Maintaining a Positive Outlook

Our feelings sometimes seem very powerful. The way we feel influences how we think about a situation and how we act.

But it is also true that the very opposite us also true. That is, our **thoughts** – what we say to ourselves in our head (our *self-talk)* – have a powerful influence over how we **feel** and what we **do**.

The way we think about a situation can affect how we feel and, consequently, how we react and behave in a situation.

For example, if we tell ourselves helpful thoughts, it can help us feel optimistic about a situation and make it more likely we will do something positive.

Over time, we can practice helpful thoughts to help create more positive thoughts, feelings and actions such as:

Thought	Feeling
I/We can do this!	Hope
I/We will get through this. I will do everything I can to make this work.	Determination
This is ok, we have survived tough times before	Positivity

At times of stress it is easy to think in a negative way. It can help to identify some positive and helpful thoughts to say to yourself when you feel stressed, such as:

- I am a strong person
- I can be myself. I've got lots of good qualities
- I can try harder
- I've got people to help me
- I've got people who love me
- I have coped before

What are some positive thought you have used before?

If you find it hard to think positively about yourself it can sometimes be helpful to ask yourself what would my best friend say about me?

It is important to remember that a positive belief system and way of thinking can contribute to coping with difficult situations.

It is worth taking time to stop and consider how you are thinking about a situation.

The following example has been provided to help you and your family to explore this idea:

What happened?	What was I thinking?	How did I feel?	What did I do?
I forgot to give Lucy her medicine	I am a terrible parent and will make her condition worse	Miserable Guilty	I cried and went to my room
My husband came home late and didn't tell me	He is selfish and not committed to us	Angry	I ignored him when he came home

Think about some situations that have happened recently and write down what happened, what you were thinking, how you felt and what you did.

What happened?	What was I thinking?	How did I feel?	What did I do?

Becoming aware of our thoughts means realising that they are *just thoughts* and you have power to challenge them and to choose to think about a situation in a helpful way.

When challenging your thoughts, ask yourself:

- Are they true?
- Do I want to let them control my actions?
- Am I exaggerating?
- Am I making things worse thinking this way?

It's ok to have unhelpful or negative thoughts (everybody does!) but what's important is what we do with them. We can give them less attention or we can try to change them into something that is more realistic and more helpful. We don't have to be blindly positive and just think the opposite of our negative thought, we can simply practice being kinder to ourselves.

We don't have to give power to our unhelpful thoughts if they make us feel miserable, worried or upset. We don't have to act on unhelpful thoughts.

Referring to the examples above, here are some examples of changing thoughts to something more helpful.

What happened?	What was I thinking?	What I could think instead?	What would I feel?	What would I do?
I forgot to give Lucy her medicine	I am a terrible parent and will make her condition worse	I'm so busy no wonder I forgot.	A bit guilty but forgiving of myself	Write a big reminder note and stuck it to the fridge where I would see it.
My husband came home late and didn't tell	He is selfish and not committed to us	I would like to know why he was late and didn't tell	Upset but respectful he probably has a reason	Calmly asked why he was late

Now thinking about the examples you wrote above, try writing down how you could change your thinking to something more helpful, and how it might change how you felt and what you did in that situation.

What happened?	What was I thinking?	What I could think instead?	What would I feel?	What would I do?

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Changing unhelpful thoughts to helpful thoughts takes effort and will require practice and persistence.

However, becoming more aware of how you are thinking and how it is connected to how you feel and behave can help make things easier when you are facing stressful times.

You have the power to control your thoughts and actions!

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