

## Realistic and Effective Positive Thinking

Positive Thinking can have a very powerful effect. It can bring inner peace, improved health and happiness, helping you to cope more easily and successfully with everyday life and its challenges.

The effect on our lives can be phenomenal and bring very successful and happy results.

Positive Thinking can help us to achieve any of our goals, large or small. My personal view is that it is best to begin with one only, keeping it realistic, i.e., relatively easy to achieve and then to progress from there.

Positive thinking is so much more though than just repeating affirmations every day, visualising ideal outcomes or telling yourself that everything is alright, when sometimes it quite clearly isn't. Positive thinking has to be your main mental attitude but for many of us this will require a lot of practical and emotional work, especially at the beginning. And to begin with we need to already be in a reasonably healthy state of mind and not suffering with deep depression or anxiety\*.

\* In terms of relatively minor depression or anxiety I believe that due to feedback I've received from my audio CD and research, guided meditation can in fact be very powerful and helpful in terms of bringing peace, healing and relaxation. It is also an ideal way to begin to learn how to meditate. Meditation is a powerful tool for relieving stress and worry. It gives our brains a chance to rest. If you have been diagnosed with depression or any mental health disorder please always check with your GP that meditation will be suitable for you before embarking on any programme.

When we are depressed struggling to 'think positively' can create an extra burden. It can be exhausting and often end up depleting any reserves of energy that we already have. Also, if we are feeling too low to try to think positively, as we are often told we 'should' then this can make depression or anxiety worse. If we've been experiencing thoughts of being a failure, then not being able to think positively can confirm this for us, that this is yet something else we have failed at.

I believe that telling a depressed or anxious person that they 'should think positively', is as bad as telling them to 'pull themselves together' or 'you ought to be over this by now', which will make them feel worse and certainly not 'heard'. Personally I think the words 'should' and 'ought' should and ought to be banned!

There is a counselling therapy called **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**, or in short, **CBT**. It is thought to be very effective in helping people to find relief from depression and anxiety. Undertaking CBT can be an effective prelude to positive thinking and I highly recommend it.

In a nutshell the counselling model concerns asking depressed or anxious patients to try to suspend positive or negative judgment on what they are thinking and to ask themselves a different question: '**Is my thinking helpful or unhelpful?**' This question means:

1. Does that thought or idea make **you** feel the way you want to feel?
2. Does that thought get **you** to become the person you wish to become?
3. Does that thought or way of thinking aid **you** in achieving your goals and where you want to be in life?

This empowers you because by asking yourself this question makes **you** the decision maker as to whether or not your thought, idea or belief is helpful or unhelpful to you and your life. When

you decide these are unhelpful to you then the motivation to change it to a more helpful one (which **you** decide) can come from deep within. The result can often be experiencing an extra burst of energy or motivation to help you towards making the change.

If you are feeling depressed or anxious keeping a '**Thought Diary**' for a week can be very helpful and I suggest this CBT recommended exercise:

Read through the exercise and if it appeals to you select a week when you are going to try it.

On the Monday begin to keep a diary of your thoughts. You might like to divide the page into three columns headed 'Thought', then 'Helpful/Unhelpful' and 'Feeling'. Look at each thought as you are writing it down and ask yourself if it is helpful or unhelpful, noting it accordingly and then in the third column labelling the feeling, i.e. sad, anxious, happy, excited. If it is unhelpful write down a more helpful thought below to substitute for the unhelpful one and again record how you are feeling. At the end of the day notice and record how you feel mentally.

On the Tuesday return to writing down your thoughts, harshly judging them as good or bad, positive or negative, right or wrong in the Helpful/Unhelpful column, noting your feelings as before. Don't write down a more helpful thought.

Keep switching between the two different ways of thinking every alternate day until the week is up. By the end of it you will be in an excellent position to judge for yourself which way of evaluating your thinking works best for you.

As your psychological health improves you will feel more able to start the process of positive thinking and then you will be able to begin the climb up the emotional scale to feeling and experiencing more happiness, joy and meaning in your life. Not only will you feel able to set realistic goals to achieve (remember to begin with small, baby steps) you will be empowered to view so-called failure, disappointments and problems as blessings in disguise.

Along with creating a successful (in whatever way this means to you) and happy life there are so many manifestations of positive thinking. For example a few of these are: increased self-esteem or confidence, seeing opportunities, feelings of hope, optimism and motivation, sustaining these feelings even throughout challenging times. We can also achieve success faster and more easily and motivate and inspire others.

Positive thinking is positively contagious! I would love to know how you achieve this.

Part of this Article concerning the philosophy and benefits of CBT has been adapted from 'Counselling Directory': [www.counselling-directory.org.uk](http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk) a helpful resource for locating a counsellor in your area.

Valerie Anthony MGSW [www.potentialunlimited.co.uk](http://www.potentialunlimited.co.uk)

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