

# Well-being this Week

FOR EDUCATORS • BY EDUCATORS

## Take charge! Tips for changing your stressful thinking.

*by Lisa Sanetti, PhD*

As reviewed in issue 1.4 of 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 helpful ways for thinking about stressors. To do that, you need to identify your unhelpful thoughts and beliefs related to your stressors (issue 1.4), and then implement some changes to your stressful thinking.



If you haven't read issue 1.4 and identified your unhelpful thought patterns yet, use the checklist at this QR code



### FACTS:

Stressful thinking patterns escalate your stress.

When you are stressed, there are likely more accurate ways of thinking about the things that are happening to or around you.

Accurate thinking  $\neq$  Positive thinking

### How do I think more accurately?

Below are six of the most common stress-related thinking patterns, introduced in issue 1.4, with one strategy you can try if you find yourself using that stress-inducing pattern of thinking. At the end is a log you can use to log your attempts and consequences.

## Stressful Thinking Pattern



## Helpful 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.

Ex: *My new sweater has a pull in it - now it is totally ruined!*

### Seeing Shades of Gray

There are "degrees of badness" in even the most stressful experiences. Recognizing these shades of gray will help you get a better handle on your stress.

Ex: *It's not perfect, but it isn't totally ruined. No one else will probably even notice!*

### Musturbation

You believe your happiness depends on things going as you think they *must* or *should* go.

Ex: *If I help Juan, he should return the favor and do something to help me!*

### Preferences

Rethink "musts" and "shoulds" into *preferences*, *wishes*, and *desires*-rather than rules or demands.

Ex: *It would be nice - and I'd prefer it - if Juan returned my favor, but there is no rule saying they have to.*

### 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. OR you are so convinced someone is reacting negatively you don't look for proof.

Ex: *My superintendent will never support this new initiative, so why both asking?*

### Examine the Evidence

Instead of assuming your negative thought is true, challenge your thoughts, examine the evidence, and consider a more realistic belief.

Ex: *Maybe it is unlikely the superintendent will support this initiative, but the worst they can say is "no," and they have said "yes" to things that have surprised me before.*

## Stressful Thinking Pattern



## Helpful Thinking Pattern

### Awfulizing and "What If?" Thinking

You imagine the worst possible (110% bad) outcome and then treat it as a foregone conclusion.

*Ex: I am going to be fired if my school's test scores don't go up as much as I want them to?*

### Challenge Your Thinking

Ask these questions: What does past experience tell me about this? Have I expected something bad to happen and it didn't before? How might someone else look at this?

*Ex: Other leaders haven't met their goals and still work here. I expect the worse. Others are impressed with the school's progress !*

### I-Can't-Stand-Its

You see yourself as unable to cope with a stressful situation.

*Ex: I can't stand my child's teacher! They don't know how to teach math or talk with parents!*

### You CAN Stand It

You will not die from things you think you can't cope with. You can choose how to "stand" any situation.

*Ex: Dealing with my child's teacher is unpleasant, but I can handle it.*

### Labeling

You attach an extreme negative label to yourself, someone else, or an event.

*Ex: Meetings with these parents are horrendous; they are so annoying. We are doing our best!*

### Judge the Behavior, Not the Person

Think about labels you use. Are they true? Remember everyone (a) makes good and bad decisions & (b) has areas of strength, skill, & vulnerability.

*Ex: The parents are loud and argumentative, but they are doing their best for their child.*

## Shifting My Thinking

[illegible]

## Shifting My Thinking

[illegible]

# Reflections

The suggestions above are just some of the ways you can increase the number of more accurate, helpful thinking patterns to reduce your stress. What other ways of thinking have helped you?

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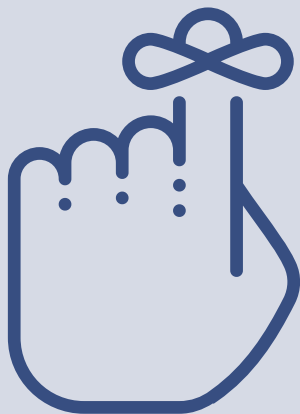
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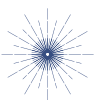
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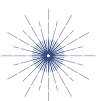
## Accurate thinking:

- Decreases your initial stress reaction
- Increases your ability to effectively address situations, further reducing stress!

## Well-being thisWeek Take-Aways



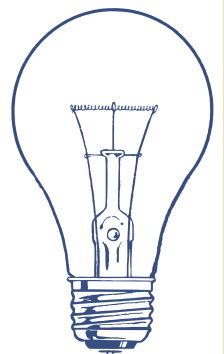
Everyone has some unhelpful thinking patterns that contribute to their stress.



There are more accurate and helpful thinking patterns you can practice to decrease your stress.



With practice, your new thinking patterns will become automatic!



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

If you have suggestions for future columns, please email Dr. Sanetti at [wellbeingthisweek@gmail.com](mailto:wellbeingthisweek@gmail.com)