

# Managing Unhelpful Thoughts





# What to Expect in this Session

## **Session Roadmap**

1. We will set an agenda for the session.
2. How are you doing? We will complete a quick mood “check-in.”
3. We will review the previous session’s assignment and any other ongoing homework or skills you are using.

## **Developing New Skills – Using Relaxation Skills**

4. We will review the differences between thoughts and feelings.
5. We will identify common types of unhelpful thoughts.
6. We will look at how Dave/Danielle used the Managing Unhelpful Thoughts session to address his unhelpful thought patterns.
7. We will identify unhelpful thoughts that are causing you distress.
8. We will introduce coping statements to manage unhelpful thoughts.
9. We will discuss how to evaluate unhelpful thoughts (optional skill)
10. We will develop an action plan to help you meet your goals.



# Rate your Mood

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

	Not at all	Several Days	More than half the days	Nearly every-day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things.	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless.	0	1	2	3
3. Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much.	0	1	2	3
4. Feeling tired or having little energy.	0	1	2	3
5. Poor appetite or overeating.	0	1	2	3
6. Feeling bad about yourself—or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down.	0	1	2	3
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television.	0	1	2	3
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite—being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around more than usual.	0	1	2	3
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself in some way.	0	1	2	3

How difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

Not Difficult at All	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult	Extremely Difficult
0	1	2	3

# Feelings vs. Thoughts

## Dave's feelings and thoughts

Situation:

Dave didn't feel well and missed his daughter's graduation.



How  
Dave  
Feels

- **Frustrated**
- **Sad**

What  
Dave  
Thinks

- ***I feel like a failure.***
- ***I'm a terrible father.***

## What are feelings?

- Feelings (also known as emotions) are core human experiences.
- Feelings are best described with one word (sad, worried, happy, satisfied, scared, etc.). *Note: In the example above – the sentence “I feel like a failure” is a thought, not a feeling.*
- Examples of feelings (emotions) include the following:



## What are thoughts?

- Thoughts are the things we tell ourselves about an experience.
- They typically involve phrases or full sentences.
- Sometimes thoughts become so automatic that they are not always easy to recognize.

# Feelings vs. Thoughts

## Danielle's feelings and thoughts

Situation:

Danielle was stressed about paying a late bill and ate too many sweets.



How  
Danielle  
Feels

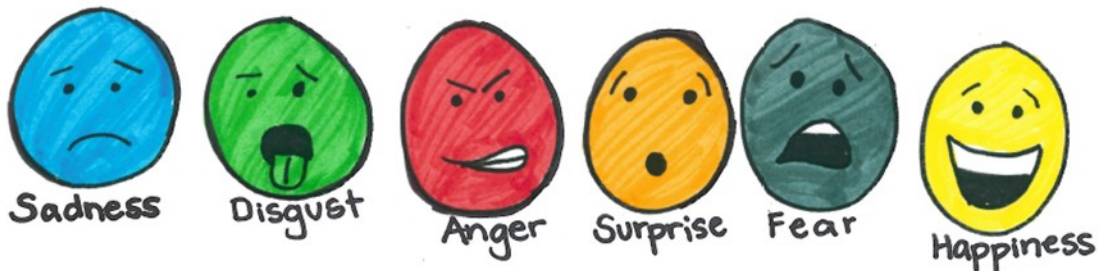
- ***Frustrated***
- ***Worried***

What  
Danielle  
Thinks

- ***I feel like a failure.***
- ***I can only count on myself, no one understands me.***

## What are feelings?

- Feelings (also known as emotions) are core human experiences.
- Feelings are best described with one word (sad, worried, happy, satisfied, scared, etc.). *Note: In the example above – the sentence “I feel like a failure” is a thought, not a feeling.*
- Examples of feelings (emotions) include the following:



## What are thoughts?

- Thoughts are the things we tell ourselves about an experience.
- They typically involve phrases or full sentences.
- Sometimes thoughts become so automatic that they are not always easy to recognize.

# Unhelpful vs. Helpful Thinking

Our thoughts have a great impact on how we feel. Thoughts can be helpful, unhelpful, or something in between.

## Unhelpful Thinking

This type of thinking is an interpretation of a situation that is unnecessarily negative and ultimately not helpful. Unhelpful thought patterns can include over-reacting to a situation, exaggerating the negatives, or focusing too much on things that you have no control over.

### Example #1: Unhelpful Thinking Pattern

#### Situation / Experience

Busy day at work; a lot of pressure to finish a project that isn't going well.

#### Thoughts

"I am doing a terrible job today."

#### Feelings

Stress  
Sadness

## Helpful Thinking

This type of thinking is not always positive or "sunny" but is at least accurate and realistic. Helpful thinking means that you are thinking about situations and reacting in a way that is in your best interest.

### Example #2: Helpful Thinking Pattern

#### Situation / Experience

Busy day at work; a lot of pressure to finish a project that isn't going well.

#### Thoughts

"This is a stressful day, but I have handled stress before."

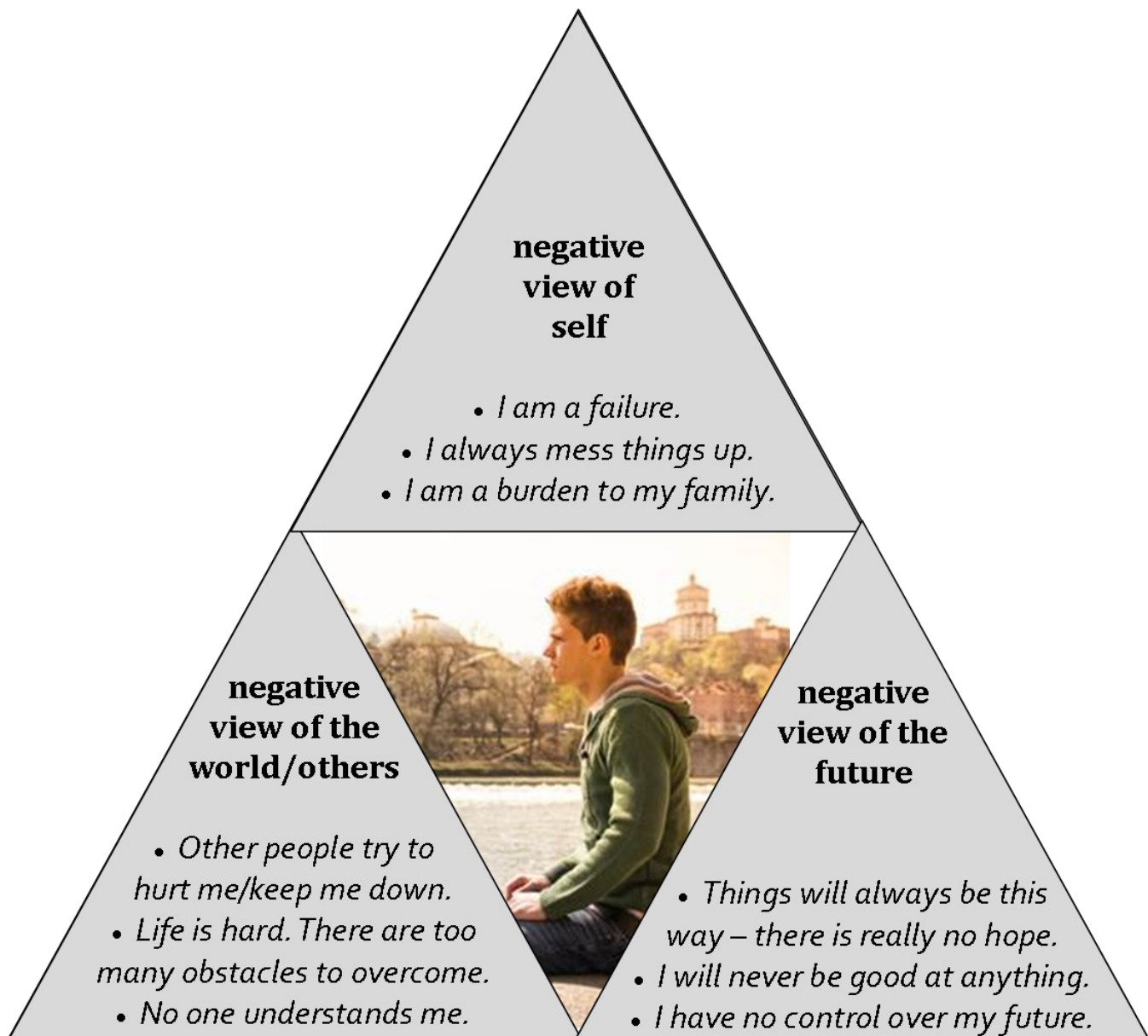
#### Feelings

Stressed  
Capable/Confident



# Common Unhelpful Thinking Patterns when Depressed

Individuals with depression often have negative (unhelpful) thoughts related to their views about: The Self, The Future, The World.









Do you recognize any of these negative thought patterns in your own life?



# Dave's Thought Worksheet

First let's take a look at how Dave's unhelpful thoughts impacted his mood and behaviors. Then, notice how Dave used helpful thinking strategies to improve his mood.









Original thoughts		
Situation		<b><i>Sitting at home watching TV during the middle of the day</i></b>
Thoughts		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>I am truly useless now. (negative view of self)</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>This is pathetic – I am wasting my life away. (negative view of future)</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>There is no one helping me and it seems that no one cares. (negative view about others)</i></b></li> </ul>
Feelings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Depressed</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Mad / angry</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Lethargic / without energy</i></b></li> </ul>
Behaviors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Stay on the couch – no motivation to get going</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Isolate from others</i></b></li> </ul>
New thoughts		
New / Alternative Thought		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Nothing is going to change until I make a change.</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>I will not stand by and waste my life. I insist on taking action.</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>My family is supportive, maybe they just don't know how to help.</i></b></li> </ul>
New Feelings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Determined</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Hopeful</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Motivated</i></b></li> </ul>



# Danielle's Thought Worksheet

First let's take a look at how Danielle's unhelpful thoughts impacted her mood and behaviors. Then, notice how Danielle used helpful thinking strategies to improve her mood.



Original thoughts	
Situation 	<i>I need to pick up a shift at work, but I can't find</i>
Thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I'm a failure. (negative view of self)</i></li> <li>• <i>Nothing ever goes right for me. (negative view of future)</i></li> <li>• <i>I can't rely on anybody but myself. (negative views of others)</i></li> </ul>
Feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ashamed</i></li> <li>• <i>Worried</i></li> <li>• <i>Tired/without energy</i></li> </ul>
Behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Avoids phone calls and messages</i></li> <li>• <i>Sits on the couch — no motivation to get going</i></li> <li>• <i>Eats too many sweets and comfort foods.</i></li> </ul>
New thoughts	
New / Alternative Thought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I'm overwhelmed by my situation not because of who I am.</i></li> <li>• <i>I can still make healthy eating choices when I'm stressed.</i></li> <li>• <i>Family and friends have helped me with child-care in the past.</i></li> </ul>
New Feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Encouraged</i></li> <li>• <i>Confident</i></li> <li>• <i>Motivated</i></li> </ul>

# Identifying Unhelpful Thoughts

	Situation #1:	Situation #2:
<b>Original thoughts</b>		
<b>Situation</b> <i>What actually happened? Where? When? How?</i>		
<b>Thoughts</b> <i>What thoughts went through your mind? What views did you have about yourself, your future, or others?</i>		
<b>Feelings</b> <i>What emotions did you feel at the time?</i>		
<b>Behaviors</b> <i>What did you do in response? Also include any withdrawal of activities – like staying at home or staying in bed.</i>		
<div>  <b>New thoughts</b>  </div>		
<b>New/Alternative thoughts</b> <i>What is another, more helpful, way to think about this situation?</i>		
<b>New Feelings</b> <i>What emotions did you feel after identifying alternative thoughts</i>		

# Using Coping Statements to Manage Unhelpful Thoughts

## What are Coping Statements?

A coping statement is a statement you make to yourself to help decrease feelings of stress and depression. It is a way to provide "instructions" to yourself to reduce how much negative thoughts get in the way.

Coping statements can serve as "alternative thoughts" when unhelpful thinking patterns are getting you down. Remember, coping statements are not "pie-in-the-sky" statements but, rather, should be statements that you actually believe to be true.

## Example Coping Statements:

*"I can do what I need to do."*

*"Even if I make mistakes, it will be okay."*

*"If I take it one step at a time, I can meet this challenge."*

*"I can take control of my stress by getting up and doing things."*

*"I choose to think positively and to remember the things I can still do."*

*"I am not going to let my pain limit my life."*

*"I have people in my life who care about me."*

*"I can ask for help when I need it."*



# My Coping Statements

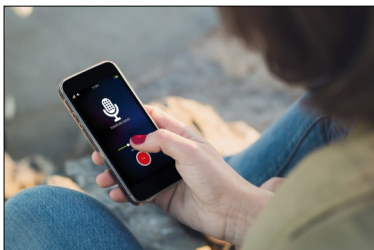
## Coping Statements I Can Use:

Stressful Situation	Coping Statement(s)
1.	
2.	
3.	

## Tips for Using Coping Statements:



- Don't be afraid to talk to yourself! Say coping statements aloud to yourself instead of just reading them.



- It can sometimes be helpful to audio record the statements and listen to them when necessary.



- Place your coping statements where you will see them regularly (a note on your refrigerator, on your phone, etc.).



# **Managing Unhelpful Thoughts**

## **Optional Advanced Skills**







# Evaluating Unhelpful Thoughts

You previously learned how to identify unhelpful thoughts and use coping statements to decrease stress and depression. However, it can also be useful to challenge these unhelpful thoughts in a more direct way.

## How to Evaluate your Thoughts:

### 1. EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE

Think like a scientist—look for evidence for and against a specific thought to evaluate how realistic it is. Approach your thoughts as if they are scientific hypotheses (or guesses), rather than facts. Often, we focus on one explanation or interpretation of a situation, rather than looking at the whole picture and considering other possible interpretations. In depression, people tend to focus only on the negative aspects of a situation rather than examining all the evidence and taking a balanced perspective.

Inspect the evidence *for* the thought.

- What has happened to suggest the thought is true?

Inspect the evidence *against* the thought.

- What has happened to suggest the thought is not true?

TIP: Ask yourself these questions:

- Is this thought based on feelings or facts?
- Am I 100% certain this thought is true? If not, why not?
- Is there another possible explanation or interpretation of the situation?

What counts as evidence?

- Specific behaviors or actions
- Past experiences
- Feedback from others

What doesn't count as evidence?

- Feelings
- Interpretations of events
- Interpretations of others' actions



### 2. IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS.

The next step is to come up with an alternative, more balanced way of thinking about the situation. Remember, we tend to assume that the first thought that comes into our head is the “truth,” so it’s important to open your mind to ALL other possibilities.

One way to generate alternative thoughts is to ask yourself, “*What would I tell someone I loved if he/she were in this situation and had these thoughts?*”

# Evaluating Dave's Unhelpful Thoughts



Let's take a look at how Dave used a scientific approach to evaluate his unhelpful thoughts in a more direct way.

Original Thoughts	
<b>Situation</b> <i>What actually happened? Where? When? How?</i>	<b><i>My friend cancelled on me at the last minute.</i></b>
<b>Thoughts</b> <i>What thoughts went through your mind? What views did you have about yourself, your future, or others?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>She must be sick of me.</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>I'm a failure at relationships — no one wants to spend time with me.</i></b></li> </ul>
<b>Feelings</b> <i>What emotions did you feel at the time?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Sad</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Lonely</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Worthless</i></b></li> </ul>
<b>Behaviors</b> <i>What did you do in response? Also include any withdrawal of activities – like staying at home or staying in bed.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Stayed at home by myself all day</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Watched boring daytime TV</i></b></li> </ul>
Evidence	
<b>Evidence to support the thought</b> <i>What has happened to make you believe this thought is true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>She cancelled our plans.</i></b></li> </ul>
<b>Evidence that does not support the thought</b> <i>What has happened to prove the thought is NOT true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>She said she had to care for her sick granddaughter.</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>We have spent a lot of good time together recently .</i></b></li> </ul>
New Thoughts	
<b>New/alternative thought</b> <i>What is another, more helpful, way to think about this situation?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>This time didn't work out to get together, but we can make plans in the near future.</i></b></li> </ul>
<b>New feelings</b> <i>What emotions did you feel after identifying the new/balanced thought?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Hopeful</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Comforted</i></b></li> </ul>

# Evaluating Danielle's Unhelpful Thoughts

Let's take a look at how Danielle used a scientific approach to evaluate her unhelpful thoughts in a more direct way.



Original Thoughts	
<b>Situation</b> <i>What actually happened? Where? When? How?</i>	<i>Couldn't go on walk with daughter this week because of migraines.</i>
<b>Thoughts</b> <i>What thoughts went through your mind? What views did you have about yourself, your future, or others?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>My health is going to get worse.</i></li> <li>• <i>My daughter will think that I am lazy.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Feelings</b> <i>What emotions did you feel at the time?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Rejected</i></li> <li>• <i>Insecure</i></li> <li>• <i>Depressed</i></li> </ul>
<b>Behaviors</b> <i>What did you do in response? Also include any withdrawal of activities – like staying at home or staying in bed.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Isolated from daughter.</i></li> <li>• <i>Laid in bed all day.</i></li> <li>• <i>Watched TV</i></li> </ul>
Evidence	
<b>Evidence to support the thought</b> <i>What has happened to make you believe this thought is true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Didn't go on walk with daughter.</i></li> <li>• <i>Stayed in bed and watched TV.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Evidence that does not support the thought</b> <i>What has happened to prove the thought is NOT true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I rescheduled the walk to later in the week.</i></li> <li>• <i>My daughter helped me with managing my migraine.</i></li> </ul>
New Thoughts	
<b>New/alternative thought</b> <i>What is another, more helpful, way to think about this situation?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I didn't feel well enough to walk today, but have rescheduled to do it later this week.</i></li> </ul>
<b>New feelings</b> <i>What emotions did you feel after identifying the new/balanced thought?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Hopeful</i></li> <li>• <i>Secure</i></li> <li>• <i>Proud</i></li> </ul>

# Evaluating My Unhelpful Thoughts

	Situation #1:	Situation #2:
<b>Original Thoughts</b>		
<b>Situation</b> <i>What actually happened? Where? When? How?</i>		
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<b>New Thoughts</b>		
<b>New/alternative thought</b> <i>What is another, more helpful, way to think about this situation?</i>		
<b>New feelings</b> <i>What emotions did you feel after identifying the new/balanced thought?</i>		

# Action Plan

**The specific goal or activity I plan to work on:**

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**Timeline for completing goal:**

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**Steps to help me accomplish my goal:**

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**Possible barriers and ways to overcome them:**

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**How important is this goal to you?**

Not Very Important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Important

**How likely are you to complete these steps?**

Not Very Likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Likely

**Tracking your progress:**

What progress did you make towards your goal this week?

☐ Exceeded ☐ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Did Not Attempt

What went well?

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What challenges came up?

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# Action Plan

## Next Steps

- ☐ Option 1: **Continue** with your plan as is—keep doing what you
- ☐ Option 2: **Modify** your plan to better meet your needs.
- ☐ Option 3: **Use a different skill** that better meets your needs.

### Next Steps—Notes

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## Other Skills

### Questions to think about:

- What other skills are you using?
- Are these skills working for you?
- Do you see any changes needed for these skills?

### Next Steps— Plans to use these skills

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