healthyminds™
Education & Training

PARENT SUPPLEMENT
MODULE 2

Evidence-based psychological skills training
for mental health, wellbeing and resilience
in your school

2021

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Helpful vs Unhelpful Thinking

● **Key Concepts**

■ **Key Student Activities**

⬡ **Discussion Points**

★ **Parent Self-Reflection**

- Session 2 introduces a key principal underlying emotions and psychological wellbeing: that **our thoughts affect our feelings**, but they aren't always accurate or helpful. Whereas many people presume that the events in their lives cause their feelings, it is actually the interpretation or *automatic thoughts* we have that determines how we will feel. It looks something like this:

Situation or Event	→	Thoughts	→	Feelings	→	Behaviour
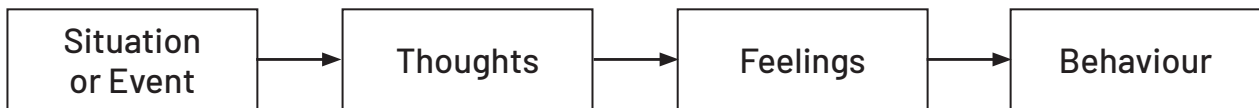
If you want more information on automatic thoughts, you may wish to investigate these online, such as here:

http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/thoughts.htm

- There are certain common unhelpful habit of thinking, called *Thinking Errors*, that feature prominently for many people when they are under stress or just not aware of their thinking. Some of these are:

  1. Black-or-white thinking
  2. Discounting the positive and magnifying the negative
  3. 'Shoulds'
  4. Overgeneralisation
  5. Fortune telling
  6. Mind reading

- Students are introduced to the concept of *flexible thinking*:

  1. Being able to offer many possible interpretations in ambiguous situations
  2. Being able to offer the perspective of different people to the same situation
  3. Being able to offer alternative, competing perspectives in arguments
  4. Being able to identify exceptions to the rule

Key Student Activities

- Students match examples of automatic thoughts with *Thinking Errors*.

- Students guess at the possible feelings that come about as the result of various automatic thoughts.

- A group activity prompts students to use their *flexible thinking* skills.

Discussion Points

- Ask your child if they notice any of the thinking errors in themselves.

- Who in your family is naturally good at *flexible thinking*, and who tends to be a bit more 'black-or-white'?

- Can you identify any common situations that might be ambiguous, and you or your child might tend to jump to conclusions? For example, if a friend is late to an agreed meeting, do you start thinking the worst case scenario, or does your thinking tend to be realistic or calm?

Parent Self-Reflection

- Am I a 'flexible' person in terms of my thinking?

- When I am discussing a problem or issue, do I tend to verbalise other people's perspective or alternative explanations, or do I tend to jump to conclusions?

- Can I relate to any of the common *Thinking Errors*?