

## Automatic thoughts undermining self-esteem

Every person has typical for him or her ways of thinking, interpreting and reasoning. It is common not to be aware of them. This is why they are called 'automatic thoughts'. Sometimes, there can be some patterns or even distortions observed in them, occurring independently from situation. These distortions can become very destructive and contribute to consolidation of negative thinking about oneself.

**Listen to your inner voice... and recognize the automatic thoughts undermining your self-esteem.**

Type of an automatic thought	Example	Description
<b>Assuming</b>	„I know I'll do a lousy job even though I'm perfect.”	Assuming the worst without testing the evidence.
<b>Shoulds /Musts/ Oughts</b>	„I should have know better.”	Shoulds/Musts/Oughts are demands we make of ourselves.
<b>The fairy-tale fantasy</b>	„ That's not fair that it happened to me.”	Type of fantasy demanding the ideal from life.
<b>All or nothing thinking</b>	„If I am not performing perfectly, I'm a loser.”	With this way of thinking you hold yourself to the impossible standard of perfection.
<b>Overgeneralizing</b>	„I always get rejected in love.”	Belief that negative experiences describe your life completely.
<b>Labeling</b>	„I'm boring.” „I'm a loser.”	Giving oneself a label, or name, as though a single word describes a person completely.
<b>Dwelling on the negative</b>	„How can I feel good about myself when I make mistakes?”	Focussing in on the negative aspects of a situation, while ignoring the positive aspects.
<b>Unfavorable comparisons</b>	„John is so bright, he gets straight A's.”	In comparisons to others one would seem inadequate or inferior – always coming out on the short end of the stick.
<b>Catastrophizing</b>	„I couldn't stand if she were to leave me. It would be awful.”	Focusing on horrible and awful predictions.
<b>Personalizing</b>	„It's all my fault.”	Seeing oneself as more involved in negative events than one really was.
<b>Blaming</b>	„He has ruined my life and my self-esteem.”	Putting all the responsibility for difficulties on something outside of yourself.

## Learn a new skill to identify and challenge negative automatic thoughts

### Step 1.

Describe the situation, when you had negative/self-critical thought (date, place, circumstances).

### Step 2.

Describe your mood:

- type of feelings
- their intensity (on the scale 0-10; 0=not at all, 10=very high).

### Step 3.

Write down the self-critical thought.

### Step 4.

Rate how much do you believe the self-critical thought (on the scale 0-10; 0=not at all; 10=completely).

### Step 5.

Find evidence for - refers to the information that you feel backs up your thought.

### Step 6.

Find evidence against - refers to the information that doesn't back up your thought or contradicts your thought.

### Step 7.

Build a balanced, realistic perspective - when you've considered all the evidence, try to come to a more balanced, realistic perspective about the situation.

### Step 8.

Re-rate belief – considering a new more balanced, realistic perspective about the situation, re-rate how much you believe your original thought.

### Step 9.

Re-rate your mood – considering a new more balanced, realistic perspective about the situation, re-rate original mood.

## The analysis of an example.

What to do if one has a tendency to dwell on the negative and catastrophizing?

**Step 1. Situation...**  
10th April, 6 pm.  
Getting ready to go out, trying on different outfits

**Step 2. Mood...**  
Upset - 8,  
Irritated - 9,  
sad - 7

**Step 3. Automatic thought...**  
I am fat and ugly. I will better stay home instead of making a fool of myself.

**Step 4. Strength of my belief...**  
Simply 10.

**Step 5. Evidence for...**  
Recently I've put on weight a few pounds. My ex-boyfriend laughed at me when I dressed in that way.

**Step 9. Original mood re-rating?**  
Upset - 2, Irritated - 3,  
sad - 2

**Step 8. Original belief re-rating?**  
Maybe 3 or 4...

**Step 7. A realistic perspective...**  
There are different opinions on me. Lots of people have given me compliments. A negative opinion of my ex-boyfriend doesn't make it a fact.

**Step 6. Evidence against ...**  
Even if I've put on a few pounds – it doesn't mean I'm fat. My ex-boyfriend used to laugh at me always when he was angry. Sue has told me that she likes me for who I am, not for how I look.

### Summary

- When you feel bad about yourself, notice what you say to yourself.
- You can learn to challenge harmful, self-critical thoughts and replace them with more helpful, realistic thoughts which can help you to improve your self-esteem.
- There are a number of questions you can ask yourself to help you change the way you think about yourself.
- The more frequently you practice this skill, the more efficient you become.