

WORKING WITH THOUGHTS



**“With our thoughts we make our world.”
~Buddha~**

**“Our life is what our thoughts make it.”
~Marcus Aurelius~**

**“The greatest discovery of my generation
is that human beings
can alter their lives by altering their
attitudes of mind.”
~William James~**

**“Outer changes always begin with an
inner change of attitude.”
~Albert Einstein~**

“You are your choices.” ~Seneca Lately I’ve been feeling a bit down in the dumps. A few things have happened at work to make me feel like nothing’s going my way. I’m guessing that pretty much everyone experiences weeks like this from time to time. You know, where it *feels* like the whole world is against you. No matter what you do, nothing goes right. When this happens often old negative tricky thoughts can become frequent visitors in our life. This old well travelled brain pathways can “become very sticky and linger more and more frequently. From research in CBT we know that when we are feeling low our brain tends to be more likely to recall negative , general memories and thoughts so we may think like “oh whats the point”, nothing will change anyway so why try” ... or negative self beliefs from the past may poke their heads out at us such as “I am unlovable... / not liked” or similar thoughts.

It is not your fault you are having these thoughts : and your brain does seem to stick around your tricky thoughts. However it is important not to get stuck with them and to learn to create some distance from them in order to see the world with more clarity and “realness” again

Once when I was in one of my own negative thought cycles seemingly very stuck and going round in ever more darker circles amidst my dark clouds of pity I had an epiphany:

I have a choice. I have the choice to listen and belief in my dark messages of the past or just see them as what they are “just thoughts” dark not helpful messengers from the past.

One of my clients ones called his own negative after a useful session his “wrinkly old oranges” and his epiphany was : “Hey I can listen to these or grow myself a completely new fresh orange tree” based on what is going on here and now. Once he and I got that major turning point it became a bit easier spotting and sorting old unhelpful oranges out from the real here and now world. When it comes to filtering our thoughts, even though at times it

may not feel like it, we do have a choice at what thoughts and stuff we listen to or grow seeds from.

Just because some of our thoughts are negative doesn't mean we have to listen to them.

So try and sow fresh seeds that can turn into fresh juicy helpful oranges rather than unhelpful old wrinkly ones.

Did you know that our brains produce 70,000 thoughts every single day? Just imagine trying to take action on every single thought—all 70,000 of them. It would be pretty much impossible, right?

In fact we actively “filter” our thoughts pretty much all the time. Our brains are constantly deciding which thoughts are useful and which ones to ignore. So when a negative thought pops into our heads, we do actually have a choice.

Either we listen to the thought and allow it to trigger a whole host of other often more negative thoughts or we decide that we have better things to do in life and we ignore it.

The truth is, you are not your thoughts.

Think about it. The thoughts you have inside your head do not reflect who you are as a friend, partner, parent, or worker. They are often passed down messages from unhelpful experiences, from the past. Maybe your mum or dad did constantly criticise you and nothing was ever good enough. Or you have been through all sorts of trauma and neglect in life. So those negative messages from the past can get very ingrained in our brain. But just because we keep repeating these messages over and over does not make them real or true, just an old dusty road more travelled than we would like.

This is an important point.

So many people get caught up feeling sorry for themselves or even worse hating and disliking themselves due to some of their old “demon thoughts” or wrinkly oranges. And then they beat themselves up about it when they realize the negativity of their thoughts.

But here's an interesting fact:

Most of the thoughts that roam around our heads are completely inane and useless! Your thoughts do not make you a bad person, because guess what? Your thoughts aren't real. They are just fleeting ideas that you can control if you take the time to learn how.

It's pretty obvious, but the way you handle your thoughts will massively impact your life.

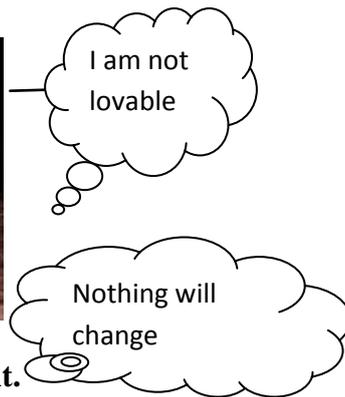
So what can you do to tame your negative thoughts?

1. Be aware.

Notice next time you experience a negative thought. Often we are so “in our heads” that we don’t even realize that we may have spent the last 20 minutes in the throws of self-pity or worries. Just capture and notice it.

2. Keep calm. And create distance from you thought

Try not to have an emotional reaction to any negative thoughts that pop up. Remember that you are not your thoughts, and try to distance yourself from them. and then try and create some distance from it by stating aloud or on paper “ I am having the thought that ... (whatever it is that is troubling you)” Its just a thought or “wrinkly orange” or maybe another metaphor an old dusty road of mine. I don’t have to get stuck with it and think or analyse it ... sing it to a funny tune or use visualisation described underneath.



3. Catch the first thought.

If you can catch your negative thinking early on, then it will be much easier for you to stop it before it escalates into a big problem. Often something that starts out as a minor problem ends up being completely blown out of proportion.

4. If distance does not help . Assess if the thought is true.

Most negative thoughts are not based on reality. So ask yourself,

- “Is that thought 100% true right now am I missing something out here?”
- What would I say to a friend that went through this?
- What would be a more helpful and kind way of looking at the situation and what happened to me?
- Even if I am really unwell right now is the situation likely to pass ... think of the image of a big powerful wave that comes over you most tricky feeling ebb away again with time... if you give it the space.

5. Look for a positive take on it or something you are missing out on if possible.

Instead of finding ways to escalate the thought, do the opposite and look for ways to prove that the thought is not true. For example, if you’re doubting your capabilities you could look for an example of someone else who has achieved in this area.

6. Don’t beat yourself up.

You are not your thoughts. Resist the urge to beat yourself up when you catch yourself thinking negatively. *Everyone* has negative thoughts from time to time. This is part of our human condition and what makes us so likely to suffer. It is also something we all have in

common and can relate to. So when you are feeling alone and low in your negative thinking spiral remember other will have been through this lots of times and these thoughts will pass again with time. Today, take power back from your negative thoughts, and see how much more you can be ...

7. Use positive imagery with your thoughts

Seeing them far removed on a screen and fading, or as passing clouds in the sky or leaves floating away on a stream... this focus on moving imagery can help us in getting slowly unstuck from the more stickier harder to move on thoughts.

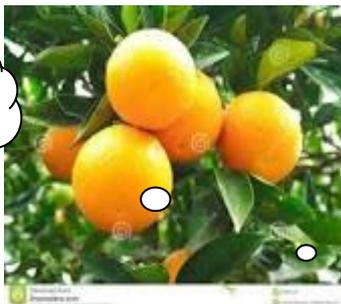


Act leaves on a stream exercise see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLIVV3dKI9w

8. Do something that is putting yourself back on the path you want to go in life a valued action

When we are doing and acting in a way that is true to what we wish to be like in life that can create a life more worth living and often creates better experiences which are less in keeping of old “dusty negative paths” of avoidance and fitting with our negative thoughts. So if being connected to nature is a big value in your life try and do something that reconnects you e.g. planting some flowers in the garden. If being a loving connected mum is your thing try and play a game with your loved child and focus at the reaction of your child . Acts and activities in keeping whats important to us no matter what your thoughts are telling you can help you on your new path and help swing more positive seed and hopefully some more “juicier” and helpful oranges.

I can do this



I am an ok person

Namaste! Don't let your thoughts dictate your liveKarina Woldt , clinical Psychologist and Mindfulness teacher