

**Fair and realistic thinking: step by step**

1) First think of a recent time when you got upset about something – let strong emotion be your guide to upsetting thoughts because they usually go together. What was it that upset you? Write down the situation – where you were, what you were doing, what time it was, who else was there, and what else was going on.

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2) Now ask yourself: what was I feeling at the time - rate how strong the feeling was out of 100, where 100 is the worst that feeling could be.

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ (%)    Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ (%)

3) Now ask: what was going through my mind at the time? Write down all the thoughts you can remember.

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Once you've written down what was going through your mind, take a look at the list of thoughts and ask yourself, if I had to pick just one of those thoughts as most upsetting, which would it be? Circle it – that's what we call the *hot thought*. Now ask yourself: at the time how strongly did you believe that thought, where 100% is that I thought it was a fact and 0% I didn't believe it at all.

Hot thought: \_\_\_\_\_

How strongly did you believe it? (%) \_\_\_\_\_

4) Now this is the really important bit. What we're **not** looking for is positive thinking – we're looking for **balanced thinking**, that is, an opinion that takes account of **all the facts** and is **fair** and **realistic**. The chances are that you've had plenty of experiences that back up the way you think so first of all we're going to ask: 'What makes me think this is a true reflection of what's going on?' Write down all the evidence you can think of and try to stick to the facts, not opinions.

If you're not sure what's a fact then remember that it should describe something that happened, not an interpretation of what happened: 'she didn't phone me' is a fact; 'she doesn't like me' may or may not be true but it isn't a description. What you have to write down is what you saw or heard actually happen.

Write down the evidence for your hot thought:

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5) Now for the harder bit - the 'evidence against'. Ask yourself, is there any evidence that doesn't support what I'm thinking (or assuming) to be true. You're probably going to have to dig a bit here – after all the way we feel has a big effect on what we think – if you *feel* bad the world *looks* bad.

Here's some questions to ask yourself that may be helpful in uncovering evidence against the hot thought – under each one is an example – write your own answer in the column to the right:

What experiences have I had that show this is not necessarily true?	
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What would someone who knows me really well remind me of?	
What small things might I be discounting or overlooking?	

6) Now let's think about 'missing information and assumptions' you might be making. Ask yourself whether there is anything else you need to know. Here are some more questions to help you – write your answers in the right hand column.

What would you say to your best friend or a loved one if they were thinking like this?	
Are you using a mental shortcut that's not helpful: for example black-and-white thinking; jumping to conclusions, or catastrophising	

7) Now take a look at the evidence for, the evidence against, and any missing information or assumptions you're making. Taking *all* the evidence into consideration ask yourself, what would be a fair and realistic way of looking at the situation?

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8) Now ask yourself whether the way you're feeling has changed and re-rate your feelings.

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ (%)    Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ (%)

9) And now, whatever you decide about the truth or otherwise of your thoughts you still have a choice. What would be the most helpful thing to do now?

Write down what you will do:

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It may seem a little long-winded but one of the great advantages of filling in an automatic thought record is that it slows down the process of making assumptions and then acting on them in unhelpful ways. Even if there is some truth in your assumptions you can still choose to act in a way that is kind and compassionate to yourself and others.

Andrew Grimmer