in a journal, keep a record of any thoughts that arise, the accompanying emotions and your actions in response to situations.**

<b>DATE / TIME</b>	<b>SITUATION / EVENT</b> <i>Who, What, When, Where?</i>	<b>FEELINGS</b> <i>What did you feel? Rate your emotion (0-100%)</i>	<b>THOUGHTS</b> <i>What was going through your mind as you started to feel this way? Rate how much you believed the thought (0-100%)</i>	<b>BEHAVIOURS</b> <i>What actions did you take? What physical symptoms did you notice?</i>



The brain is sensitive to negative information (alerting to danger) to keep you safe. It remembers things from the past, making the same connections when similar thoughts or emotions occur.

Notice if your thoughts are slipping into these distorted patterns of thinking that are often subtle – it is difficult to recognize.

**/ DISQUALIFYING OR DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVES**

Telling yourself that positive experiences or accomplishments don't count. The 100 things that can go right in a day, but the thing that sticks in your mind is the one thing that went badly. E.g. being complimented for something and thinking "They're just being nice"

**/ MIND READING OR FORTUNE TELLING**

Thinking that you know what others are thinking without adequate evidence or facts to support your conclusion. E.g. "That person looked at me funny, they think I must be an idiot" (mind reading) or going to a job interview and thinking "I'm not going to get this job" (fortune-telling).

**/ TUNNEL VISION**

Focusing on the most negative and upsetting features of a situation, filtering out the positives. E.g. receiving praise for a work presentation from everyone except one person and thinking "My presentation was a failure; I am not good at public speaking"

**/ 'ALL OR NOTHING' THINKING**

Thinking in absolutes or seeing things in extremes by using words like 'every', 'always', 'never', 'all', 'nothing', 'everyone.' If a situation falls short of perfect, you see it as a total failure. E.g. "No one likes me," "I planned to eat only healthy snacks, but I ate a piece of chocolate, so my diet is completely ruined."



### **/ OVER-GENERALISATION**

Seeing a single, negative incident as a never-ending pattern of defeat and everything being hopeless/negative. E.g. after one unsuccessful date thinking "I will never find a partner, I will be lonely forever."

### **/ MAGNIFYING OR MINIMISING**

When you evaluate yourself, someone else or a situation, the negatives are unreasonably exaggerated or the positive are unreasonably minimised. E.g. You make a mistake and think "I did badly in that exam, I am such an idiot," "just because they were nice to me doesn't mean that others will be."

### **/ PERSONALISATION**

Assuming responsibility and blame for events that isn't entirely under your control. E.g. "They were rude to me because I said or did something wrong," "that relationship didn't work out because I didn't give enough."

### **/ SHOULD AND OUGHTS**

Thinking in 'shoulds', 'oughts'; or 'musts' and holding expectations of how you and others 'should' and 'ought' to be. E.g. You don't want to go to University but think that "I should get a degree to satisfy my family's expectations."

### **/ EMOTIONAL REASONING**

Assuming feelings reflect fact, regardless of the evidence. E.g. Thinking. "I feel ugly and stupid" means you must be ugly and stupid; despite the fact you are neither.

### **/ LABELLING**

Assigning a negative, emotive and inflexible label to yourself or others leaving no room for change. E.g. Thinking "I'm stupid, I am ugly, I am hopeless, I am unlovable" when you don't receive a text back.

**Resilience is ‘bouncing back’ when life’s problems and struggles arise. It is cultivating your ability to be resourceful when approaching challenges and setbacks.**

## **THE ABCD OF RESILIENCE**

*Reflect on the following questions*

### **/ ADVERSITY**

What challenges have I faced in the past? What is the setback I am facing?  
e.g. relationship breakup, loss of job

### **/ BELIEFS**

What are the beliefs, thoughts and worries related to this experience?

### **/ CONSEQUENCES**

How do these thoughts or beliefs impact how I feel and how I am acting now?

### **/ DISPUTE**

Challenge your thoughts and propose alternatives. What is the factual evidence for this thought? What are the alternative ways of looking at this? What is the worst-case scenario if this thought is true?





# / Reaching out

Calling upon others to help us meet the challenges that we face is an important part of building resilience.

Sometimes thought challenging may not be relevant to your situation and there may be evidence that explains why you're reacting strongly.

Getting help to understand your emotions and the vital role they play is important.

**INWARD OUT PSYCHOLOGY**

Dr Marianne Torres

 [inwardout.com.au](http://inwardout.com.au) |  0401 453 116