

MANAGING STRESS:

CALMING OUR THOUGHTS

Our thoughts often wander into **the past or the future**. The brain's survival bias acts like a magnet for negative experiences, while positive thoughts don't stick as easily.

How does chronic stress affect our thinking?

- Poor concentration

Confusion - Less reliable memory

- Difficulty organising and prioritising

Sensitivity - Hypervigilance for threats

- Preoccupation with worst possibilities

- Under-estimating our ability to cope

Low

Self-esteem

- Loss of confidence

- Feeling worthless

- Perceiving a lack of control

Incorrect - "Always" or "Never" thinking

Assumptions - Over-generalising from isolated incidents

- Jumping to negative conclusions

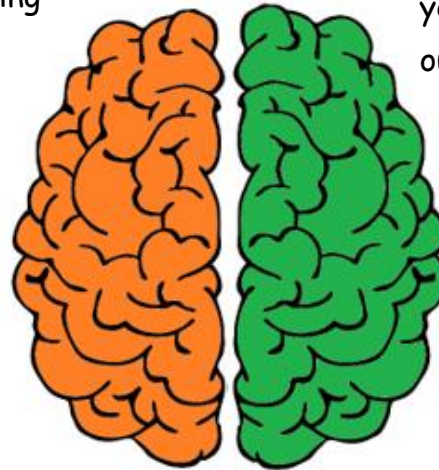
Distorted

Perceptions

- Focusing on the negatives

- Downplaying neutral or positive experiences

- Disqualifying solutions as "Yes...but..."



Ideas for anchoring ourselves in the present



Pay more attention to the here-and-now

- **Grounding:** 5 things you can see; 4 things you can touch; 3 things you can hear; 2 things you can smell; 1 thing you can taste.
- **50/50 Attention:** While listening to someone, anchor yourself to your surroundings - for example, notice the sensation of your feet on the floor or your legs on the chair.
- **Mindful breathing:** Focus on how the breath comes in through your nose, the rise and fall of your abdomen and how air rushes out of your mouth.

Challenge and Reframe your Thoughts



- **Be realistic:** Pause and ask "How likely is this?" and "What was it really like when it happened in the past?"
- **Look for evidence against:** "I coped last time"; "It wasn't so bad"; "I got through it in the end".
- **Keep things in perspective:** "Now I know how to handle this"; "This has been a bad day, but I still have..."

Positive Self-Talk and Gratitude

- **Moderate your language:** "This is unbearable" vs "This is so annoying".
- **Allow for solutions:** "I can't do this" vs "How do I do this?"
- **Mantras:** "This will pass"; "I can handle this"; "I am enough".
- **3 Good Things:** Three positive experiences from the day, big or small. Keep a gratitude journal or a box with photos, post-it notes & keepsakes.