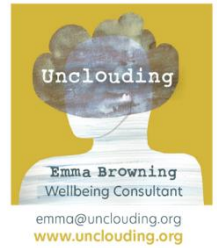


Section 1: Why we think negatively and how it can make us stressed and unhappy.



A good first step to supporting someone with their anxiety, stress or low moods is to help them understand and recognise how they are creating that behaviour. Section one is designed to help individuals notice which thoughts are triggering the emotions they find challenging and vice versa. Through discussion and reflection individuals should be able to see their own behaviour and experiences reflected in the simple text and illustrations.

When individuals recognise the emotional stories they are telling, it can help them gain greater perspective and distance from them. Use the text and illustrations to inspire conversations which explore their stressful thoughts patterns and feelings that need addressing. All of this work prepares individuals for section two, where they can start to learn how to do things differently.

Topics for discussion:

- Do they recognise what they are thinking, and can they notice when new storylines first start up? Can they describe their trains of thought in reference to a story that they are mentally telling? For example, “I am telling a story about how life is not fair” What is the plot of this story, who are the characters? And is the information within it completely true? How do they know when a story they are telling might be making them stressed or unhappy? What do they feel in their body, when this story is running? Have they had this or a similar story like this before? Can they see any patterns or storytelling habits? This line of questioning can help someone to gain some objective distance from being consumed inside their stories and they can recognise the stories which cause them stress and how they might not even be 100% true.
- Discuss the concept of having a negativity bias and how even though it doesn't feel like it, some of the negative stories that we tell are actually our minds way of trying to protect us. This can help someone to understand that negative thinking is not wrong. If you can see your stories as the mind being protective instead of stressful, it can change our attitude to our thoughts.
- How seriously do they take their stories and what makes them feel real and believable? Do they believe everything they think? Can they think of examples when they have thought things in the past that were not in fact true? Discuss how convincing the mind can be when it is in negative storytelling mode. Discuss how thoughts are not facts and how just because you think something, **does not** make it true.
- Get the individual to look back on their life and recognise the common patterns of negative storytelling that they habitually do: What stories from the past do they often tell that make them stressed or unhappy? Have they created negative thinking and feeling habits from repeatedly thinking the same thing again and again and cementing that neural pathway in place?
- Discuss whether they tell unhappy stories about things going wrong in the future? Why do they think they do this? Return to conversations about negativity bias and how these stories are just our mind trying to protect us and help us to make good decisions.
- What ideals about their life do they hold onto that causes some negative stories to grow? Explore where these ideals have come from and whether they still serve them well today.
- Explore whether they have told certain negative stories for so long that they have now become a hardened belief, which taints the way they see certain aspects of life? Can they recognise that this has happened and how it affects them today?