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FREE



## Discovery Arts

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Discovery Arts brings music, art, dance, and drama to children with cancer, serious blood disorders and life threatening illness while they are in the hospital receiving treatment. All the programs and services are offered free of charge to hospitals, patients, and their families all year long. For these children, their greatest wish is normalcy. Discovery Arts relies completely on the generous gifts of individuals, corporations, small businesses, and grants to survive and grow.

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Please Contact Janel Bagby @ (310) 418-9574 for more information

Please visit our NEWSLETTER tab for the Discovery Arts page

## Healthy Thinking

By Sharon Jackson, Ph.D.

So, what is "Healthy Thinking" and what do I need to know to start implementing it? Healthy thinking is not necessarily positive thinking. Healthy thinking processes all thoughts, positive, negative, and neutral. When we allow ourselves to process all of these thoughts, then and only then, can we begin to think positive.

We can't deny the reality of life. Yes, things go wrong that's all part of the process of life and growing as an individual. We need those experiences, otherwise we would never grow. We must be aware of how we think and process thoughts.

We have emotions that we are all entitled to use. So, it's okay to feel angry? Of course! If not, we would only be fooling ourselves. We want to feel our feelings and process them in a healthy manner. We need to look at the entire situation, positive, negative, and neutral. Feel it, process it, and move on. Then, focus on being positive and letting go of the negative. Processing negativity creates balance. How you process a situation affects how you will feel.

### What are common thinking traps?

Everyone falls into unbalanced thinking traps from time to time. You're most likely to distort your interpretation of things when you feel sad, angry, anxious, depressed or stressed. You're also more vulnerable to thinking traps when you're not taking care of yourself, like when you're not eating or sleeping well. See if you can recognize your own thinking traps in the list below:

Article continued on other side or next page for eCopy

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# Healthy Thinking

By Sharon Jackson, Ph.D.

**Overgeneralizing** - Thinking that a negative situation is part of a constant cycle of bad things that happen. People who overgeneralize often use words like "always" or "never."

**Black and White Thinking** - Seeing things as only right or wrong, good or bad, perfect or terrible. People who think in black and white terms see a small mistake as a total failure.

**Fortune Telling** - Predicting that something bad will happen, without any evidence.

**Emotional Reasoning** - Believing that bad feelings or emotions reflect the situation.

**Labeling** - Saying only negative things about yourself or other people.

**'Should' Statement** - Telling yourself how you "should" or "must" act.

**Mind Reading** - Jumping to conclusions about what others are thinking, without any evidence.

**Mental Filter** - Focusing only on the negative parts of a situation and ignoring anything good or positive.

## How do I get out of a thinking trap?

Here are helpful strategies to challenge common thinking traps. Many people find their mood and confidence improve after working through these skills.

### Try to separate your thoughts from actual events

Ask yourself the following questions when something upsetting happens:

What is the situation: What actually happened? Only include the "facts" of the situation that everyone would agree on.

What are your thoughts: What are you telling yourself?

What are your emotions: How do you feel?

What are your behaviors: How are you reacting and what are you doing to cope?

1. **Identify the 'thinking traps'**  
Take a look at the thoughts you've listed. Are you using any of the thinking traps and falling into distorted thinking patterns? It's common to fall into more than one thinking trap. Go back to the [thinking trap list](#) and identify which ones apply to you and your current situation.
2. **Challenge the thinking traps**  
The best way to break a thinking trap is to look at your thoughts like a scientist and consider the hard facts. Use the evidence you've collected to challenge your thinking traps. Here are some ways to do that:

Sources: Wellness Module 8: Healthy Thinking

**Examine the evidence:** Try to find evidence against the thought. If you make a mistake at work, you might automatically think, "I can't do anything right! I must be a terrible employee!" When this thought comes up, you might challenge it by asking, "Is there any evidence to support this thought? Is there any evidence to disprove this thought?" You might quickly realize that your boss has complimented your work recently, which doesn't support the idea that you're a bad employee.

**Double-standard:** Ask yourself, "Would I judge other people if they did the same thing? Am I being harder on myself than I am on other people?" This is a great method for challenging thinking traps that involve harsh self-criticism.

**Survey Method:** Find out whether other people you trust agree with your thoughts. For example, you might have trouble with one of your kids and think, "Good parents wouldn't have this kind of problem." To challenge this thought, you can ask other parents if they've ever have any problems with their kids.

**Conduct an experiment:** Test your beliefs in person. For example, if you think you think that your friends don't care about you, call a few friends and make plans to get together. If you assumed that they will all say no, you may be pleasantly surprised to hear that they do want to see you.

## Aim for a balance in your thoughts

Once you have worked through some challenges, try to think of a more balanced thought to replace the old thinking traps. Let's use the following example

**Situation:** My friend didn't say hello when I passed her on the street.

**Thoughts:** She's so rude. She doesn't like me anymore.

**Thinking traps:** Labeling; Mind Reading

**Challenge:** Examine the evidence: She has never been rude to me in the past. I have no proof she even saw me.

**Balanced thoughts:** There could be lots of other reasons why she didn't say hello. She probably didn't see me and still likes me. I'll wait until the next time we meet before I jump to any negative conclusions about our friendship.

Are all negative thoughts unhealthy thinking traps?

**No—there are times when negative thoughts are realistic.**

It can still be helpful to find different ways of looking at the situation, though. Try to find a meaningful personal challenge in the situation. See if you can find any opportunities for personal growth or skills development. Many people coping with difficult situations find that their upsetting thoughts improve when they work on other coping skills, such as identifying the main sources of stress in their lives, problem-solving issues that they can control, and finding social support.

There are many workbooks and self-help manuals to help you to challenge thinking traps and build up your healthy thinking skills. We have listed some examples for you below. Healthy thinking is a key part of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT is an effective treatment approach for many substance use and mental health problems. Consider working with a qualified CBT practitioner if you need help developing your healthy thinking skills.

**Frequent distressing, unwanted or strange thoughts may be a sign of a mental health or substance use problem.**

Fortunately, help is available. If you or a loved one struggles with upsetting or unusual thoughts, it's best to talk to a doctor or mental health professional.

\*Information found in this newsletter is for avocational purpose only and does not replace the advice of a doctor. If you need medical attention, please consult with your physician.

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