

Well-being this Week

FOR EDUCATORS • BY EDUCATORS

Are your beliefs and thoughts contributing to your stress?

by Lisa Sanetti, PhD

As reviewed in the last [Well-being this Week](#), your thoughts and perceptions have A LOT to do with how much stress you experience. One important strategy for managing stress involves developing more useful ways for thinking about stressors. To do that, you need to (1) understand what your stressors are (reflect on your stressors using the [checklist](#) in the last edition of Well-being this Week) and (2) identify your thoughts and beliefs related to your stressors. Although some stressors are outside of your control, your thoughts and beliefs are within your control. A major part of managing stress is learning to recognize and change the sorts of thinking patterns that intensify your emotions and lead to poor coping.

Thinking patterns of people who are highly stressed

- People who are highly stressed have specific patterns of thoughts and beliefs that are automatic and instantaneous.
- These thoughts and beliefs
 - are inaccurate or exaggerate or distort reality, and
 - intensify your emotions and lead to poor coping.

Generally, people who are highly stressed believe the world is full of negatives and they don't have as much control over those negatives as they should.

A very important step toward managing stress is identifying your stress-related thinking patterns so that you change them.

Below are six of the most common stress-related thinking patterns. Each pattern is explained and has three statements for you to consider whether you agree or disagree. If you agree with one or more of the statements, you might have a habit of using that thinking pattern.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

You think in all-or-nothing terms. There are no in-betweens. No middle ground. A situation is either wonderful or awful. This type of thinking causes stress because in reality things are rarely all good or all bad; they are usually somewhere in the middle.

	Agree	Disagree
I often see things as either <i>perfect</i> or <i>awful</i> with no middle ground	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I frequently use terms like "always," "never," "everyone," and "no one."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Something isn't worth doing if I can't do it perfectly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Musturbation

You believe your happiness depends on things going as you think they *must* or *should* go. This type of thinking causes stress because in reality we can't always control situations or events, and we can't be perfect all the time.

	Agree	Disagree
People should always treat me with kindness and respect.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I must be successful, respected, and attractive, or else I can't be happy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Things should be as comfortable as I want them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Jumping to Conclusions

Even though it hasn't happened yet, you automatically assume that something dreadful is just around the corner. Or you decide you know what someone is thinking (as if you could read the person's mind), and you are so convinced someone is reacting negatively you don't look for proof.

	Agree	Disagree
I tend to expect the worse.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's important to always prepare for the worst possible outcome of a situation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many things I worry about end up turning out far better than I thought they would.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Awfulizing and "What If?" Thinking

You imagine the worst possible (101% bad) outcome and then treat it as a foregone conclusion. This type of thinking causes stress because in reality not *everything* is going to go wrong.

	Agree	Disagree
I tend to expect the worst.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's important to always prepare for the worst possible outcome of a situation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many things I worry about end up turning out far better than I thought they would.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I-Can't-Stand-Its

You see yourself as unable to cope with a stressful situation. This type of thinking causes stress because you become annoyed or discouraged easily, and may seek immediate gratification instead of long-term benefit.

	Agree	Disagree
I get annoyed easily over nuisances, inconveniences, and hassles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am impatient and have trouble putting up with frustrations in the short term, even when there is something to gain in the long run.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often procrastinate-putting difficult or onerous activities off until some future time-or escape through sleep or use of alcohol or drugs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Labeling

You attach an extreme negative label to yourself, someone else, or an event. This type of thinking causes stress by quickly moving from "I made a mistake" to "I'm the worst educator ever."

	Agree	Disagree
Most people are good or bad.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People who make lots of mistakes are not as worthy as people who make fewer mistakes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MI often judge people based on their actions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

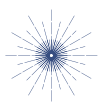
Other Stress-Related Thinking Patterns

The lists above are just examples. Have thoughts or beliefs that commonly occur when you are stressed? List them here:

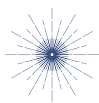
Why does this matter for my well-being?

- Identifying what is causing your stress is the first step toward understanding the ABC's of your stress:
 - A = activating events (those you just identified!)
 - **B = beliefs (thoughts and perceptions related to A)**
 - C = consequences (negative emotions and poor coping resulting from AxB)
- Next issue, we will dive into how to help improve the outcomes (Cs), now that you have more information about your stressors and thinking/belief patterns.

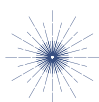
Well-being this Week Take-Aways



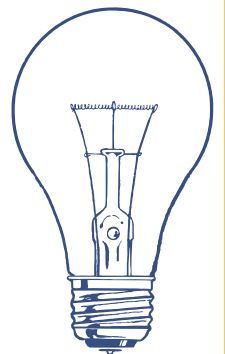
The thoughts and beliefs that "color" how you interpret situations, thoughts, and feelings contribute your stress.



Learning what your stress-related thinking patterns are is a critical step in reducing stress reactions you can control.



Once you know your most common stress-related thinking patterns, you can start to decrease your stress.



Well-being work isn't selfish. It's necessary.

If you have suggestions for future columns, please email Dr. Sanetti at wellbeingthisweek@gmail.com