

Overcoming Negative Thoughts

PARENTS ASK:

What is negative thinking?

It's thinking about yourself in a negative way. About how things always go wrong for you. It's thinking about how bad you are. People can get so used to thinking like this that they believe they really are that bad.

PARENTS ASK:

What's wrong with that? Isn't it true sometimes?

Negative thinking makes it very hard to believe in yourself. It makes it really hard to keep trying.

Everyone feels bad at times. But it's important not to focus on blaming yourself for what happened.

Thinking positively makes it much easier to succeed. Positive thinking makes it easier for your child to lose weight and manage diabetes. It makes it easier for you to help your child.

Remind your child that a mistake isn't the end of the world.

PARENTS ASK:

How can I tell when a thought is negative?

Negative thoughts usually come down to one of 4 beliefs about yourself:

- ▶ I'm a failure.
- ▶ I'm hopeless.
- ▶ I'm a quitter.
- ▶ I'm pathetic.

Failure Thoughts are when you say something about yourself based on one thing that happens.

- ▶ "I dropped the plate, so I'm clumsy."
- ▶ "I didn't lose weight this week, so I'm no good at eating smaller portions."
- ▶ "I didn't do well on the math test, so I'm a horrible student."

Failure thoughts like these make you feel bad. They make you doubt your ability to do things. They hurt your self-image. They are also not true. They are not true because they are generalizations. They make

KEY GOALS

Overcoming negative thoughts will help your child continue to work on 4 key goals:

- ⊙ Limit RED foods
- ⊙ Increase GREEN activity
- ⊙ Hold Family Meetings
- ⊙ Keep Track of Weight

broad conclusions from one example. They don't take into account all the other times when things go well.

- ▶ Dropping a plate doesn't mean you are clumsy. It just means you had an accident.
- ▶ Not losing weight doesn't mean you're "no good" at eating smaller portions. It just means you made mistakes and need to figure out how to do better next time.



Here's what you'll learn about in this module:

- ▶ Identifying negative thoughts
- ▶ Challenging negative thoughts
- ▶ Turning negative thoughts into positive thoughts



- ▶ Not doing well on a test doesn't mean you are a horrible student. Maybe you didn't prepare as well as you could have, or you just had a bad day.

Can't Thoughts usually have the word "can't" in them. They make you feel helpless.

- ▶ "I can't avoid dropping things. It's hopeless."
- ▶ "I can't eat smaller portions. It's hopeless."
- ▶ "I can't pass that test. It's hopeless."

Of course, it really isn't hopeless. But if you feel hopeless, you may stop trying. If you don't try, it *is* hopeless.

Always/Never Thoughts are hopeless thoughts about yourself made stronger by using words like "always" or "never" to talk about failing. They make you feel like quitting.

These thoughts make big generalizations from little evidence. Always/Never Thoughts are also not true. They assume that what happens once or a few times will "always" happen. They say that you will "never" succeed so, you may as well quit.

- ▶ "I ate too many RED foods again. I'll *never* be able to meet my goals. It's over."
- ▶ "I missed another shot. I'll *never* be any good at basketball. I might as well quit."

- ▶ "I missed my calorie goal again. I'll *always* be overweight. Why keep trying?"

"Why me?" Thoughts are when you feel sorry for yourself because things aren't going your way. Of course, it's really hard to keep trying when you think it's unfair that you have to try in the first place. It's seeing yourself as pathetic: "Why me? Poor me."

- ▶ "Why should I have diabetes and have to lose weight? It just isn't fair."
- ▶ "It isn't right that I have to eat a healthy lunch at school when everyone else is eating burgers and fries and drinking soda."
- ▶ "Why should I have to do physical activity every day? None of my friends do."

PARENTS ASK:

What can I do about my child's negative thinking?

You can do more than you think. Teach your child to challenge her negative thoughts. If negative thinking goes on too long, she will soon have a very poor self-image. Who wants to think of herself as a failure? Who wants to think that nothing she does will work out? That's no way to live.

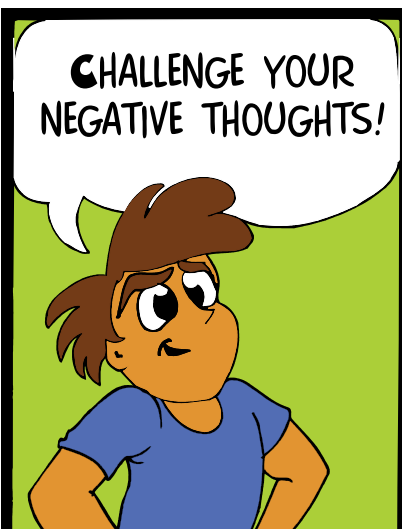
But it doesn't have to be this way. She can learn to challenge her negative thinking. She can learn to see herself in a more

positive way. A more realistic way. Here's what to teach her.

- ▶ *Turn a negative thought into a positive thought.*

Remind her that a mistake isn't the end of the world. Having a tough time learning new skills doesn't mean she can't. A mistake doesn't mean she has to quit. For example, if she missed her RED food goal for the day, she could say to herself, "I did everything right except for the RED food snack I had after school. I'll make sure there are no RED food snacks around. That way I won't be tempted."

Say to her, "Think of yourself as a winner. You don't quit."



Identify negative thoughts. Write them down. This is the first step in changing them to positive thoughts.

You're hopeful. You believe in yourself. You're a "can-do" person. You look for solutions. You're someone who meets challenges, not someone who complains about them."

▶ *Make a thought neutral if you can't make it positive.*

For example, if your daughter drops something, tell her to just say, "It was an accident. Accidents happen to all of us."

▶ *Pretend you're a friend.*

Tell your daughter to say to herself what she would say to a good friend who did what she did. That would be something positive. She'd want to make her friend feel a lot better about herself.

▶ *Problem-solve.*

Your child can find ways to avoid the situation altogether. She can

deal with it in a way that gives her a better chance of success.

▶ *Pretend you're an adult you trust.*

When your child thinks negative thoughts about herself, she should try saying what she thinks you or someone who really cares about her would say. That will probably be pretty positive also.

Alicia talked to her mother at her family meeting. "I ate too many RED foods at a party. I shouldn't have done that. I'm so stupid!" she said.

"That's a negative way of thinking about yourself," her mother said. "Have you had other negative thoughts about yourself?"

Alicia answered, "Sure, I have some negative thoughts about myself. I do a lot of stupid things."

Her mother asked for some examples. Alicia said she'd forgotten to take her history book to school that day, ate too many RED foods at the party, and didn't meet her physical activity goals because it had rained for the past two days.

"Forgetting your book was an accident. Lots of times people forget things when they rush. It doesn't mean you are stupid. It just means you need to load your backpack for school the night before," Alicia's mother said.

Then she explained about negative thinking. "Try thinking about yourself in a more positive way. That would help you feel better. And it would be more realistic," she said. "Can you tell me some positive thoughts about the other two examples you gave?"

Alicia said she knew that missing her physical activity didn't really prove she was stupid. It just meant that she hadn't taken the time to listen to the weather report and plan how to get some physical activity inside if it rained. "I know I don't always eat too many RED foods. I guess I should think about how I can do better next time," she said.

Until then, Alicia didn't know how negative some of her thoughts were. She made a plan to look more closely at her thoughts. She wanted to see how much negative thinking she was doing. She planned to write down her negative thoughts. Then she would write down a more positive way of looking at herself in the same situation.

"That's a great idea," her mother said. "I'll ask you about it at the family meeting next week. I'm sure you'll find some much more helpful ways to think about yourself."

Encourage your child to say to herself what she would say to a good friend who did what she did.

How did Alicia's mother help her?

Have you ever been able to help your child this way? When?

What negative thoughts hurt my child the most?

People are different. Their negative thoughts are different. That's why your child needs to get to know *his own negative thoughts*. This is the first step to turning them around.

Help your child start a list of negative thoughts. He can add to it whenever he has a negative thought. How does he think about himself when he makes a mistake? How does he think about his weight? What are his thoughts about limiting RED foods? His thoughts about increasing GREEN activity? Changing these thoughts will help him meet his goals.

How to help your child overcome negative thoughts

Encourage your child to:

- ▶ Identify situations when her thinking is negative.
- ▶ Identify positive thoughts she could have instead.
- ▶ Practice turning her negative thinking into positive thinking.
- ▶ Say to herself what a friend or a parent would say.

How can I help my child think more positively?

- ▶ Help your child make a list of his negative thoughts. A good way to do this is to think about challenging situations. Then ask how he thinks about himself in each of these situations. Help him write these thoughts down on his help sheet.
- ▶ Then ask your child to think of at least one positive thought he could have in each situation. Stick to it. If your child has trouble thinking of positive thoughts, suggest some.
- ▶ Encourage your child to use these new ways of thinking about himself. Ask about it at family meetings. Praise and encourage him when he does well. Remind him that change doesn't come all at once. Change takes time and practice. Explain that each time he has a negative thought it is really an opportunity to learn how to think more positively about himself.

How to help yourself overcome negative thoughts

- ▶ Identify your negative thinking.
- ▶ Think of positive things to say instead.
- ▶ Practice turning your own negative thoughts around.

Overcoming Negative Thoughts

Ways to Turn Negative Thoughts into Positive Thoughts

Negative thoughts are unhelpful. Positive thoughts help to keep you focused on healthy behaviors. Here are some examples of ways to turn negative thoughts about yourself into positive thoughts.

Situation	Negative Thought	Positive Thought
My activity level: I did not get GREEN physical activity for two days in a row.	"I'm so stupid. Why did I watch so much television instead of getting some fresh air and physical activity?"	"Everyone makes mistakes. Rather than watch more television now, I will go for a run around the park."
My self-control: I ate more than 25 RED foods this week.	"It's all over now. I am such a failure. I wish I could control myself. Now I am really going to gain weight."	"I can't be perfect every week. I know that I can eat fewer RED foods this week by just being a little more careful about what I eat at lunch and snacks."
My ability to manage my weight: Instead of losing, I gained a pound this week.	"I am going to gain back all the weight that I lost now. I'll never be able to take care of my diabetes by losing weight and being healthy. I'm just so bad at this."	"I know that I slipped a little bit. But I know that this is just a slip-up and that I should get back on track right away. I'll just do a better job of keeping track of what I eat when I eat it."

Think about your child. What kind of situations causes him to have negative thoughts? What do you think those thoughts may be? What are examples of positive thoughts?

Situation	Negative Thought	Positive Thought
Limiting RED Foods:		
Increasing GREEN Activity:		
Appearance:		
Ability to manage weight:		
Self-control:		
Health:		
Ability to make friends:		

Challenge Your Negative Thoughts

Write down situations that challenge you in the column on the left. Then write down the negative thoughts you have in the situation. In the column on the right, write down the positive thoughts you can have about yourself and how you could handle each situation.

Situation	Negative Thought	Positive Thought
Limiting RED Foods:		
Increasing GREEN Activity:		
My appearance:		
My body shape:		
My ability to manage my weight:		
My self-control:		
My health:		
My ability to make friends:		

Overcoming Negative Thoughts

Common negative thoughts that people often have:

- ▶ **Failure Thoughts** are based on one thing that goes wrong. They make you doubt yourself and your ability. *"I dropped the plate. I must be clumsy."*
- ▶ **Can't Thoughts** use the word "can't." They make you feel helpless. *"I can't eat smaller portions. It's hopeless."*
- ▶ **Always/Never Thoughts** use words like "always" or "never" to talk about failing. They will make you feel like trying is useless. *"I ate too many RED foods again. I'll never meet my goals."*
- ▶ **"Why me?" Thoughts** make you not want to try. *"Why should I have diabetes? It's not fair."*



Positive Thinking Tips

Go over these tips with your child:

- ▶ Turn your negative thought into a positive thought.
- ▶ Make a thought neutral if you can't make it positive.
- ▶ Tell yourself what you would tell a friend who did what you did.
- ▶ Tell yourself what your parent, grandparent, or an adult you trust would say.

SPECIAL FOCUS

How to help your child think more positively.

- ▶ Think about times when your child says negative things about herself. Pay special attention to negative thoughts about limiting RED foods and increasing GREEN activity.
- ▶ List positive thoughts your child could think about instead. Go over them with your child.
- ▶ Praise and encourage your child for turning negative thinking into positive thinking.
- ▶ Remind your child that change takes time and practice. Explain that having a negative thought can be an opportunity to learn how to think more positively about himself.
- ▶ Turn your own negative thoughts into positive thoughts.
- ▶ Explain how you change negative thinking into positive thinking.