



## Identifying Thoughts vs. Feelings and Using the Emotion Wheel

### What are Thoughts vs. Feelings?

#### *Thoughts:*

- Thoughts are the interpretations, beliefs, or evaluation your mind creates in response to situations, sensations, or experiences.
- They are the ongoing internal dialogue you have with yourself -- words, images, or ideas that you consciously or even subconsciously create throughout the day.
- Thoughts play a crucial role in shaping how you feel and act!

#### *Feelings:*

- Feelings are automatic, physical or behavioral responses that evolved for survival.
- They include simple reactions such as anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise.

#### *Main Difference:*

- Feelings are not conscious choices—they are automatic survival responses.
- We can influence our feelings by changing how we think and behave.

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## *Example:*

- Feeling: Fear in a high pressure situation (difficult social situation, challenging conversation)
- Thought: Anxiety or worry that your words will change how people perceive you and your self worth

## **Instructions:**

- For each scenario provided, describe the immediate feelings you would feel in that situation.
  - And then create two separate potential thoughts that would come from that feeling, one thought that would be unhelpful and another thought that would be constructive.
1. We all face moments of *stress, frustration, confusion, or self-doubt*—especially when navigating work, relationships, and daily responsibilities. It can be helpful to understand the difference between feelings, which are *automatic and instinctual*, and thoughts, which are shaped by how we think and make sense of our experiences.
  2. This reflection isn't about changing who we are or avoiding hard feelings. It's about *recognizing the first emotional reaction* we might have in a tough situation—and then exploring how different thoughts can shape our feelings in either helpful or unhelpful ways.
  3. The goal is to *build tools that support emotional balance, clear thinking, and self-trust*. There's no right or wrong answer, just a chance to

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better understand yourself and how you respond to the world around you.



Scenario:	Feeling:	Unhelpful Thought:	Constructive Thought:
You feel overwhelmed by the tasks you're asked to do at work or during your daily routine, and you're afraid of making mistakes.			

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You're having trouble talking to a support person or friend because they don't always understand what you need or how you feel.

You're feeling left out at your job or program because others are forming friendships, and you're not sure how to join in.

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## **Exercise #2: Using the Emotion Wheel**

**How can we accept our feelings, but change our thoughts?**

### Step 1: Recognize & Name Your Feeling

- Feelings happen automatically and are neither "good" nor "bad."
- Notice what you're feeling without judgment (e.g., "I feel anxious," "I feel frustrated").
- Labeling your feeling helps you understand it rather than react impulsively.

### Step 2: Accept the Feeling Without Fighting It

- Feelings are natural responses to situations; they don't need to be "fixed" immediately.
- Instead of saying, "I shouldn't feel this way," try, "It's okay that I feel this right now."
- Acceptance does not mean you have to act on the feeling—it just means acknowledging it.

### Step 3: Identify the Thought Behind the Feeling

- Feelings come from how we interpret the situation.
- Ask yourself, "What am I thinking that is making me feel this way?"

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- Example: "I failed my test" (emotion = sadness) » "I'm not smart" (thought) » Feeling = hopeless

## Step 4: Challenge & Reframe Unhelpful Thoughts

- Replace negative thoughts with more balanced, constructive ones.
- Example:

Instead of "I'm a failure" » Try "One test doesn't define me, and I can improve."

Instead of "No one likes me" » Try "Maybe they were busy; I can reach out again."

## Step 5: Adjust Your Actions & Focus on What You Can Control

- Thoughts influences feelings—change your thoughts to shift your feelings.
- Take small, productive steps:
- If you're feeling anxious about a test » Study in small chunks instead of avoiding it.
- If you're feeling lonely » Reach out to a friend instead of assuming they don't care.

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## Step 6: Use Mindfulness & Self-Compassion

- Remind yourself: "Emotions pass. I don't have to let them control me."
- Practice meditation and use coping techniques that we learned in previous lessons.

### **Instructions for Using the Emotional Wheel (Below):**

Think of two recent situations where you felt one of the **core 6 “emotions”**.

- Then within that emotion, circle 1 – 2 more **specific feelings** you felt within that core feeling.
- Then in the thought table below, reflect on an unhelpful **thought** that perpetuated negative feelings.
- Create a **constructive thought** that acknowledges the emotion, yet contributes to more positive feelings.

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1. Recent Situation Description #1:

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2. Recent Situation Description #2:

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3. Select a Core Emotion and Specific Emotion for each Situation on the Next Page:



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4. Fill out the Thought Table:

Core Emotion:	Specific Emotion(s):	Unhelpful Feeling:	Constructive Feeling:

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