

Reducing Anxiety With Thought Challenging

Thought challenging is a simple yet powerful cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) technique for reducing anxiety.

As mentioned, anxiety is best described as the unhelpful thinking patterns you experience when your mind fixates on threat, uncertainty and negativity. Thought challenging helps by broadening your focus to include the bigger picture.

Below are two thought challenging techniques you can experiment with. Keep practicing and discover what works best for you.

The ABCDE Technique

Attention – When you feel distressed, stop what you're doing and pay attention to your inner dialogue. What is your mind telling you?

Believe? – Do not automatically believe your thoughts!

Challenge – Defuse anxiety by broadening your focus. What's the bigger picture? Is the thought fact or opinion? What might you think if you were feeling calmer?

Discount – Acknowledge that anxiety has been dominating your thinking and let the unhelpful thoughts go.

Explore options – What would be helpful to focus on right now? What options do I have available?

The THINK Technique

True? – Is this thought 100% true? If not, what are the facts, and what is opinion?

Helpful? – Is paying attention to the thought useful to me or others?

Inspiring? – Does the thought inspire me or does it have the opposite effect?

Necessary? – Is it important for me to focus on the thought? Is it necessary to act on it?

Kind? – Is the thought kind? If not, what would be a kinder thought?

Thought Challenging Tips

- Writing or typing your thought challenging process is more powerful than trying to do it in your head. We recommend trying out the free CBT Thought Diary app ([Google Play](#), [iTunes](#)).
- If you're not used to paying this much attention to your inner dialogue, thought challenging might feel unnatural at first. That's okay. Over time, it'll start to feel easier.
- This isn't the most appropriate tool if you're feeling very distressed, as it can be hard to think rationally when your emotional brain has taken over. Try defusing your emotions with a distraction activity (see the following page) and returning to thought challenging once you're feeling calmer.

Adapted from Carol Vivyan (2006)

