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# Facts For You

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## Change Your Thinking

Your perceptions about the events or your thinking style and attitude can contribute to your level of stress regardless of the stressful situation. Psychologist have found that we hold number of beliefs that are self defeating, task interfering and goal-blocking in nature. The following exercise is helpful to discover which of your beliefs can create or worsen stressful situation.

### **Stress – Inducing Beliefs Indicator (SIBI)**

Do you recognise any of the following? The questions include both work and general beliefs. Circle the strength of your belief, where S represents 'strongly', M represents 'moderately' and W represents 'weekly'. Include in Questions 25 any additional beliefs you hold that causes you further stress.

Table 1

1	S	M	W	Events should go smoothly.
2	S	M	W	Work must be exciting and stimulating
3	S	M	W	If I lost my job, it would be awful.
4	S	M	W	If I lost my job, I could not bear it.
5	S	M	W	My job is one of the most important things to me.
6	S	M	W	I must perform well at all important tasks.
7	S	M	W	My work should be recognised by others
8	S	M	W	I am indispensable at work

9	S	M	W	I must enjoy myself whatever I am doing
10	S	M	W	I must not get bored
11	S	M	W	I should not encounter problems
12	S	M	W	I should have the solitude I deserve
13	S	M	W	I must escape from responsibilities and demands
14	S	M	W	I should be treated fairly
15	S	M	W	I should be treated as special
16	S	M	W	I should be in control of all significant situations
17	S	M	W	Others should respect me
18	S	M	W	I should get on well with my friends and family
19	S	M	W	My children should do well in life
20	S	M	W	If things went badly, it would be awful
21	S	M	W	If things went badly, I could not stand it
22	S	M	W	Things never work out well for me
23	S	M	W	If things go wrong, those responsible are stupid, useless, idiots or failures
24	S	M	W	If I fail at a task, that proves I'm a failure or useless
25	S	M	W	Additional beliefs (write them in)

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If a person holds on strongly in one of the beliefs listed in the SIBI, when an event occurs that does not live up to expectations, stress may result. Therefore, the more beliefs you hold strongly or even moderately, the more stress you are likely to encounter. Do note that 'should', 'must', 'have to', 'got to' and similar demanding ideas you may hold are interchangeable. So if instead of a 'should' you use a 'must', this will still rate on the questionnaire. If you scored more than 10 strongly, it is very likely that you make many situations into potential stress scenarios! Even if you hold any of the above beliefs only moderately, under extremes of pressure you are likely to become quite stressed.

### Thinking errors

Psychologists have identified thinking errors that frequently contribute to stress and hinder successful problem solving. It is dealt with in two stages:

- I. Identify the thinking errors you most commonly use.
- II. Use thinking skills to help modify the errors.

### Activity I: Thinking errors

Think back to the last time you were moderately stressed. Tick or highlight the following thinking errors that you recognise.

### **All-or-nothing thinking**

We view things in absolute, extreme terms without any shades of grey.

Examples:

*If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing really well.*

*My partner always makes the same mistakes.*

### **Labelling**

We 'globally rate' ourselves, others or the universe, as opposed to rating skills deficits or specific behaviours.

Examples:

*Because I've failed any professional exams, it proves I am a total failure.*

*She's late again. That proves that she's incompetent.*

### **Focusing on the negative**

**Instead of keeping life or events in perspective, we focus only on the negative aspects.**

**Examples:**

*Projects are always going wrong in my job.*

*Our parents are always causing us problems.*

### **Discounting the positive**

**We choose to reframe anything positive as unimportant.**

**Examples:**

*When my manager gives me positive feedback she is only saying it to be nice. She doesn't really mean it.*

*My boyfriend only tells me that he loves me because he feels sorry for me. He doesn't really care.*

### **Mind-reading**

**We conclude from people's behaviour that they are either thinking or reacting negatively towards us.**

**Examples:**

*I'm sure my colleagues think that I can't undertake this project successfully.*

*My neighbour has ignored me again. He must have seen me in the garden. What have I done to upset him?*

### **Fortune-telling**

**We predict the worst-case scenario, often by using insufficient evidence.**

**Examples:**

*We won't reach the deadline. I can see it all going wrong.*

*What's the point in going on holiday? The weather is bound to be awful and we'll get stuck in traffic again.*

### **Magnification or 'awful sing'**

**We have a tendency to blow the significance of events out of proportion and make mountains out of molehills.**

#### **Examples:**

*If we don't reach that deadline, the outcome will be awful.*

*If she leaves me, it will be the end of my world.*

### **Minimisation**

**We condemn ourselves for our shortcomings and make excuses for our successes or strengths.**

#### **Examples:**

*Getting the contract was really nothing. I'm not a good salesperson.*

*The exams I passed were easy ones. I was lucky.*

### **Emotional reasoning**

**We evaluate situations by how we feel.**

#### **Examples:**

*I feel so angry; it proves that he treated me badly.*

*I feel so anxious about flying; it must be dangerous to fly.*

### **Blame**

**Instead of taking any personal responsibility, we blame others for problems that have occurred.**

#### **Examples:**

*It's all Managing Director's fault; she shouldn't have given me so much work.*

*Where are my keys? Who has moved them?*

### **Overgeneralization**

**We predict repeated outcomes on the basis of only one event.**

#### **Examples:**

*I've got off to a bad start today. That means the rest of the day will be a write-off too!*

*There is no point in applying for promotion as they have already turned me down once before.*

### **'Personalisation'**

**We blame ourselves unfairly for something for which we are not totally responsible.**

#### **Examples:**

*The team did not reach the target. It's all my fault.*

*My children have done badly at school and I am totally to blame.*

### **'Demandingness'**

**This occurs when we hold unrealistic expectations or rigid and absolutist beliefs, which are usually expressed as 'should', 'got to', 'have to' and 'ought'.**

#### **Examples:**

*I must perform well regardless of the lack of resources.*

*My partner and I should never row with each other.*

### **'Phoney-ism'**

**We fear others may find out that we are not the person we portray.**

#### **Examples:**

*Even though so far I have given good lectures, one day I'll make a mistake and they will discover how incompetent I really am.*

When my children grow up they will realise what a hopeless parent I was.

### **'I-can't-stand-it'**

**We lower our tolerance for dealing with adversity or frustrating situations by telling ourselves that 'I can't stand it' or 'I can't bear it'.**

#### **Examples:**

*I can't bear travelling on the underground in the rush hour.*

*I can't stand small rooms or noisy children.*

Activity II shall provide a range of thinking skills and strategies to help you challenge and modify these errors. Useful thinking skills that may help challenge your thinking errors.

### **Activity II: Thinking skills**

#### **Relative Thinking**

While identifying events in extreme terms, such as 'Excellent versus Poor' try to introduce shades of grey. Find some middle ground to keep the situation in perspective.

For example, instead of thinking 'She never reaches her targets', be more realistic: 'Although this year she has failed to reach two targets on time she has successfully achieved eight others'. Introduce less extreme attitude.

## **Befriend yourself**

When a member of family or colleague makes mistake or error most people are supportive; therefore we can say that they have befriending skills. However, how often do you use these skills on yourself? When you make a mistake can you accept yourself? Or you criticise yourself?

For example instead of thinking 'that was a hopeless presentation, which proves I am totally useless' step back from the situation and describe it accurately like 'I know areas I can focus on to improve my next presentation'.

## **De-labelling**

When you describe someone as 'total failure', 'useless', 'idiot', or similar examine your idea more closely. Think carefully.

For example, instead of thinking, 'I have failed in my exam; therefore I am a complete failure'. Focus on behavioural aspect avoid as far as possible rating of you. All it proves is that 'I have failed though too bad I can survive this hassle' When you are angry about yourself or other person rate the behaviour and not the person.

## **Broaden the picture**

Concentrate on the positive and realistic aspect of the situation rather than focusing on negative side. When things go wrong individuals too often blames themselves or others.

Whatever situation you find yourself in, try to broaden the picture when blame enters the equation. This technique is used when an employee totally blames him or herself for not reaching a work dead line. First write down all the factors or people involved. Second, draw a circle on large sheet of paper. Third using the circle draw pie diagram, with each section approximately equating to the fault or responsibility of the different factors or people involved. Finally whatever is left of the pie diagram is probably your responsibility.

## **Seek evidence**

Avoid mind reading or making assumptions. Look for the evidence for your stress inducing ideas. This may involve asking your family, friends or colleagues for feedback about presentation, completing a task, or some personal issue. Avoid 'beating about the bush'. Ask a direct question. For example, if you believe that 'I can't stand queuing' and you find in a situation when you have to queue, join the longest one and remind yourself that 'Although I don't like queuing, I can stand it'.

## **Think more flexibly**

Demanding beliefs trigger high levels of stress therefore introduce flexible beliefs such as preferences, desires and wants into your list.

**For example:** instead of thinking 'I must perform well', 'I should achieve my deadlines regardless of lack of resources', or 'Although it is highly desirable to achieve my deadlines, with the current lack of resources I can only do my best'

**Keep emotions in their place**

When people make the emotional reasoning thinking error, they evaluate the situation on the strength of their feelings and not on the situation itself.

For example: tell yourself 'Just because I'm feeling anxious it does not mean that flying is dangerous,' or 'I feel very angry because I misinterpreted my partner's actions. I'll ask him what it was all about.'

**Conclusion:**

To summarise, thinking skills are used to promote realistic thinking. Things may be bad or really awful, unless we allow our thinking to make them so!

**(Reference:** How to Deal with Stress)

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