

4 Dealing with Stress in Healthy Ways

4A2 Lesson — Investigating and Controlling Self-Talk

We must exercise caution in order to control ill-natured thoughts that we have about indulgences, complaints, frustrations, sadness, and other potent emotions. Without guidance to understand unhealthy and unproductive thoughts, we become susceptible to thoughts that can adversely affect us. When we pay closer attention to what we are thinking and telling ourselves (and know what distortions to look for), we can develop a better understanding about the need to qualify our thinking and make healthy adjustments.

How We Learn to Improve the Quality of Our Thinking

A study by Raymond Birdwhistle in 1970 proved that the words we speak to others represent just 7% of the results that we gain from communication. On the other hand, he found that the words that we speak to ourselves generate 100% of the results we get in our lives since our own minds interpret our suggestions and follow our instructions. Thus, we have the capability to allow thoughts to direct and consume us as well as define our judgments and beliefs!

In earlier lessons, you learned that your mind directs virtually everything you say and do. To more accurately assess the healthy development of the mind, you must pay close attention to the quality of your thoughts, words, and actions. Self-monitoring can make a big difference, especially when you are able to identify inappropriate, distorted or inferior quality choices, as well as healthier options.

As children growing up, parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, and religious leaders can make it a point to give helpful direction to improve the quality of our thoughts, words and actions. This direction helps us think more meaningfully, become better behaved, and develop mature ways to articulate ourselves. Even with their guidance, we still have to develop our own thinking.

The inner world of our thoughts is very private and removed from other's view. How could anyone help us correct inappropriate self-talk unless we talked aloud or were told what kinds of thinking patterns to avoid? Without enough guidance to understand unhealthy thoughts, we were susceptible to building inappropriate thinking habits that stress us and adversely affect us our entire lives.

Granted, there are those who are gifted masters of cognitive thought. Most of the wonders of the human mind have to do with thought processing, examples being those who can play music by ear after hearing a tune for the first time, those who have photographic memories, and those who have a genius IQ. However, emotionally speaking, they too can be susceptible to ill-natured thinking.

As mentioned, the quality of our thinking can depend on how closely we monitor the mind and what we understand about quality thoughts. We can learn more about important and useful thoughts by spending more time monitoring our thinking.

Becoming More Selective About Our Thinking

Being selective about what we think about can have similarities to being selective about what we eat. We can't just take a leaf off of any plant and eat it. Some plants and foods can make us sick and even be deadly! Similarly, we can't just accept any thought our minds present to us. Some thoughts can be damaging and even deadly, too! We know that the more nutritiously we want to eat, the more selective we have to be about the healthful quality of what we eat. The healthier we want our minds to be, the more selective we must also be about what we think.

One thing is for certain: when it comes to our thinking, we can't just go with the flow! We can't let the mind go wherever it wants to within our own internal Internet of subject matter. We must be careful not to waste precious time rambling on about whatever comes to mind, rather than reflecting on particular considerations that would be of greater positive value.

When we pay closer attention to what we are thinking and telling ourselves—and know what idiosyncrasies and distortions to look for—we can develop a better sense of understanding about the micro-technicalities of thought processing and subsequently make healthy adjustments. Self-understanding about our self-talk can, overall, help improve our approach to our moods, attitudes, and behavior.

Technically, there is a strategy and balance to what we spend time thinking about, which can only be measured by understanding the symptoms of inappropriate thinking and by paying close attention to how our minds operate. Without understanding symptoms and qualifying the quality of our thinking, we become susceptible to just go with the flow and/or to ill-gauge the quality of our thinking, often resulting in negative thought consequences. To improve your understanding about thinking patterns to avoid, we have compiled the following list:

12 THINKING PATTERNS TO TRY TO AVOID

1. Try to avoid being too *insensitive* about whether your thoughts are appropriate. There are too many unhealthy things we can allow ourselves to think about when we aren't sensitive to the quality of our thoughts.
2. Try to *avoid* thinking about things that are too dismal, too sad or too discouraging. There are extremely important limits we must learn to apply about this kind of thinking.
3. Try to *avoid* giving too much attention and acceptance to weird or obsessive thoughts and pet peeves or nit-picking petty bothers. These are dangerous places to go!
4. Try to *avoid* being too persuasive toward doing things that aren't healthy for you. Our minds can reason with inappropriate advertisements. They can justify, exaggerate, deny and use other ploys that can be more effective and less regulated than luring media commercials!
5. Try to *avoid* forgetting embarrassing moments of failure. By remembering your failures, you can help prevent these experiences from happening in the future. Embarrassment can create an automatic learning emphasis of great value to grasp.

6. Try to *avoid* thinking too much about uncomfortable experiences you should forget. By overemphasizing the negative, you are likely to miss special things that you should highlight and remember.
7. Try to *avoid* thinking sarcastic, negative or complaining thoughts in general. There are strict limits to such thoughts that we must apply in order to build healthy minds.
8. Try to *avoid* thinking sarcastic, negative, or complaining thoughts about others, rather than taking time to think meaningful, positive thoughts about them. There are many meaningful things we can try to point out and remember in order to maintain our appreciation of others as well as inspire them.
9. Try to *avoid* spending too much time thinking about other people when you have other important matters at hand. There is a balance that we need to exercise about how much time we spend thinking of people in our lives and how much time we spend thinking about important matters.
10. Try to *avoid* over-sensitive reactions to agitations, frustrations, excitement, or other potent emotions. We need to be aware that our minds can immediately fuel emotions with too much hype and become susceptible to over-dramatization. This over-emphasis can cause us stress, which can in turn cause us to overreact. This stress can be similar to how our nerves cause us to feel sharp pains when we cut ourselves, ever so slightly. Excitement can also cause us to over-react similar to how mesmerizing urges cause us to over eat, over spend, and overindulge, in general.
11. Try to *avoid* being under-focused about the quality of your behavior. There are often concerns we should have about how we are doing what we are doing and why-- that we miss to be concerned about when we are under-focused about such quality.
 - a. Consider whether you understand how much focus is necessary.
 - b. Consider whether there are safety, memory, or character concerns to consider or analyze.
 - c. Consider whether casual focus is causing you to miss something important, be too easily distracted, or react too slowly.
 - d. Consider whether you are too lackadaisical about the whole idea of focusing.
12. Try to *avoid* being over-focused toward one thing you are concentrating about and miss the broader scope of considerations, unless necessary because of safety and other important concerns. There can be broader priorities we need to reflect on or check further about our days or even our lives that we miss when too intensely in thought about one particular thing.
 - a. Consider whether you are focused on a “thought marathon” and fixating about something repeatedly too long.
 - b. Consider whether you are focused too intensely on a particular thing.
 - c. Consider whether you are focused too anxiously.
 - d. Consider whether you are concentrating too much about *what* you are thinking and missing the idea of *thought quality*.

The more we use a knowledgeable kind of discretionary process to weigh the value of our thinking, the more it can help us reduce chances for distortions that inhibit our minds and adversely affect our emotional well-being. We can learn to recognize thinking that is too casual, too confident, too negative, too timid, too

self-serving, etc. The more closely we monitor our thinking, the better chance we have of developing healthier emotional stability. Our approach to thinking can range from healthy prescriptive selective thinking to a kind of thinking that increases life's problems.

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WAYS TO REDUCE INAPPROPRIATE THINKING

In Conclusion

When we don't concern ourselves with the quality and value of our thoughts, we become prone to irrational, immature, or unstable thinking. We can allow unproductive, unhealthy thinking to occur too often and go on for too long. There are many coping methods and problem-solving strategies that psychologists use to disrupt unhealthy thoughts. Unhealthy and unproductive thoughts or beliefs can be boldly addressed and replaced with more constructive ones. Healthy mind development depends on our becoming more aware of how well our minds are operating! Our emotional equilibrium depends on how well we navigate our thinking!

If we are not mindful of the quality of our thinking, it makes it difficult to improve the quality of our thoughts. And without even realizing it, we can remain much more narrow-minded. We must weigh the quality of our thoughts, not just accept and express them. When we become accustomed to merely accepting and expressing our thoughts, we can go too far with negative consequences.

To build healthier minds, we must learn to build a somewhat micro- technological security system against unhealthy and unproductive thoughts. We can apply a range of thinking from an extremely liberal freestyle way of thinking to a more sophisticated, high standard structure. In perspective, a liberal freestyle way of thinking affords us an emotional ability similar to understanding how to play a game of checkers. Yet, the more sophisticated structure affords us the emotional ability to play a game of chess. Thus, applying a more healthfully structured mode of thinking awards us more sophisticated, emotionally stabilizing benefits!