

# Brighter Days

## Issue 5: Changing Harmful Thought Patterns

We all get down at times but the important thing to know is that we are in control of how we think and feel! There are practical strategies that help us better see the positive side of life. Last month, we discussed how engaging in pleasant activities can increase mood and improve resilience. This month, we'll explore how our thoughts influence our mood and learn ways to change harmful thought patterns.\*

### What Are Thoughts?

Thoughts are all the things we tell ourselves, and they can help us or harm us. Helpful thoughts are those that make you feel good, happy, or hopeful. Harmful thoughts are thoughts that make you feel stressed, drained, worried, sad, scared, or angry.

### Activity: Identifying Helpful Thoughts and Harmful Thoughts

Identifying helpful and harmful thoughts and how they affect your mood is an important step toward improving your mood. Try to think of some helpful and harmful thoughts that you may have and list them in the boxes below.

Helpful Thoughts	Harmful Thoughts

### Ways to Change Harmful Thoughts

Once you know what brings your mood down, there are things that you can do to help stop those harmful thoughts from spreading. Here are three specific strategies to use when you feel stuck or overwhelmed with harmful thoughts.



### Resources

#### SSM Health

For assistance in finding a behavioral health therapist or psychiatrist, call the Customer Care Center number on the back of your insurance card or use the “Find a Provider” feature on [deancare.com](https://deancare.com).

SSM Health also provides free phone education and resource coordination for members with complex, unstable behavioral health needs. To learn more, visit [deancare.com](https://deancare.com) or call our Customer Care Center.

*\*This information was developed by and re-printed with permission from Northwestern University Center for Community Health's Mothers and Babies program.*



### We are here to help

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Harmful Thought Pattern	Strategy	Example
<b>All or nothing thinking</b> Thinking in extremes – all good or all bad, best or worst, perfect or failure.	<b>Challenge your belief</b> Notice use of all or nothing words like always, never, or everything and think about what’s in the middle.	<b>“I’m a failure.”</b> Nobody is successful at everything, but you have been successful at some things in your life. What are they?
<b>Self-blame</b> Thinking that when things go wrong, they are always your fault.	<b>Self-instruction</b> Remind yourself to use the techniques listed here or how you want to handle things when they go wrong.	<b>“If only I would have..., this wouldn’t have happened.”</b> No one is perfect. Look at the situation as an opportunity for learning.
<b>Overgeneralization</b> Taking one negative event and seeing it as a never-ending pattern or that your future will turn out badly.	<b>Time projection</b> Imagine a time in the future when things will be better.	<b>“Things are never going to work out for me.”</b> This is just one situation. Remember that life will bring good and bad things. Enjoy the good things and remember that bad moments will pass by.

### Personal Project: Keeping Track of Your Thoughts

Every day this week, keep track of the helpful thoughts and harmful thoughts you had. Try to use two of the skills provided to work on reducing harmful thoughts and reflect on how effective that strategy was for you.

<b>What was the harmful thought?</b>
<b>What strategy did you use to try to stop the harmful thought?</b>
<b>How effective was the strategy?</b>

### Other Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):  
**nami.org**

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance:  
**dballiance.org**

Anxiety and Depression Association of America:  
**adaa.org**

### ▶ Next Month

We'll talk about how our relationships with other people affect our mood, identify the people in your life and the ways they support you, and offer other ideas you can use to improve your mood and manage your stress..