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# Goodbye Anxiety

**Taking the Stress Out of Your  
Thinking**



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# Taking the Stress Out of Your Thinking – How to Transform Your Emotions by Taking Control of Your Mind

## 1. We are responsible for what we use our minds to think about.

*“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” - Philippians 4:8*

*“We take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ.”  
- 2 Corinthians 10:5*

## 2. Events do not produce stress and anxiety, our thoughts do.

*“You will keep in perfect peace, him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.”- Isaiah 26:3*

Here are three important principles that explain why learning to manage your thoughts is a key to reducing stress and anxiety:

**Principle 1: Situations and events do not directly determine your emotions.**

**Principle 2: How you think about situations and events is what determines your emotions.**

**Principle 3: The more you think negative thoughts the more negative emotions (stress or anxiety) you will feel.**

These simple, yet powerful principles are based upon a theory written by psychologist, Albert Ellis, in the 1960's. His theory said that emotions are not the result of actual events. Instead, your thoughts about an event expressed by self-talk produce your emotions.

**Actual Event → Thoughts/Self-Talk → Emotions (Stress, Anxiety, etc.)**

## 3. Types of Irrational (Untrue) Thinking that Contribute to Stress and Anxiety

*“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” - 1 Peter 5:8*

*“When he (the devil) lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”- John 8:44*

### **“Should” Thinking**

“Should” thinking is holding the unrealistic belief that everything should be exactly the way you want it to be. It is turning personal preferences, wants, and choices into absolute rules in your mind. These rigid expectations are usually expressed with words like “should,” “ought to,” “have to,” and “must.”

### **Black-or-White Thinking**

Black-or-white thinking (also called all-or-nothing thinking) is viewing everything in extremes. The black-or-white thinker sees no grey area. If something is not right, it's wrong. If something is not good, it's bad. If a person is not beautiful, then he or she is ugly. If you don't succeed, then you have failed.

### **“Yeah, but” Thinking**

People who do “yeah, but” thinking tend to exaggerate mistakes, dwelling on what is wrong with themselves, someone, or something. They focus on the negative part of most everything, perceiving it to overshadow anything positive. People who think this way make lots of statements that start with “yeah, but.”

### **Catastrophizing**

Another way to magnify the negative part of something is by catastrophizing. Catastrophizing is blowing negative events or feelings way out of proportion. It is thinking of small mistakes or minor setbacks as major catastrophes through exaggeration. You will hear people who engage in catastrophic thinking saying things like “this is so horrible,” or “this is so terrible.” Magnifying negative events leads to a magnification of panic, anxiety, and fear.

### **“What If?” Thinking**

A twist on catastrophic thinking is “what if?” thinking. “What if?” thinking is just catastrophic thinking about the future. Many people who suffer from stress and anxiety have highly analytical minds that can think of an infinite number of possibilities in a given situation. Using this gift to think of only negative possibilities produces anticipatory anxiety.

### **Overgeneralizing**

Overgeneralizing means assuming that something that happens one time in one place or situation (usually an event that produces stress) will continue to happen in all places and situations.

### **“I Can’t” Thinking**

“I can’t” thinking is believing that the forces that govern your life circumstances are completely beyond your control. Many people who suffer from stress or anxiety hold the fundamental belief that they are powerless to make choices that will affect the important outcomes in their lives.

### **“It’s All My Fault” Thinking**

“It’s all my fault thinking” is blaming yourself for things you really can’t control. This creates stress and anxiety that comes from feeling too responsible for other people’s emotions, decisions, or behavior.

### **Negative Mind Reading**

Negative mind reading, as the term implies, is assuming that other people are thinking and feeling negative things about you without any real evidence to support your assumption. Some people who suffer from stress and anxiety live as though they are psychic, always assuming the worst-case scenario when interpreting other people's comments, expressions and behaviors.

### **Emotional Reasoning**

Emotional reasoning compounds all of the other types of irrational thinking. When you engage in emotional reasoning you use your emotions, or how you feel, as evidence to back up your irrational thinking, even in the face of strong evidence to the contrary. This leads to feeling needless stress or anxiety in response to events or circumstances.

#### 4. To change irrational or untrue thoughts:

*“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” – Romans 12:2*

- a. **Record** exactly what you are telling yourself in your mind when you feel stressed or anxious. You may record your thoughts as statements in a journal.
- b. **Re-evaluate** the stress or anxiety-producing thought by questioning it:  
  
Do I have any objective evidence that this will happen (or is true), or am I just jumping to a conclusion?  
  
Could another person with the same experience come up with a different explanation of what happened?  
  
How many times have I worried that this would happen, and how many times did it really happen?  
  
What is a more rational statement that I could make to someone else and be believed?
- c. **Replace** each stress-producing thought with a more rational or truer statement.
- d. **Rehearse** the replacement thought often, especially when you catch yourself thinking irrationally or negatively.

#### 5. Examples of Replacement (True) Thoughts

*“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” - John 8:32*

**When things aren’t the way I think they should be** (“Should” Thinking).....

*“In this world I will have trouble, but I will take heart because Jesus has overcome the world.” (John 16:33)*

**When I start labeling myself a failure** (Black-or-White Thinking).....

*“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” (1 Corinthians 1:27)*

**When I get too focused on my mistakes** (“Yeah, but” Thinking).....

*“God’s grace is sufficient. His power is made perfect in my weaknesses.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)*

**When I think something really bad has just happened** (Catastrophizing).....

*“Nothing, not even death, can separate me from the love of God.” (Romans 8:38)*

**When I am worried about the future** (“What If?” Thinking).....

*“I will stop worrying about tomorrow because tomorrow will worry about itself. I will seek first God’s kingdom, and trust God to supply my needs.” (Matthew 6:33-34)*

**When I think I will never succeed at something because I haven’t succeeded yet**

(Overgeneralizing).....*“I am a new creation in Jesus Christ. My past does not have to be my future.” (1 Corinthians 5:17)*

**When I feel helpless or powerless to do something** (“I Can’t” Thinking).....  
“I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13)

**When I get self-critical or down on myself and can’t forgive myself** (“It’s All My Fault” Thinking).....“God will forgive my sin and purify me from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

**When I get too worried about what other people think of me** (Negative Mind Reading)..... “I am not trying to please men but God, who tests my heart...I am not looking for praise from men.” (1 Thessalonians 2:4, 6)

**When I am afraid of something because I don’t feel confident inside** (Emotional Reasoning).....“God’s perfect love will drive out the fear I am feeling.” (1 John 4:18)

**6. Activity**

Choose the type of thinking that causes you the most stress or anxiety. Write at least one anxiety or stress-producing thought from your chosen category in one or two sentences. Then create a more rational or truer statement to replace it.

**Irrational (Untrue) Thought**

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**Thought Type**

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**Replacement (Truer) Thought**

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“The one thing over which you have complete control is your thinking. Use it well.”

- Brian Tracy