

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN TO MASTER YOUR MOOD

What's the difference between emotions and moods?

Emotion and **mood** are words that are often used interchangeably, but there are differences. Emotions, or feelings, are short-lived feelings that come from a known cause. We feel many emotions each and every day. Moods are different. They tend to last longer, may not be tied to a specific cause, and have more to do with how we feel about ourselves and the world in general. Emotions can range from happy, ecstatic, sad and prideful, while moods can be positive, negative, or neutral (and all of these are perfectly okay, unless they are interfere with how you're functioning. In which case, you may want to consult a healthcare professional).

The connection between thoughts, emotions and actions

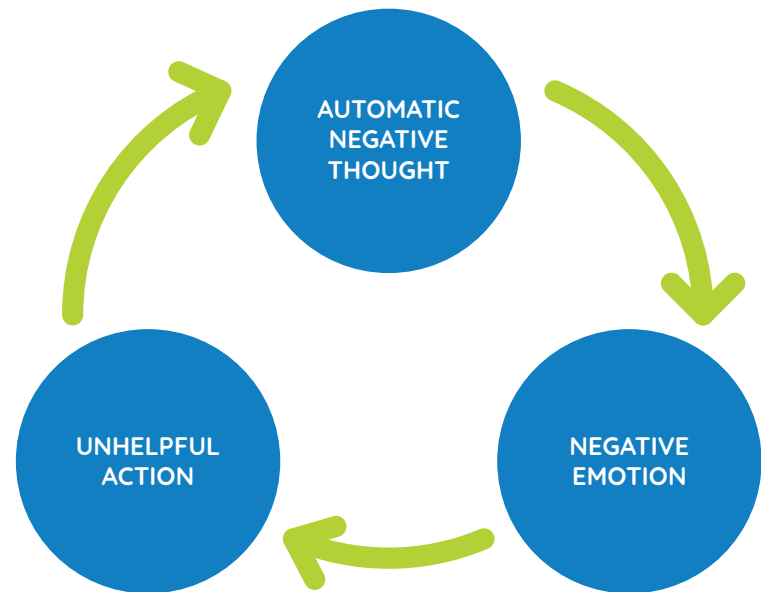
There is a direct connection between what we think, feel, and do. Here's an example:

Your manager sends you an email late Sunday night and asks to meet with you first thing the next morning. Your first thought is, "Oh great, what did I do this time?" Feelings of anxiety start bubbling up inside of you. You think about how hard you've been working, and that your boss just doesn't seem to appreciate it - you feel upset. They've just ruined your weekend. You stay up later than usual, thinking through all the things you're going to say in the morning, and wake up already exhausted for your work week. You think to yourself, "My week is ruined already."

We get caught up in traps like this all the time. And when you keep going around and around this negative loop, it can end up impacting your overall mood quickly.

The first step to beating this cycle is to train your brain to recognize those automatic negative thoughts. If you recognize them, you can practice adjusting them before they impact how you feel and act.

Has this ever been you? When something happens to us, our mind often jumps to automatic negative thoughts (ANTs). These thoughts then trigger emotional reactions in us, and our feelings impact the way we behave. This actually creates a negative loop in our minds that looks something like this graphic.



THINKING TRAPS

Exploring Unhelpful Thoughts

Here are 10 common thinking traps that you can learn to recognize in your own life. Do any of these sounds familiar to you?

1

LABELLING

You use negative words, like “loser,” “failure,” or “idiot,” to describe yourself or others when things don’t go as planned.

2

BLACK AND WHITE THINKING

You see things only in extremes. Good or bad, perfection or failure – there’s no grey or middle ground.

3

DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

You focus on the negative by discounting good things that have happened. “She just said that to be nice.”

4

CATASTROPHIZING

You imagine the worst possible outcome of an action or event. It’s easy to have one bad night of sleep; catastrophizing means telling yourself that you’ll never sleep well again.

5

MENTAL FILTER

You focus only on the negative details while filtering out positive aspects of a situation. “I got two needs improvement sections in my evaluation. I’m terrible at my job.”

6

OVERGENERALIZATION

You make broad statements or assumptions with only a single piece of evidence. For example, if you once gave a poor speech, you may think, “I can’t speak in public without messing up.”

7

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

You assume that you know what others are thinking or feeling. “Everyone is laughing at me.”

8

“SHOULD” STATEMENTS

You use words like “should” or “must” and put undue pressure on yourself. “I should be cleaning the house.”

9

EMOTIONAL REASONING

You assume that the way you feel is reality. “If I feel that way, it must be true.”

10

PERSONALIZATION

You believe everything others say or do is a direct, personal reaction to you.

TRAINING YOUR BRAIN

Recognizing automatic negative thoughts is half the battle!

When you find yourself in a negative loop, here are some questions you can ask yourself to help you get unstuck:



What's the evidence to support the way I'm thinking?

We often make assumptions that aren't based on facts. Bring yourself back to what you know for certain and use that to ground yourself.



Is this something I can control?

We spend a lot of time getting upset or anxious about things that we simply have no control over. If you can't control it, there's no sense worrying about it!



What's the worst that can happen?

Take a minute to play out the worst-case scenario. Often it's not as bad as what we jump to in our minds. If you can figure out how you'd respond in the worst case, suddenly reality doesn't seem so bad.



What's good about this?

If we're not careful, we miss the good things that happen in our days. Remember, if you're alive and breathing, there's more right with you than wrong.



If you can learn to recognize and re-frame the negative thoughts you might have, you'll be on your way to a better mood! But remember, it takes practice, patience, and self-compassion to get there.