

ABOUT AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS



Our thoughts - all 70,000 to 100,000 of them every day - are constantly helping us to interpret the world around us, describing what is happening, and trying to make sense of it by helping us interpret events, sights, sounds, smells, feelings.

Thoughts are simply electro-chemical impulses in our brain. **Thoughts are NOT statements of fact.**




DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK!

CBT says that it is not the event which causes our emotional and behavioural reactions, but the meaning we give that event - what we think ABOUT that event.



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

Particular types of thoughts tend to lead to particular emotions.

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

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 to automatically 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. Often based on emotion (rather than facts), which drives our opinion. **Don't believe everything you think!**
- ❖ 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.