

Australian version

iSupport For Dementia

Training and support manual
for carers of people with dementia



Unit 3. Thinking differently

Why is this learning unit important?

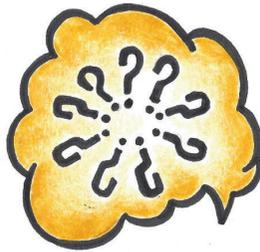
Your thoughts determine how you feel. Unhelpful thoughts can make us feel unhappy or dissatisfied.

How will this unit help me?

This unit will help you to think differently and change your unhelpful thoughts into helpful thoughts.

What will I learn?

- You cannot change what happens, but you can change your response.
- To think differently by changing unhelpful thoughts into helpful thoughts.
- Thinking differently will help to make you feel better.



There are different ways to deal with stressful events: One way is to think differently.

Lost keys

Jo is married to Max who is living with dementia. She is about to leave the house to visit a friend. Max says, 'I can't find my keys! You cannot leave me without keys!' Jo thinks to herself: 'I cannot leave him alone anymore.' She starts to feel miserable.

Check your understanding



What do you think Jo should do?

Click on the answers you think are the right things for Jo to do and drop them into the box.

- Tell Max that she cannot help him search now and leave.
- Search for the keys until she finds them.
- Tell Max that he should be more careful not to lose his keys in the future.
- Think to herself, 'Max has dementia and is sometimes worried when he loses things. I can take some time to help and then go.' Then call her friend and explain that she will come later.

ANSWERS - Unit 3. Thinking differently

Check your understanding

**✘ Tell Max that she cannot help him search now and leave.**

This is bad advice. Max has dementia and is feeling worried. He could be very upset if Jo leaves the house right now.

✘ Search for the keys until she finds them.

This could be helpful, as Max might feel safer if he has the keys. However, this may mean Jo misses meeting her friend and is left feeling miserable.

✘ Tell Max that he should be more careful not to lose his keys in the future.

This is not such good advice. Max has dementia, he cannot help misplacing things.

✔ Think to herself, 'Max has dementia and is sometimes worried when he loses things. I can take some time to help and then go.' Then call her friend and explain that she will come later.

This is good advice. It is not the fact that Max has lost the keys that are making Jo miserable, but her concerns that she always needs to help Max and cannot leave him alone anymore. After Jo has called her friend, she can help Max search for the keys, which will make him feel safer. Then she can go to visit her friend.

Keep in mind



- There are lots of different ways to deal with events.
- Negative thoughts may make us feel sad or dissatisfied.
- By thinking differently, you might feel better and be able to manage situations better.



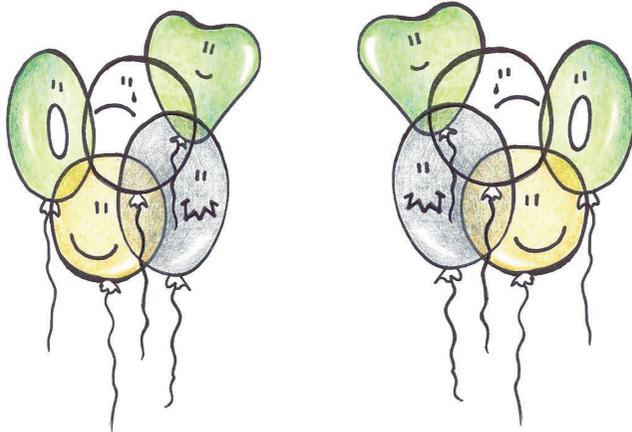
Thoughts determine how we feel

It is not an event that makes you feel angry, sad, happy or guilty, it is your thinking.

An event can be anything:

- The person living with dementia becomes angry when you ask them something.
- Your family member who promised to help you does not turn up or cancels on you.
- The person you care for cannot find something.
- Your family member is blaming you for not providing the right care.

Many people think that their feelings are a direct consequence of a particular event. However, it is the way you think about the event that determines how you feel.



Jo's unhelpful and helpful thoughts



Jo thinks to herself when Max cannot find the keys: 'I cannot leave Max alone anymore.' This makes her feel miserable.

This means that Jo is having an unhelpful thought. Unhelpful thoughts can make it harder to respond in useful ways to situations like this.

Jo could think instead: 'Max has dementia and is sometimes worried when he loses things. I can take some time to help and then go.' This different way of thinking will probably make Jo feel better, help her to stay calm and compassionate.

Helpful thoughts like this can make it easier to respond in useful ways to situations like this.

Keep in mind



Remember:

- It is not the situation itself that makes you feel angry, sad, happy or miserable.
- Helpful or unhelpful thoughts can determine how you respond to a situation.
- By changing your thoughts, you could help change the way you feel.

Unhelpful thoughts make you feel bad

Aron has cared for his wife, Joan for several years now. Aron has many thoughts. Some make him feel worse, some make him feel better.

Check your understanding



Can you indicate which of Aron's thoughts may help to make him feel better?

Select that thought and drop them into the box.

- Aron thinks: 'Making time for myself helps me to provide better care.'
- When Joan is not happy, Aron feels, 'I am a bad carer.'
- 'Maybe the dementia will go away, and Joan will be better.'
- 'No one understands how hard it is to be a carer.'
- 'No one can provide the care the way I do.'
- 'Asking others can help me to share the duties of care.'
- Aron thinks, 'Dementia is a disease, it is not anyone else's fault.'



ANSWERS - Unit 3. Thinking differently

Check your understanding



- ✓ **Aron thinks: 'Making time for myself helps me to provide better care.'**

This is a helpful thought. No one should feel guilty when taking time for themselves. It might help the carer to continue to provide care in the long term and to do other valuable things as well.
- ✗ **When Joan is not happy, Aron feels, 'I am a bad carer.'**

This thought will make Aron feel unhappy and sad. The mood of the person with dementia does not depend solely on the carer. For example, mood can also be related to dementia, depression, functional ability or personality.
- ✗ **'Maybe the dementia will go away, and Joan will be better.'**

This thought may make Aron feel disappointed as people with dementia continue to decline. There are many diseases that cause dementia. Unfortunately, there is no cure for any of these diseases yet.
- ✗ **'No one understands how hard it is to be a carer.'**

This thought may make Aron feel upset, isolated and lonely. There might be people who do not understand how hard it is to be a carer. However, talking to other people may help them better understand what dementia is and at the same time may help you to take some pressure off.
- ✗ **'No one can provide the care the way I do.'**

This thought could make Aron feel lonely, isolated and under a lot of pressure. Although others may provide care in a different way, that does not mean that it is always of a lower standard. It is important to involve others in the care of a person with dementia, to prevent becoming overwhelmed.
- ✓ **'Asking others can help me to share the duties of care.'**

This is a helpful thought that may make Aron feel more in control. Involving other people in caregiving has lots of potential benefits, for instance, the carer will be able to take breaks more regularly and be able to provide care for a longer period of time.
- ✓ **Aron thinks, 'Dementia is a disease, it is not anyone else's fault.'**

This thought is helpful and might prevent feelings of guilt.

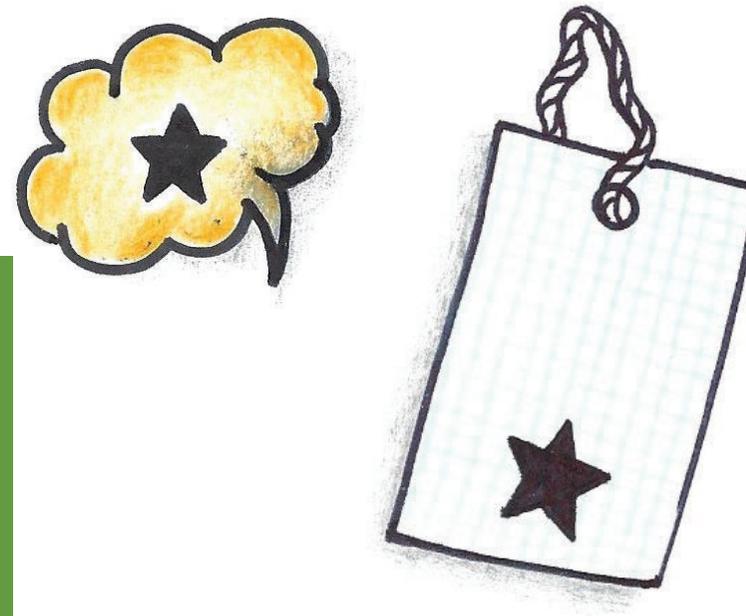
Keep in mind

- Unhelpful thoughts can make you feel bad.
- Helpful thoughts are important to feel better and will assist you in dealing with situations in a more useful way.
- To feel better, it is important to identify unhelpful thoughts.

More information and tips

For more information and tips on:

- how to ask others for help and involving others
- how to relax
- how to deal with changed behaviour
- how to plan pleasant activities for yourself.



Carer support groups can offer a safe place to talk about your role as a carer. They can put you in touch with other carers who may be experiencing similar things to you so you can share advice and suggestions to support each other.

For information call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.
If you feel you are not coping and need to talk to someone immediately contact Lifeline (24 hours a day) on 13 11 14.

EXTRA INFO

Matching feelings to an unhelpful thought

Xavier meets Gabriel

Xavier takes care of his father, who is living with dementia. When he is doing some shopping, he meets his friend Gabriel, who asks: 'How are you? Don't you need any help to care for your father?'

Xavier thinks to himself, 'If Gabriel thinks I need help, he must think I am a bad carer.'

Check your understanding



How do you think Xavier is feeling?
(more answers possible)

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upset | ✓ | Upset |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lonely | ✓ | Lonely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | ✓ | Sad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happy | ✓ | Angry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angry | ✓ | Guilty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guilty | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supported | | |

Matching feelings to a helpful thought

Xavier thought, 'If Gabriel thinks I need help, he must think I am a bad carer.'

This is an unhelpful thought that may leave Xavier feeling upset, lonely, sad, angry or guilty.

What if Xavier thinks to himself, 'If Gabriel thinks I need help, he must care about me and my father and wants to make sure we are doing well?'

Check your understanding



How does Xavier feel now?
(more answers possible)

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upset | ✓ | Happy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lonely | ✓ | Supported |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happy | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angry | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guilty | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supported | | |

Helpful thoughts make you feel better

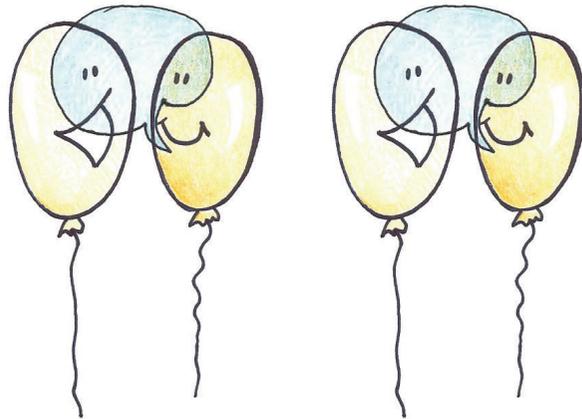
Xavier thought, 'If Gabriel thinks I need help, he must care about my father and wants to make sure we are doing well.'

This is a helpful thought that may leave Xavier feeling happy or supported.

Keep in mind



- Sometimes you cannot change the things that happen.
- But sometimes you can change your response (thoughts).



Activity



What are your unhelpful thoughts?

In an earlier example you indicated which thoughts are helpful and which can be unhelpful. Below you will find a list of unhelpful thoughts.

Which unhelpful thoughts do you have?

Please select the thoughts you have or provide additional examples.

- I have to do everything alone.
- He/she does not care about me anymore.
- When he/she is not happy, it means I am a bad caregiver.
- Maybe he/she will get better.
- I must always be available for the person you care for.
- I should not consider my own needs if I want to be a good carer.
- No one understands how hard it is to be a carer.
- No one can provide the care for the person you care for the way I do.
- The person you care for has complicated my life.
- I have no time for others because I am a carer.
- I feel sorry for the person I care for.
- Other people are better off than the person you care for and I.
- Other...

Activity **What are your helpful thoughts?****Which helpful thoughts do you have?**

Please select the thoughts you have or provide additional examples.

- It is okay to take time to relax as it will help me to provide a good standard of care.
- Sharing my feelings with others helps to take the pressure off.
- Asking help from others can help me to share the load.
- Making time for myself helps me to care for the person I care for.
- Dementia is a disease; it is not anyone's fault.
- Other...

Keep in mind 

Important to remember:

- Remember that if you want to feel better, you can change your unhelpful thoughts to helpful thoughts.

Helpful thoughts make you feel better

You cannot change the things that happen, but you can change your response to them. Or in other words: you cannot change the situation, but you can change your thoughts.

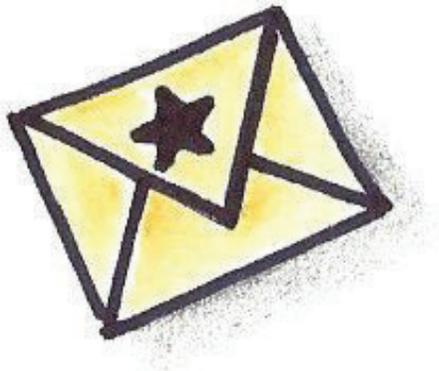
In the next exercise you will work to change your unhelpful thoughts into helpful thoughts.



Now you try.

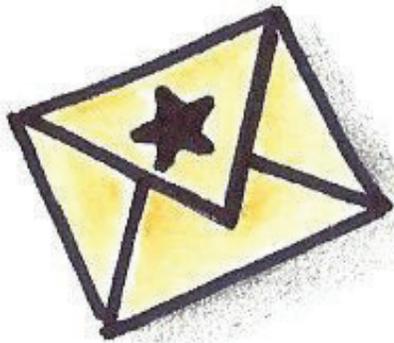
Try to think of a recent event that made you feel upset and fill out these questions.

Have a look at the example for some help.



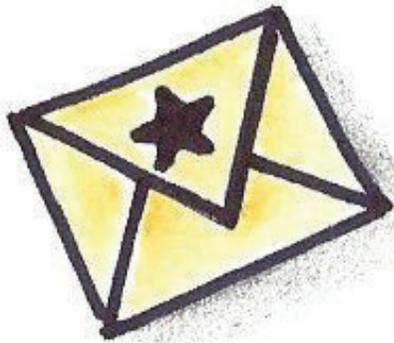
Name:	
What was the event that made you feel upset or miserable?	
What were your unhelpful thoughts?	
What would be more helpful to think?	
How could the helpful thoughts make you feel?	

Aron takes care of his wife Joan, who is living with dementia. He writes the following:



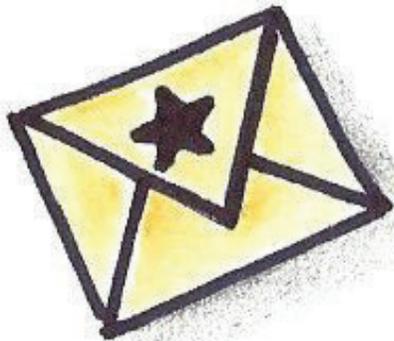
Name:	Aron
What was the event that made you feel upset or miserable?	<i>Yesterday my wife, Joan, and I visited some friends. We had tea together. Joan dropped her cup on the floor. When they started to clean the floor, Joan did not help, but she stood in the way. She did not apologise for her behaviour but laughed.</i>
What were your unhelpful thoughts?	<i>They are upset with my wife and won't invite us to their house again.</i>
What would be more helpful to think?	<i>My wife has dementia and is unable to think and act in the way she did before she had dementia. Our friends won't blame my wife as I have explained that my wife has dementia and how her functioning has declined.</i>
How could the helpful thoughts make you feel?	<i>Instead of feeling worried and ashamed, I would have felt happy about the day we spent with our friends and glad they understood.</i>

Helen takes care of her brother, Matty, who is living with dementia. She writes the following:



Name:	Helen
What was the event that made you feel upset or miserable?	<i>A week ago, our sister came to visit us. At the end of the day, I said to Matty, 'It was a great day, don't you think so?' He said that he was not sure, because he could not remember exactly what we had been doing. He said he was tired and that he wanted to sleep.</i>
What were your unhelpful thoughts?	<i>Nothing we do is worthwhile because Matty forgets everything. Everything is ruined because of his dementia.</i>
What would be more helpful to think?	<i>Even though he cannot remember what we did, I know he had a great day too, and that is what counts. He smiled a lot today and kept saying how nice it was that our sister came.</i>
How could the helpful thoughts make you feel?	<i>Instead of feeling sad and miserable, I would have felt happy about the day we spent with our sister and satisfied that Matty enjoyed the day too..</i>

Laura takes care of her mother-in-law, who is living with dementia. She writes the following:



Name:

Laura

What was the event that made you feel upset or miserable?

A few days ago, my mother-in-law asked why she had not seen me for such a long time, but I had visited her just two days before.

What were your unhelpful thoughts?

She wants me to come more often, but that is unfair. I have my job and my children; it is too much for me.

What would be more helpful to think?

Because of her dementia she has forgotten that I came to see her two days ago. Let's try to stay calm and talk with her about what she did today.

How could the helpful thoughts make you feel?

I would have felt less upset. Maybe even calm, I don't know. Let's try to think differently next time.

Check your understanding 

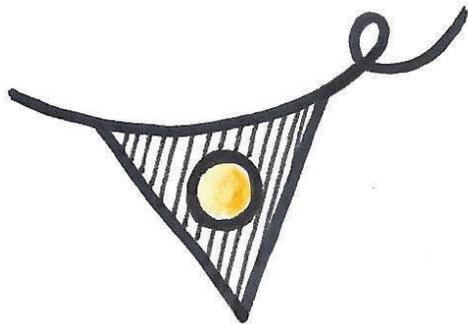
How would it make you feel?

How would the helpful thoughts make you feel?

<input type="checkbox"/> Happy	<input type="checkbox"/> Angry
<input type="checkbox"/> Relieved	<input type="checkbox"/> Less stressed
<input type="checkbox"/> Depressed	<input type="checkbox"/> Less upset
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other...

Congratulations, you tried to think differently!

Practice makes perfect. Do you want to try one more time?



Name: _____

What was the event that made you feel upset or miserable?

What were your unhelpful thoughts?

What would be more helpful to think?

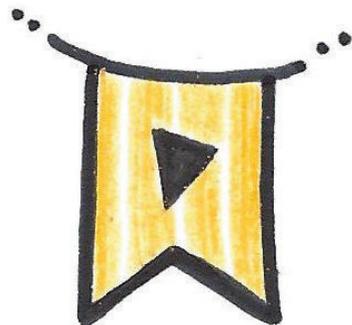
How could the helpful thoughts make you feel?

Let's review what you have learned in this Unit:

- You cannot change what happens, but you can change your response.
- You can learn to think differently, changing your unhelpful thoughts into helpful thoughts.
- Thinking differently makes you feel better.

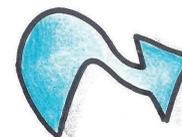
RELATED LEARNING UNITS

- Module 2 Unit 2 Improving communication
- Module 5 Unit 1 Introduction to person-centred care approach
- Module 4 Unit 1 Eating and drinking - more pleasant mealtimes



You finished this learning unit, well done!

Would you like to try the following relaxation exercise?



Keep in mind that there are events in which feeling upset, miserable, sad or angry is inevitable. Examples are: if the person you care for needs to go to hospital or if you lose a dear friend. To change your thoughts in such situations would not do justice to your feelings.

Tip

Neck movements

With this exercise you will feel less tension in your neck. It will also increase the blood flow to your brain.



This is how you do it:

- Make sure to move slowly and with attention.
- Bend your neck forward and backward.
- Inhale while you lift your head up and back. Exhale while you drop your chin to your chest.
- Rotate your chin from side to side.
- Inhale when your chin is in the centre. Exhale when you look to the side.
- Drop your ear towards your shoulder.
- Inhale when you are in the centre. Exhale when you drop your ear to your shoulder.
- Repeat 5 times.



You finished this unit, well done!