

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION – PART 8 PATTERNS AND ASSUMPTIONS – 3

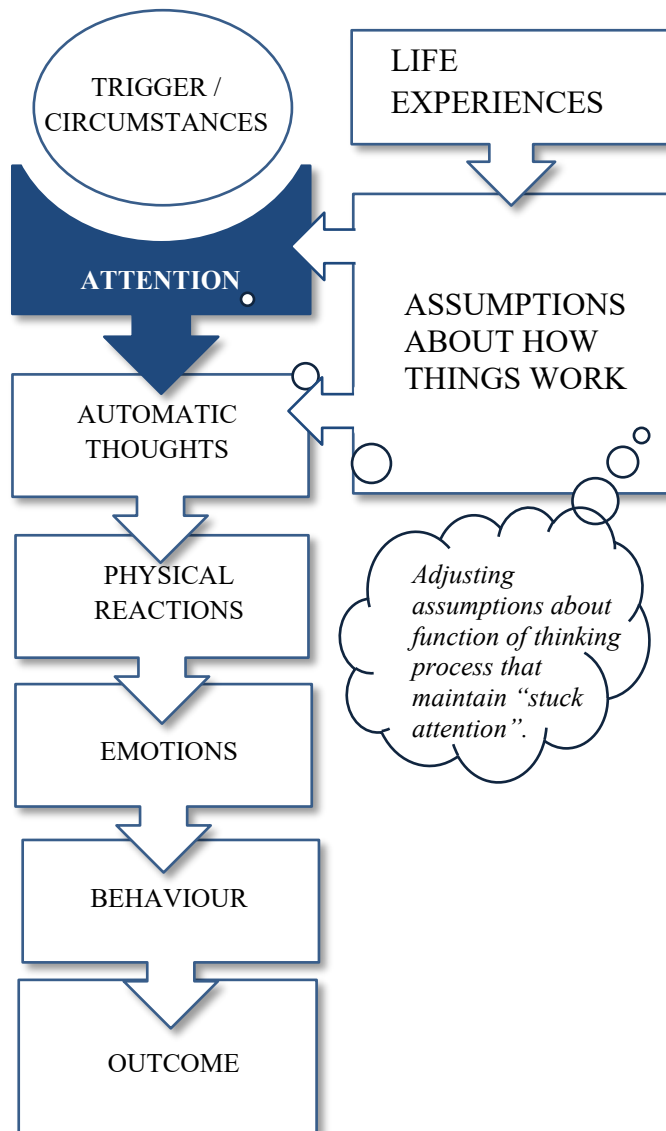


Figure 1:
BUILDING BLOCKS OF DEPRESSION

The table on the next page provides a summary of beliefs that people that prompts people to overthink. Unfortunately thinking and taking care of things are two different processes, especially if we end up by being so lost in our thoughts, that we fail to implement any actions steps.

Not taking any chances = **guarantee** that you remain where you are
Taking chances = **possibility** that you succeed

MORE THINKING ABOUT THINKING OR WHAT WE BELIEVE IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR THOUGHTS

Over time we have developed a generally useful set of assumptions about how things work together in our world. These assumptions inform what we tend to pay attention to. For instance having just left an emotionally abusive relationship, a person might pay a lot of attention to people's facial expressions and worry that their actions can be misinterpreted. Someone who just lost a job that was important to them, ends up by focussing on unfairness of their situation because that event went against a rule that "if you do hard work, your company should be loyal to you". Our attention might become "**stuck**" on issues of personal safety, fairness or regret.

Not surprisingly, we have also developed a set of assumptions about our attention habits and functions of our thinking processes.

Thinking content refers to **what** we think. We can adjust our thinking content using the *Thought Records*. The goal is to ensure that our thoughts reflect our reality.

Thinking process refers to **how** we think (What questions we ask? How long? What do we hope to accomplish by asking such questions? etc.) We can adjust our thinking process or "unstick" our attention using the *Thought Redirection Worksheet* (page 3).

In the table below color the relevant boxes to keep track of how much time you spend on over-thinking (blue), how much time you spend on taking action steps to tackle your problems (green), how much time you spent on pleasurable activities (yellow), chores (orange) and how much time you spent actively resenting your situation and trying to block your thoughts (red). Time you're able to have true rest or sleep can colored (purple). Some boxes might have more than one color – this is just a visual aid to show you how you spend your time. Keep it as accurate as possible but don't over-focus on accuracy.

DATE:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Time	7 am						
	8 am						
	9 am						
	10 am						
	11 am						
	12 noon						
	1 pm						
	2 pm						
	3 pm						
	4 pm						
	5 pm						
	6 pm						
	7 pm						
	8 pm						
	9 pm						
	10 pm						
	11 pm						
	12 am						
	1 am						
	2 am						
3 am							
4 am							
5 am							
6 am							

BELIEFS THAT LEAD TO OVER-THINKING

INTENDED PURPOSE	UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES
Produces insight	If you have no new information, chances are that you will not be able to produce any new insights. The “why” questions can go deeper and deeper in search of the original cause and never feel satisfied with the answer.
Assists with problem solving	Dealing with a problem might be quite different from understanding why the problem happened in the first place. If we spill a coffee we might admonish ourselves to be more careful but for not we need to clean the mess and get a new drink if we want to. If we deal with consequences of a natural disaster, recent diagnosis of a serious illness or an accident, we need to focus on regaining an ability to function after such experiences. Overthinking might keep us stuck in a loop and prevent from doing what is necessary to solve problems or adjust and rebuilt our lives.
Helps understanding the cause of depression and other difficulties.	The “why” questions tend to fall in two categories: (1) “ <i>Why did it happen?</i> ” And (2) “ <i>Why am I feeling this way?</i> ” Sometimes we might even arrive at “the” answer to “Why did it happen?” question. This answer makes perfect sense as in “I got hit, because the driver who caused the accident was intoxicated”. This answer points to an event in the past and not life circumstances in present. It might be perfectly true that the accident’s victim’s depression was originally caused by the accident but it is not maintained by the accident. In present day, this person’s depression is maintained by the intricate interaction of thoughts, beliefs and behaviours, including beliefs about the meaning of adjustment. If each time a question of “ <i>Why am I feeling this way?</i> ” is answered with “ <i>Because I was in an accident</i> ”, it is very easy to respond with anger towards the drunk driver and abandon all attempts to make life better. We need to ensure that we replace the “Why?” question with “What now?”. Past cannot be changed.
Prevents future mistakes	We think about the painful past with hopes that this will prevent painful events from reoccurring. We might focus on our own faults and chastise ourselves with astounding viciousness. Yet, such preoccupation makes it difficult to pay attention to here-and-now and makes it more likely that we make new mistakes even if we do not repeat the old ones. Try to replace harsh criticism (as in “ <i>I am a total idiot, how could I even put myself in this situation?</i> ”) with self-correction (as in “ <i>I messed up by doing this and this and this is what I need to do to correct it</i> ”)
Deals with the situation	Thinking is not doing. Only taking action steps can change our circumstances. Overthinking creates an illusion of doing as a lot of time is spent on certain issues. As lack of action produces lack of results, overthinking often leads to a sense of helplessness: nothing changes despite extensive emotional effort.
Achieves closure	By definition, closure refers to being able to let go of something that no longer has presence in your life. Overthinking is the very opposite of closure. Now, this does not mean that you should put in a lot of effort to avoid memories of painful past. Memories are memories, they will remain locked inside of our mind. It means that you have to learn to recognize your memories as memories as opposed to something happening in here-and-now and to refrain from excessive rehashing of the past.
Means I have not given up	Dwelling will not change past hurts. Instead it robs you from your ability to take advantage of any opportunities you might have in here-and-now. Beware of thought-action fusion as thinking about the past is not the same as actively changing the impact that the past has on you. Your being chronically angry at the drunk driver that caused the accident or a disloyal spouse does not have any impact on these people. Do not confuse striving for imaginary justice with getting better: file a court case if necessary but focus on living your life least you forget how to.
Maintains moral standards	Self-blame or self-criticism can only go so far. Blaming ourselves for things that we cannot change or cannot make amends for, makes us feel miserable and is useless to people that we might have hurt. Your morality depends on your actions and not on the degree of unnecessary suffering you put yourself through.

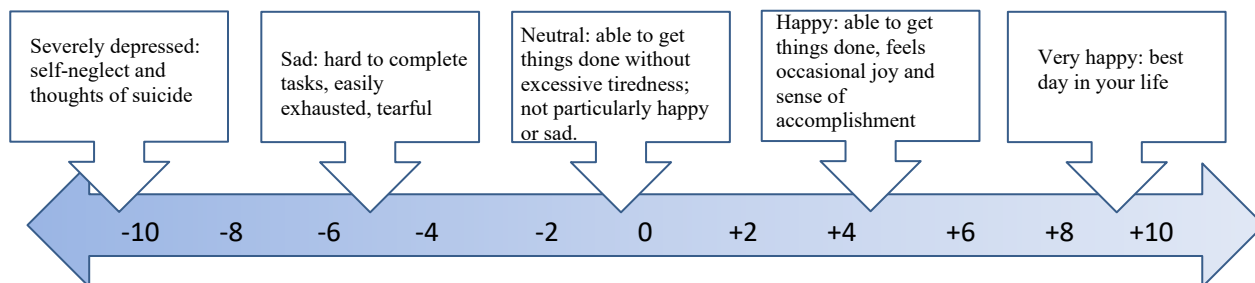
We are by no means advocating thoughtlessness. However, we urge you to recognize the difference between thoughtfulness and over-thinking. Use the table below to list your own examples of being thoughtful and of overthinking and see if you can identify the differences between these two processes.

	BEING THOUGHTFUL	OVER-THINKING
YOUR OWN EXAMPLES		
CHARACTERISTICS		

THINKING REDIRECTION

1: Write down what you are preoccupied with:	
2: What do you want to accomplish as a result of your preoccupation?	3: What are the unintended consequences of your preoccupation?
4: What would you be doing with your time if you weren't so preoccupied? List the activities and circle the one that makes the most sense for you at this time.	
5: What blocks you from doing what you would prefer to be doing with your time?	6: What can you do to tackle the barriers you have identified in box 6?
7: What are the benefits of doing your chosen activity?	8: What are the costs of doing your chosen activity?
<i>Start doing what you would prefer to be doing with your time. Your thoughts might come back like a hiccup, but try to keep on going. Complete the bottom part after you completed your preferred activity.</i>	
9: Were you able to do at least a little bit of what you would prefer to do with your time?	
10: Did your situation get any worse because you have allowed yourself time away from your thoughts?	
11: Did your situation get any better because you have allowed yourself time away from your thoughts?	
12: What can you do next time when you notice that you have been overthinking?	

KEEPING TRACK AND KEEPING HONEST



DATE:							
Rate your overall mood for the day using the scale above and mark it on the graph.	+10						
	+8						
	+6						
	+4						
	+2						
	0						
	-2						
	-4						
	-6						
	-8						
-10							
What challenges / stresses were you faced with today?							
Did you engage in any meaningful activity? If so, what was it?							
What skill have you practiced?	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense
What other things were you able to accomplish?							