

The Eight Things we Humans do to Create Stress

Although stress ends up manifesting as physical symptoms, it is a fact that all stress begins in your brain. In cognitive behavioural therapy, we look at how our thoughts impact our behaviour and ultimately steer our lives.

Below is a list of eight things that we, as human beings, are prone to doing: -

Catastrophising

Is everything a disaster for you? If something goes wrong, are you immediately thinking that all is lost? Have you heard people saying such things as *'my life is over'* or *'I will never get over it!'* Some people thrive on drama but, in the main, it isn't healthy to be living in a heightened state of stress. Catastrophising things that happen to you will, over time, create neural pathways that allow your brain to continually seek confirmation that everything is a major issue.

What to Do

Become aware of whether this is something that you do. If it is, stop yourself before it begins, and ask the following questions:-

- How bad is it really?
 - Will this matter tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, five years from now? *{as applicable}*
 - How will my reaction affect the situation? - It is not what happens to you that influences a situation; it is how you react to it.
 - What more constructive way could I react?
 - How can I find a solution to this problem?
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Generalisation

Generalisation is, for instance, how racism occurs. It is when you believe on a personal or **global level** that something is true in general.

For example:-

- All redheads are volatile
- The world is a dangerous place
- I won't succeed because I have a poor education
- Corporations do not care about their staff
- The government is out to get us
- No one likes me

There can be literally millions of generalisations that people make every single day, without realising the negative impact it has on their lives. *Is this something that you do?*

Generalisations are built on our belief system. But, beliefs are **NOT** facts. They are simply the way your brain has constructed its opinions on your experiences. Beliefs can easily be changed.

What to do

Become aware of your own generalisations and listen to how others generalise. You will be amazed at the frequency of the human generalisation. When you find yourself making a generalisation, question the belief behind it until you have got to the bottom of how it started. Then, simply break it down and create a more empowering belief.

Mind reading *{assuming we 'know' what others are thinking about}*.

How many times have you heard, "*I know what you are thinking*" The Truth is that none of us know 100% for certain what another person is thinking. We may judge this by assigning meaning simply from an expression on someone's face. Oftentimes, we are so badly off track that we end up creating a huge miscommunication. Mind reading damages our

relationships. How many times have you created a whole story based on your assumption on what someone else is thinking?

What to do

Clarify! Ask what the other person is thinking. For example:-

"Sarah, it seems as if you are not really interested in my presentation. Is that the case?"

"No Brian, I am sorry but my mum was taken into hospital last night, and I am worried about her"

"Oh, I am so sorry to hear that Sarah. Would it be better if we rescheduled our appointment?"

"No Brian. It's me that is sorry. I asked you to call. Let me go and get us a coffee and I will get my head straight by the time I come back"

By clarifying what Sarah was thinking, Brian has created a superb example of how to build trust. He didn't go off in a huff, angry with Sarah. Indeed he showed empathy and was immediately rewarded by Sarah bringing her attention back to their meeting.

Polarised and rigid thinking

It is said that the happiest people are those have the most flexible thinking. Personally, from experience, I believe this to be true. People that have polarised and rigid thinking are difficult to deal with. They find it hard to see another person's point of view and will not shift from their stance even if the other person is right. As with many on this list, once again, it comes down to having a concrete belief system. If you cannot possibly see yourself shifting from a belief, I guarantee you will be creating a considerable amount of stress in your life

What to do

Question every belief that you have. How is it serving you? Is it a life enhancing belief or a life restricting belief? If it is the latter, then it will serve you well to change it. Think of the things you believed when you were fourteen years old. Do you still have exactly the same

beliefs now? Beliefs are best if you allow them to be fluid and flexible. Why? Because, if you can shift a belief in a heartbeat, this will reduce the impact of stress in your life.

Emotional reasoning – *'I feel bad; therefore I must have done something wrong'*

As human beings, we are a mass of feelings. But, unfortunately we can get caught up in the meaning of our feelings. Do you know what I mean? You probably do. Sometimes, for no apparent reason, you suddenly find yourself feeling bad. You then start to judge what is happening around you and align meaning to these feelings by linking them to events. It's that feeling when someone says 'we need to talk'. Or you get called to the office for a meeting. You frantically try to work out what you have done wrong and build yourself up into an emotional frenzy. So, by the time you get to the meeting, you have created a dramatic story of the event. This is exhausting!

What to do

Let's not confuse these emotional feelings with gut feelings. Your intuition is a useful friend. This is different. When you find your emotions running wild, sit down, or go for a walk, and do some deep diaphragmatic breathing. Imagine you have a remote control unit for your emotions, and visualise hitting the pause button. You cannot predict the future, so stop trying to work out what you have done wrong. Learn to have belief in your courage, and ability, to cope with whatever it thrown at you.

Blaming

How easy it is to blame someone else for what 'happens to you'. But the truth is that every decision you make and every action you take has a consequence. One of the most beneficial things that you can do for yourself is to take responsibility for your actions and thoughts. Let's take an example of someone who is overweight. What food you put in your mouth every day dictates your weight and energy levels. If you are eating big Macs every day, don't be surprised if you are overweight and have no energy. If you take a walk, or run, and eat sensibly then you will lose weight and have more energy. It's not rocket science is it, really?

What to do -

Stop blaming others for your problems. If you have made a mistake at work, man up! Go tell someone that you made a mistake and suggest a solution. Taking responsibility for your experiences has the effect of disempowering potential conflict. Look at every aspect of your life and decide what you can take responsibility for. Once you take this road, you will gain confidence and also gain a great deal of respect from other people.

Filtering and magnifying

This is a little like catastrophising. But your brain filters the information in order to make things fit in with your beliefs. When this then seems to happen, it confirms your belief therefore making it even stronger. When you magnify, you exaggerate the importance or frequency of events that fit with your current belief. For example John had a series of mishaps, one of them involving a cycling accident. Then his brother had a cycling accident. My client was convinced that his father had put a hex on him from the grave. Everything that went wrong he aligned to this and did not want to shift from this belief.

What to do

Try to see the whole picture. Deal with facts not assumptions, even if the facts don't 'fit' with your belief. Try to build a case against the negative belief and check that you are not blowing element out of proportion. Did other people react in the same way as you?

Emotive language *i.e. 'I won't live if he leaves me!'*

The words that you speak provide messages to your brain that will dictate your experiences. For instance if you state, 'It would be the worst thing if X happens. I wouldn't get through it' But actually, you will get through it. But by stating that you won't, you may find it more difficult to cope with. Emotive language is one of the main reasons why people end up convincing themselves that they will not be able to cope. In truth, you always have more resources than you believe.

What to do

Listen to your vocabulary to minimise a situation. So, rather than saying 'this is awful', try saying 'what steps can I take to find a way to cope with this?' Strive to remain the neutral observer and think objectively. Resist allowing your thoughts to throw petrol on the fire of negative thoughts. It may seem a minor thing, but by asking your brain empowering questions it has no option to search for solutions.

If you can tackle each of these issues in your life, I guarantee that you will massively reduce conflict and potential stress. All of the above eight issues have created neural pathways in your brain that will then seek out confirmation of the belief. By reframing your thoughts, watching what you are saying and thinking and then choosing to say and think in a more constructive way, you will begin to build new neural pathways that will enhance your life, not restrict it.

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