

About Automatic Thoughts

Our thoughts are constantly helping us to interpret the world around us, describing what's happening, and trying to make sense of it by helping us interpret events, sights, sounds, smells, feelings.






Without even realising it, we are interpreting and giving our own meanings to everything happening around us. We might decide that something is pleasant or nasty, good or bad, dangerous or safe.



Because of our previous experiences, our upbringing, our culture, religious beliefs and family values, we may well make very different interpretations and evaluations of situations than someone else. These interpretations and meanings we give events and situations, result in physical and emotional feelings.

Something happens or we notice something, which triggers a thought. Particular types of thoughts tend to lead to particular emotions.

Thoughts	Emotion
I'm in danger and I won't be able to cope with it	Anxiety, Fear 
I'm being treated unfairly and I won't stand for it	Anger, Frustration 
Everything is hopeless – I'm totally worthless, no-one likes me, and nothing can change	Depression 

Automatic thoughts...

- Can be words, an image, a memory, a physical sensation, an imagined sound, or based on 'intuition' – a sense of just 'knowing'
- Believable – we tend automatically to believe our thoughts, usually not stopping to question their validity. When another driver cuts me up, I might judge that he's a selfish thoughtless toad, but in fact, he might be taking his wife to hospital as she's about to give birth. Thoughts are not necessarily true, accurate or helpful.
- Are automatic. They just happen, popping into your head and you often won't even notice them.
- Our thoughts are ours – they can be quite specific to us, perhaps because of our present or past experience, knowledge, values and culture, or just for no good reason at all. Some thoughts are so out of keeping with all those things, and that can make them seem all the more distressing – because we add some meaning about why we had them (I must be a bad person!)
- Habitual and persistent – our thoughts seem to repeat over and over, and the more they repeat, the more believable they seem, then they set off a whole chain of new related thoughts that lead us to feel worse and worse. They can follow themes, for short periods, or very often, throughout years and decades.