



Helping your child  
overcome negative  
thinking



~~Negative~~

**T H I N K**

Positive



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# Where does negative thinking come from?

Negative thoughts are rooted in our beliefs, which we form around our experiences and environments.

## Example 1

Your child find maths challenging and then sits a test. The result of the test shows they got half the answers correct.

**BELIEF:** I can't do maths.

## Example 2

Your child hears others say they can't control themselves and don't behave.

**BELIEF:** I'm bad.

## Example 3

Your child is naturally introverted and feels that they are outside of friendship groups.

**BELIEF:** No one likes me.

Reflect on your child's negative thoughts that you notice. What experiences may be impacting them? Who might be influencing them and how?

## How does negative thinking impact my child?

Negative thinking impacts how your child sees themselves, how they judge themselves and begins a process of looking for evidence to confirm the thought.

### The Negative Thinking Path



## What does negative thinking look like?

Negative thinking can show itself in behaviour and actions, the things your child says, lack of confidence and body posture.

### Spotting Negative Thinking

#### Behaviours/Actions

Aggression  
Defiance  
Avoidance  
Physical symptoms,  
e.g butterflies in  
stomach  
Crying  
Withdrawn  
Lack of interest

#### Body Posture

Tense muscles  
Furrowed brows  
Dropped shoulders  
Slow movements  
Turned down mouth corners  
Fidgeting  
Nervous tension  
Looking down  
Hands in fists

#### Words

I can't do it.  
I'm no good at this.  
No one likes me.  
I'm not important.  
I hate myself.  
I'm weird.  
I'm bad.  
I'm naughty.  
I'm not clever enough.  
That's impossible for me.  
I'm weak.  
I'm not good enough.  
This is too hard.  
I can't do anything right.  
I'm a loser.  
I'm dumb.  
They have more fun without me.  
I never get anything right.  
This will be the worst thing ever.  
No one ever wants to play with me.

Which behaviours do you notice in your child?

## Types of Negative Thoughts

Negative thoughts are a type of thought distortion, which is something we all experience. It's our brain's way of coping with huge amounts of information coming in. They're a product of the process of making sense of things, but they're often unhelpful, based in fiction and can lead to beliefs that hold us back.

### Thought Distortions.

#### Deleting information

You may notice your child ignores evidence that doesn't fit a belief. For example, if they believe they are bad at maths, they'll ignore a good test result and file it away as a 'one off'.

#### Catastrophising

Catastrophising means your child will blow things out of proportion. Thoughts such as, 'This is the worst day ever' or 'It will be a total disaster' are catastrophising.

#### Assumptions/Predicting

You might notice your child jumps to conclusions or predicts the future! For example, if their best friend says they can't come over to play one day, they may assume 'My best friend doesn't like me anymore'. Or they may predict the worse case scenario will happen, such as 'I'll have a terrible game, I just know it'.

#### Blaming

Blaming can fall into self blame where your child automatically believes something is their fault, or avoiding responsibility and blaming others. For example, instead of identifying a knocked glass of water as a simple mistake, they would think or say 'Well, I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been left on the floor.'

#### Perfectionism

Setting unrealistic expectations can lead to perfectionist thinking which is highly self critical. You might notice your child struggles to acknowledge when they have done well because they are focused on what they could have done better.

## Labelling

Labelling is when a general label is given after one incident. For example, you might hear your child say 'I'm dumb' because they couldn't answer one question in class.

## Should sentences

Should sentences often come from hearing the voice of someone else in our internal chatter. If we focus on the expectations of someone else and start to internalise that as a belief of our own, it can lead to feelings of guilt and 'I shoulds'. For example, 'I should be able to run this lap quicker', or 'I should enjoy this activity'.

**Make a note of the type of negative thought patterns you notice in your child:**

# Overcoming Negative Thoughts

## Power principle:

**You change behaviours by working on beliefs!**

It takes work, but if you dig deep enough and work on your child's beliefs you'll see change. Unfortunately, we can't change our children's negative thoughts just by telling them to think the opposite or telling them to be positive. There's more work to it than that, which needs time, patience and understanding. But by consistently using some simple approaches, we can help our child become more resilient to negative thoughts.

## Step 1: Find the belief

Discovering the belief behind the negative thought will break the cycle and allow you to help your child to replace it with something more helpful. To find the belief at the centre of the negative belief, ask 'so what?' when you hear your child's negative thought.

### Example 1

**Your child find maths challenging and then sits a test. The result of the test shows they got half the answers correct.**

**I got a terrible low score in my maths.**

**So what?**

**Well, I think everyone else got higher than me.**

**So what does mean?**

**Well, it means I can't do maths.**

**So what?**

**It means I'm not smart. BELIEF!**

Once you've figured out what is really underneath the negative thinking you can then implement strategies to support your child.

# Overcoming Negative Thoughts Strategies

## Step 2 : Choose the appropriate strategy

There's a range of strategies you can use to overcome negative thoughts and beliefs. What you choose to do depends on the thought, how resistant your child is to changing it and their preferences, but here's a brief description of each strategies you could implement.

### Challenge the belief

Our brains naturally look for evidence to prove our negative beliefs. The brain likes familiarity and wants to avoid change, so it will keep us held in our beliefs even if they don't help us. Challenge the belief!

**Look for evidence which disproves the belief.**

**I can't do maths.**

**Is that true?**

**Tell me about a time you did well in a maths session?**

**What would you teacher/friend say?**

**Test the belief on a thought scale.**

**I can't do maths.**

**On a scale of 1 - 10 how much do you really believe that?**

### Reframe the thought

Reframing means changing the negative thought into something more useful. It doesn't mean changing it to the exact opposite, such as 'I'm great at maths', as the new thought needs to be realistic. So for example, you could say 'I'm working on improving in maths'. Your child might need support to come up with these new thoughts, so do give them suggestions and ask them to pick the one that fits best for them. Over time, you can keep stepping the thought up to a more positive one.

## Affirmations

Affirmations are powerful statements that, when used consistently, can help train the brain to catch negative thinking and choose a positive instead. Even if a negative thought arises, use of affirmations means that the underlying belief is in contradiction to the thought and so the negative thinking won't take hold or get filed away in the 'evidence' section of the brain!

## Growth Mindset

Growth Mindset is something we need to instil in our children continually to help them build the resilience they need to bounce back from negative thoughts. To encourage a growth mindset at home, practise goal setting with your child to help them achieve realistic yet challenging goals. This protects them from catastrophising, labelling or perfectionist thinking when they don't achieve something first time. By teaching them to understand that there are steps to achieving and making progress they can celebrate small positives along the way, boosting their confidence.

## Finding strengths and self love

Regularly communicating with our children about their strengths, helps create positive experiences which feed into positive thoughts and beliefs and therefore a positive self image. This doesn't mean telling your child they are brilliant at everything, but simply catching them in their strengths and commenting on their efforts and achievements. Help them to build a bank of positive evidence to recall when a negative thought pops up, which they will!

## Teach problem solving

By turning our children away from their negative thought and towards what they want instead, we can teach them to respond to negative thinking with problem solving. Over time, this will become almost instinctive.

**Solve the problem.**

**I can't do maths.**

**How would you like to feel about maths? What can we do to make that happen?**



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