

## Thinking Errors

It is estimated that our brains produce as many as 50,000 thoughts per day depending on how 'deep' a thinker you are. Most of the so-called random daily thoughts are about our social environment and ourselves.

Likewise it is estimated that upwards of 80% of our daily thoughts are negative. We often dwell in the past or the future, obsessing about mistakes we might have made, battling guilt, planning ahead or worrying. We are constantly drifting into fantasy, fiction and negativity.

A healthy first step to alleviate this problem, therefore, would be to increase one's awareness of these negative and irrational thoughts. Once individuals have awareness of these thoughts they can work to eliminate them and replace them with more rational and productive thinking patterns. You'd be surprised how much control you can have over your thought processes and your ability to control your emotional responses, even if they number 50,000 a day.

### The Thought Process

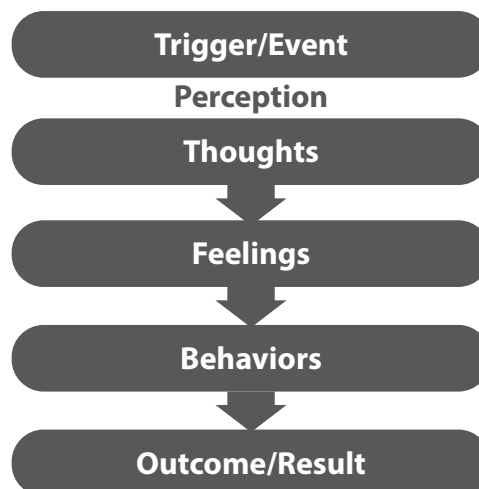
The human mind is a wonderful thing. Cognition, the act or process of thinking, enables us to process vast amounts of information quickly. Unfortunately, our cognition is not perfect, and there are certain judgment errors that we are prone to making. They happen to everybody regardless of age, gender, education, intelligence, or other factors.

Our thoughts are extremely powerful. They dictate our emotions and our behaviors. Therefore if we want to change our emotions and our behaviors, we must change our

thought patterns. The cognitive process is sometimes difficult to understand because it happens so quickly.

In the diagram below, you can see an example of how this process can happen. Typically, there is a precipitating event or trigger that occurs; this can be a small and almost undetectable event or something more obvious that occurs.

We see that event through our own set of "lenses" or perspective which comes from our own beliefs, experiences, etc. Almost instantly, our thought process begins to churn and spit out various thoughts about the event, about others, and/or about ourselves. The way we think about what is happening will produce feelings in ourselves. These feelings can then grow or subside depending on our continued thought process. Then as a result of those feelings, we behave according to our emotion. Our behaviors are perhaps the easiest to recognize but they are tethered back to our thoughts. Our behaviors then result in a particular outcome, positive or negative. This process happens thousands of times per day.



### In This Edition:

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- The Thought Process
- Common Errors
- What to do?

### Who is West Ridge Academy?

- Gospel Centered
- Spiritual Based
- Youth Residential Treatment
- Helped over 25,000 youth and their families
- Established in 1964



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Since the thought process is so powerful and influences what we do every day, we better make sure that our cognitive process is working correctly! Can you think wrongly? Can you have errors in your thinking? You bet you can... and you probably do. We all have "Thinking Errors." Thinking errors are just that- errors in the way that we think.

### Common Thinking Errors

- **I'm special** – rules are for others, not me
- **Lying** – making things up or leaving things out
- **Minimizing** – making my actions appear smaller or insignificant
- **Justifying** – giving reasons to prove why my actions are "ok" (excuses)
- **Victim playing** – getting others to feel sorry for me
- **Blaming** – shifting responsibility for my actions to someone else
- **Slamming** – putting others down to build myself up
- **Assuming** – believing that I know what others think or feel
- **Anger** – use to control, threaten, or intimidate to get my way
- **Apathy** – having an "I don't care" attitude to escape responsibility
- **Confusion** – acting confused, "puzzled," or claiming not to understand in order to avoid responsibility
- **Maximizing** – making little details appear more significant to avoid focusing on the real issue at hand ("making mountains out of molehills")
- **Helpless** – claiming to be unable to do or control something that is within my control

- **Derailing** – changing the subject to avoid talking about my behavior
- **Splitting** – creating conflict between others so that I can get my way
- **Silent power** – refusing to talk or explain how I feel in order to distract or frustrate others and avoid addressing the real issue
- **Vagueness** – giving unclear responses to avoid the reality of what I really did or what really happened
- **Perfectionistic** – Believing I have to be perfect or others want me to be perfect
- **Denial** – Refuse to acknowledge the problem and/or my personal responsibility

### Changing Thinking Errors

Thinking errors are often motivated by avoidance, such as:

1. Avoidance of uncomfortable feelings.
2. Avoidance of perceived negative consequences (with kids/teens avoidance of getting in trouble).
3. Avoidance of focusing on the real issues.
4. Avoidance of being wrong.
5. Avoidance of taking responsibility.

**Identify the Thinking Error:** You must first realize that you have a thinking error in order to challenge it. When you are feeling very emotional, this is a SIGN that you may have a thinking error. Pay attention to your emotions and it can help you identify what you're thinking. Also, take a look at the thinking error list and ask yourself if any of them fit your current mind-frame.

**Evidence of Proof:** Ask yourself, "Do I have any evidence or proof that what I'm thinking is true?" You may think, "But I failed in the past. Isn't that evidence?" Just because you've failed in the past doesn't prove you'll fail in the future. Think through the evidence and create an amended thought or belief about the situation.

### Alternative Interpretation

**Method:** Find different ways to interpret what happened. Find other possible explanations and consider them. We often jump to conclusions.

**Inquiry Method:** Just ask! Instead of assuming or mind reading, just ask the person.

**Double Standard Method:** Ask yourself what you would say to someone you really cared for. Would you say negative things, put them down, and give them bad advice? No, you wouldn't. This would be cruel and illogical, so why would you say that to yourself?

**Cost-Benefit Method:** Ask yourself the pros and cons of thinking a particular way. Making a list may be helpful.

**Experimental Method:** Do an experiment to test your thinking.

**Change Self-Talk:** Changing your inner language can help a lot. Instead of saying, "I can't," say "I can." Even if we don't believe it, it's still more helpful than always saying negative things - plus we may come to believe those positive things about ourselves.

**Is This Helpful?:** Sometimes the simplest way to challenge a thinking error is to ask yourself, "Is this helpful?" Just by analyzing if our thinking pattern is helpful may lead us to find more productive ways of thinking.