

Disentangling from the Entangled Mind

A series of 5 short audio recordings to manage repetitive negative thinking

Table of contents

What the programme is based on.....	2
Who the programme is for.....	2
How to use the programme.....	2
The nature of thinking: helpful and unhelpful.....	3
Thinking about the past.....	3
Thinking about the future.....	3
The flow of thinking.....	3
Themes in thinking.....	4
Themes in unhelpful thinking.....	4
How we get entangled.....	4
Negative thinking as disrupter-in-chief in everyday life.....	5
How to recognise unhelpful negative thinking.....	5
More information on each audio.....	6
Additional Resources.....	7

What the programme is based on

The programme is based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a therapeutic model which suggests that worry and rumination play a crucial role in the development and maintenance of emotional problems in people's lives. It also offers principles and strategies to help you unhook from unhelpful thinking and direct your energy and motivation to more valued activities.

The audio exercises were developed by Professor Ruiz and his colleagues. Their team used the audio exercises in therapy trials with people who experienced repetitive negative thinking. The results, which showed significant improvements, have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Who is this programme for?

Anyone who finds themselves caught up in unhelpful negative thinking. See "Themes in Unhelpful Thinking" (page 4) for more information on unhelpful negative thinking.

How to use the programme

We think you will gain most benefit if you

- listen to the audio exercises regularly over a period of at least 6 weeks, working through them in order, following the suggested timetable below. Through repetitive listening, the aim is to "unlearn" unhelpful and entrenched old ways of thinking
- choose a time and a place so that you can give each exercise your undivided attention, with as few distractions as possible. The exercises are not designed for listening to while driving or cooking, etc.
- have your eyes closed while listening (but this is not essential)
- please alternate audio files as you wish

Week	Time	Audio Exercise
1	Every day 10 minutes	Listen to Audio 1: Recognising the Entangled Mind
2	Every day 5 minutes	Listen to Audio 2: Observing the Mind in Action OR Audio 3: Awareness of the Mind in Action
3	Every day 15 minutes	Listen to Audio 4: How we get entangled
4	Every day 5 minutes	Listen to Audio 5: Moving forwards
5	Every day 10 minutes	Revisit Audio 1
6	10 minutes for at least 2 days	Revisit Audio 4 and Audio 5

The nature of thinking: helpful and unhelpful

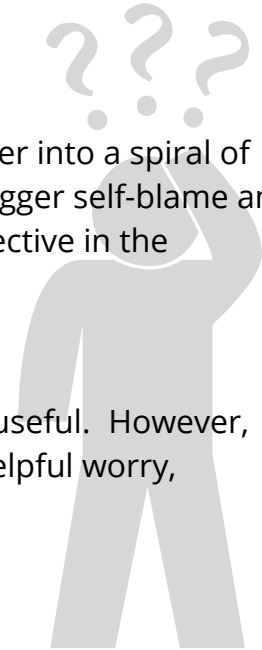
Much of our thinking is about learning from the past and preparing for the future. That makes complete sense, and helps us manage the challenges we all face in our day to day lives.

Thinking about the past

Helpful reflection that enables us to learn can all too easily slip over into a spiral of unproductive regret: "if only ..., if only ..., if only ...". It can also trigger self-blame and guilt, which generally makes it harder rather than easier to be effective in the present.

Thinking about the future

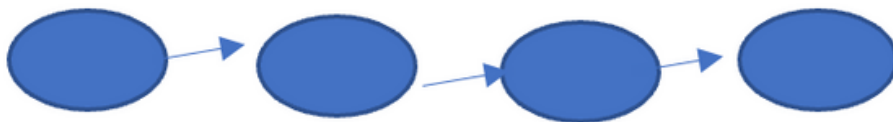
Thinking ahead, planning and problem-solving are important and useful. However, sometimes our minds can turn from this helpful thinking into unhelpful worry, undermining rather than supporting our ability to cope.



The flow of thinking

Much of our thinking flows along like a stream.

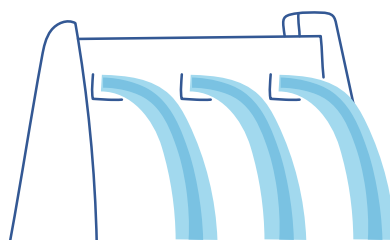
Sometimes we have a sequence of connected thoughts that lead somewhere, such as when we problem solve or reflect.



Sometimes thinking is more fragmented, a seemingly random sequence of unconnected thoughts with no particular direction.



But sometimes our thinking gets stuck, as if someone had put a dam in the stream, so the same thoughts go round and round and round



Sometimes the dam lifts after a short time, and thinking starts flowing again... But sometimes we get stuck for a long time or we find we keep getting stuck in the same places. It is as if the underlying currents have a strong pull and suck us in.



Themes in thinking

When we observe our thinking we see how much of it relates to our current responsibilities and concerns. It is as if we are keeping track of the things we need to do and the things that are important to us, that interest us. All very helpful.

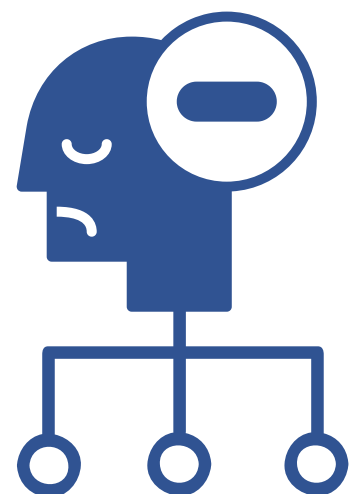
Themes in unhelpful thinking

Unhelpful thinking also has themes. Common themes in unhelpful negative thinking are often centred around negative beliefs about ourselves, others or the world. Examples of negative beliefs about ourselves are of having failed, of letting people down, of not being able to cope, of not being liked. These thoughts are often very upsetting. They have also often been around for a long time and feel 'true'.

How we get entangled

One initial thought, for example, about a mistake we have made, activates the overarching theme, which we might call the "disruptor-in-chief". In this instance, the disruptor-in-chief might be responsible for a thought such as 'I let people down', which then snowballs generating thoughts of other situations in which you think you have, or think you might let other people down.

Also, because this is upsetting we want to fix it, and it can seem like the way to fix it, is to keep thinking about it, turning the problem over and over as if that would change it. It can feel as if it should be the focus of our attention. But what is your experience of continuously turning the problem over? Has it helped?

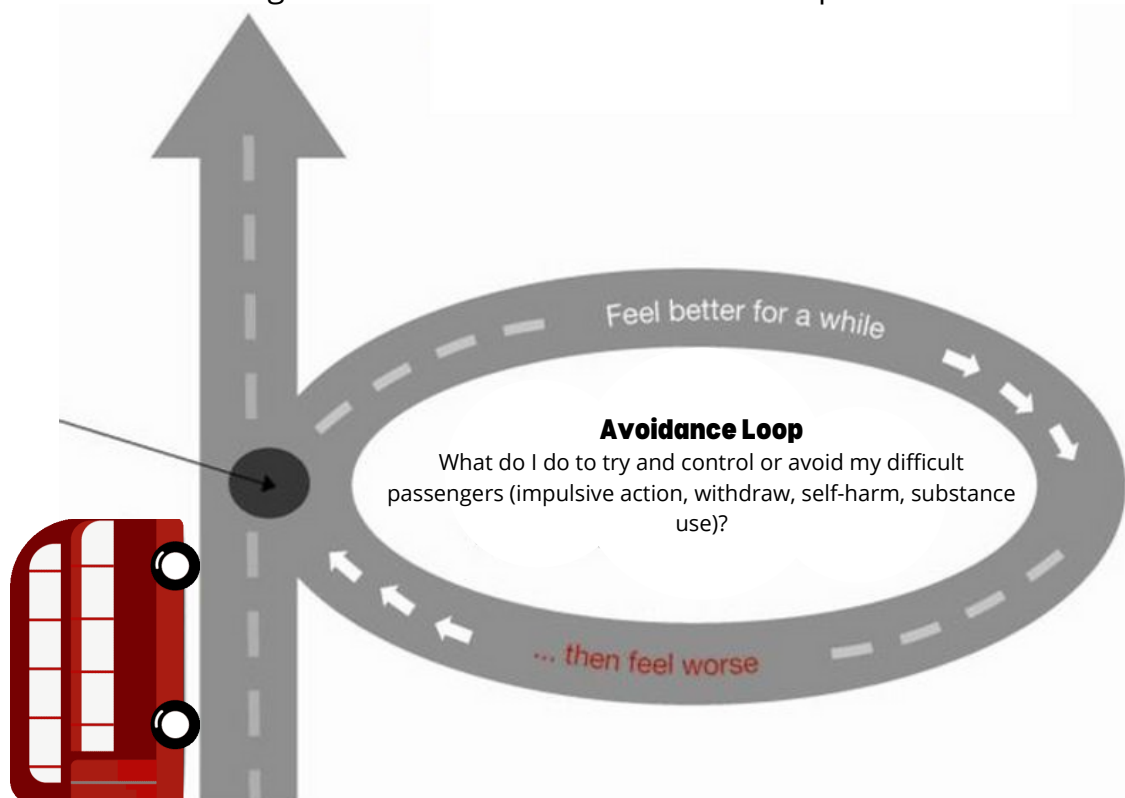


Negative thinking as disrupter-in-chief in everyday life

All day long we are making smaller and larger decisions about what to do, such as whether or not to go to the shop, whether to do some chore now or leave it for tomorrow, whether or not to apply for a job, whether or not to accept an invitation to go out with some friends, etc. etc.

When we feel low or anxious it's particularly easy to make the choices that we feel will avoid further stress or pressure even though, at another level, we can see that these choices are not in our best interests in the longer term.

What kind of thinking is it that can kick in at those choice-points?



How to recognise unhelpful negative thinking

From the outline above we can see that unhelpful thinking

- Goes round and round getting nowhere
- Pulls us in so that it is difficult stop
- Often has an underlying theme that is personal and negative, so it leaves us feeling worse about ourselves, less confident, less motivated
- Doesn't lead to solutions or effective action
- Doesn't leave us feeling more at peace with the things that can't be changed

Everyone experiences this sometimes!

More information on each audio

Audio 1: Recognising the Entangled Mind

This exercise is an opportunity to learn to

- recognise entangled thinking as it is happening,
- and begin to practice getting disentangled.



It invites you think about the day ahead so the best time to do it is fairly soon after getting up in the morning, but don't worry if another time suits you better. Feel free to pause the recording if you need longer at any point.

Audio 2: Observing the Mind in Action

This short exercise invites you to notice the thoughts or images that arise in the mind in response to the words you will hear, and how you can choose whether to let them be without either pursuing them or pushing them away.

Audio 3: Awareness of the Mind in Action

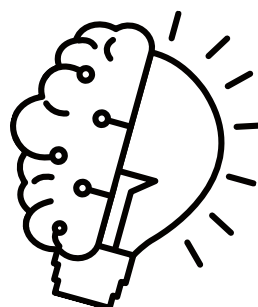
In this exercise you are invited to allow your mind to dwell on first something positive and then on a worry. In doing this in this way we create reminders that can help you interrupt worry in the future, and thus strengthen your ability to step out of negative thinking.

Audio 4: How we get entangled

Because we often don't notice that we've become entangled in unhelpful thinking until it's been going on for some time, this exercise includes an opportunity to think back to how this happens. Practising with this audio should help start to notice negative thinking sooner, before it gets a grip.

Audio 5: Moving forwards

The final audio in the series focuses on what you might want to give your mind to, as the negative thinking starts to take up less space.



Additional Resources

If you have found this material helpful and would like to learn other useful aspects of the therapeutic model on which it is based, please see the resources below:



Books

- The Happiness Trap, by Russ Harris
- Get out of your mind and into your life, by Steven Hayes
- The Compassionate Mind by Paul Gilbert

Apps

- ACT iCoach - <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/act-icoach/id1449444733>
- The Happiness Trap App - <https://www.actcompanion.com/>