

For Children: Helpful Thinking Handout



Learning to identify the hurtful thoughts that create negative feelings is an important skill. It's very difficult to detect hurtful thoughts because they occur almost automatically, like breathing. However, if you pay attention to your breath, you can control it. It is the same with thinking; if you become aware of what you are thinking and how it makes you feel, you can understand your thoughts and develop the ability to control them.

This handout lists common categories of unhelpful thoughts that can occur after a disaster, and how these thoughts may make you feel, as well as more helpful thoughts to replace them. Once you identify some of the thoughts, the key to helpful thinking is to practice the helpful thoughts often.

Common Unhelpful Thoughts	Resulting Emotion	Alternate Helpful Thoughts	New Emotional Response
"Things will always be like this." "Things will never get better." "My future is hopeless."	Hopeless Sad Scared	"I see what others are doing to improve the community." "It may take a while, but my community will rebuild." "With some changes, I can still achieve my goals."	Hopeful that things can get better Happier Stronger
"I have no one to turn to if I need help." "I can't do anything to help my family." "I can't handle this anymore."	Scared Lonely Frustrated	"I have my parents, my teachers, and my friends who can help me." "I can do chores or pick up my toys, to help my family." "I know that seems hard right now but it will get better."	Stronger Happier Calmer Hopeful that things can get better
"If I shared how I feel with others, they wouldn't care." "My new school does not want me." "I'll never fit in with these kids."	Unloved Lonely Sad Frustrated	"My parents are willing to listen and be a support." "I will get used to my new school." "I will make new friends who share my same interests."	Loved Happier Hopeful that things can get better
"Bad things always happen to me." "The world is a dangerous place." "I'm not safe."	Sad Scared Hopeless	"Good things happen to me, too." "The world is not always dangerous." "Feeling unsafe isn't the same as being unsafe."	Happier Stronger Hopeful that things can get better