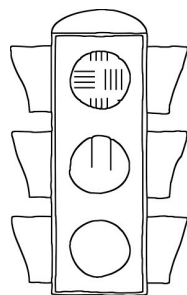


Bead #3

Fixing Sinking Thinking

"I realized that if my thoughts immediately affect my body, I should be careful about what I think. Now if I get angry, I ask myself why I feel that way. If I can find the source of my anger, I can turn that negative energy into something positive."

— Yoko Ono (singer)

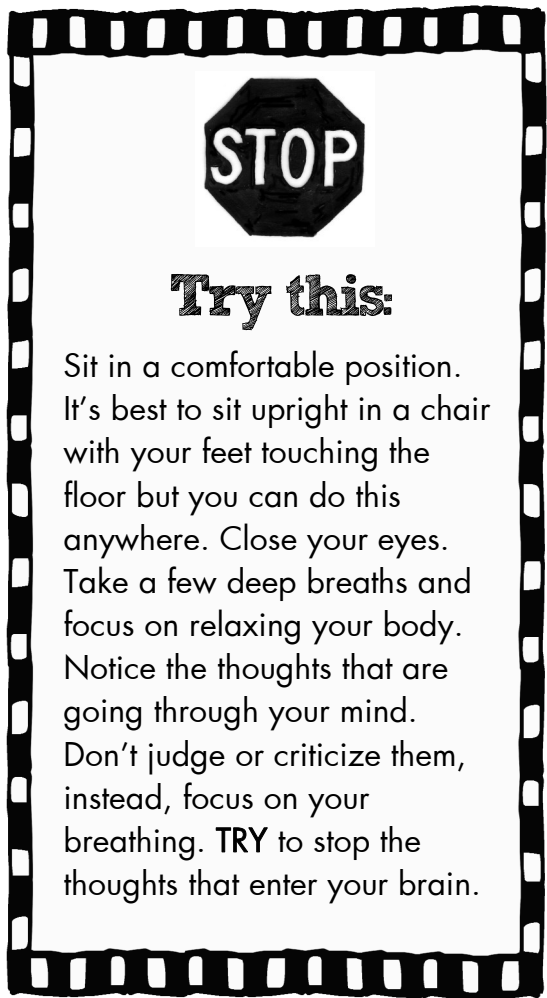


Bead #3

Thoughts are powerful! They can have a huge impact on how you feel and what happens to you in life. Many people believe “we get what we think about.” Is that true for you?

Can you think of a person who tends to look on the bright side of things? We bet you can also think of a person who tends to be negative. Our thoughts are so powerful they can actually make us mentally and physically sick. Have you ever been so stressed or angry that your stomach hurt? That’s what we’re talking about. Did you know you are actually in charge of those thoughts and can train your brain to be positive and hopeful and to stop negative, self-defeating thoughts?

Your brain creates thoughts almost non-stop throughout the day. It’s often really hard to make it stop. Take a moment to try the exercise in the box.



STOP

Try this:

Sit in a comfortable position. It’s best to sit upright in a chair with your feet touching the floor but you can do this anywhere. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths and focus on relaxing your body. Notice the thoughts that are going through your mind. Don’t judge or criticize them, instead, focus on your breathing. **TRY** to stop the thoughts that enter your brain.

That wasn’t easy was it? Your brain processes hundreds of thoughts every single day. No wonder then that some thoughts are accurate, and others are not. We need to learn how to challenge thoughts that are inaccurate.

Sometimes we play something that happened over and over in our minds – especially if it felt bad or had a bad result. This is almost never helpful because it doesn’t solve a problem but often takes a small issue and makes it feel really big. For example:




One of your closest friends makes fun of your haircut. The next day you wake up, look in the mirror and are reminded of what she said about your hair. You recall another time when a friend made fun of your new jacket. She was the friend who didn’t invite you to a birthday party. You feel alone and sad. Now you are having a full blown pity party and feel really miserable!




This is where we need to tell ourselves:
STOP! DANGER! DONT GO THERE!



CAUTION! SINKING THINKING AHEAD!

There is a scientific name for the way our brain convinces us — through inaccurate or exaggerated thoughts — that things are more urgent, more sad, more extreme or more dangerous than they really are. It is called cognitive distortion, but we call it “Sinking Thinking” because those thoughts bring us down. On the next page is a table of common “Sinking Thinking” and some suggested solutions.

SINKING THINKING	EXAMPLES	POSITIVE MAKEOVER
<p>Discounting the Positives:</p> <p>You reject positive experiences by saying they don't count. This way you can maintain your negative outlook.</p>	<p>"I was just lucky to get an A. I'm really bad at math."</p> <p>"I only got picked for the solo because nobody else would do it."</p>	<p>"I was prepared for that test!"</p> <p>"I worked hard in practice and was rewarded!"</p> 
<p>Jumping to Conclusions:</p> <p>You make a negative interpretation even though there are no facts or evidence to support your conclusion.</p> 	<p>"I know my friend is mad at me."</p> <p>"I just know I won't have any fun at the school dance."</p>	<p>Ask yourself: "Do I really know this to be true?" Focus on what you KNOW. Don't predict a negative outcome. Try, "I may be nervous at the dance but I'll have fun with my friends."</p>
<p>Overgeneralizing:</p> <p>You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.</p>	<p>"I was awful at tennis last summer. I guess I'm just not good at sports."</p>	<p>Believe that a single negative experience doesn't hold true forever. "I didn't like tennis so this summer I'll try swimming."</p>
<p>Labeling:</p> <p>This is an extreme form of over-generalization. You attach a negative label to yourself or others.</p>	<p>"I failed that test. I'm such an idiot."</p> <p>"She's a loser."</p> 	<p>This often involves a lot of emotion so wait until you calm down and can look at a situation more clearly. Challenge your negative thoughts!</p>

SINKING THINKING	EXAMPLES	POSITIVE MAKEOVER
<p>Filtering:</p> <p>You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it so much that you end up filtering out all the positive details and only focusing on the negative.</p>	<p>"I was so embarrassed when I fell and people laughed at me. It ruined the whole party."</p> 	<p>Focus on the positives; they usually far outweigh the negatives. "That skating party was a blast. Even though I fell and was embarrassed, the pizza was delicious and Sarah loved the gift I gave her. I had a great time with my friends."</p>
<p>Magnifying or Minimizing:</p> <p>You exaggerate the importance of insignificant things or shrink significant things until they appear tiny.</p> 	<p>"When I forgot my lines, I ruined the entire school play."</p> <p>"I know my friend always cancels plans with me at the last minute but that's OK. She is busy."</p>	<p>Focus on the positive. Put the event into proper perspective. Mistakes happen, to everyone.</p> <p>Do a reality check on the situation or friendship. Stand up for yourself if you are being mistreated.</p>
<p>All or Nothing Thinking:</p> <p>You see things as black and white with no in-between, often using "absolute" words such as never, always and every.</p>	<p>"I never get picked."</p> <p>"She's always mean to me."</p> <p>"Every time I try, I fail."</p>	<p>Situations and people are hardly ever black-and-white. Challenge it when you hear yourself using an absolute word.</p> 
<p>Blaming:</p> <p>We hold others responsible for our own pain or we blame ourselves for every problem.</p>	<p>"It's her fault I couldn't focus on my homework. She made me feel so bad about what happened."</p>	<p>Accept the consequences of your choices and recognize that nobody can make you feel a certain way. You are in control of your emotions and reactions.</p>

The next time you are feeling awful because of something that happened, use this table to determine if you are experiencing Sinking Thinking.

Here are some more ideas for overcoming Sinking Thinking:



Find a physical activity that requires your full attention such as a board game, video game or exercise. You can also play with your pet, go help a neighbor or read a book. Do something instead of sitting there thinking of the past or worrying about the future!



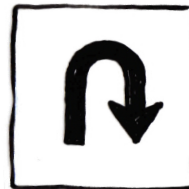
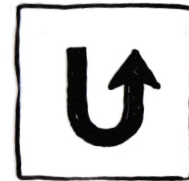
Talk to a trusted adult about your concerns and possible solutions. You can call a friend if she will help you brainstorm solutions but don't call just to obsess (telling the same story again and again) about your problem. That's usually not helpful and may even make you feel worse!



When you are stressed, upset, worried or find yourself experiencing Sinking Thinking, taking a moment to focus on your breathing will really help. Take a few moments to try mindful breathing:

Try This: Mindful Breathing

Sit with good posture in a straight-backed chair with your feet uncrossed, flat on the floor and your hands gently in your lap. Close your eyes. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose saying to yourself, "this is my in breath." Breathe out slowly and deeply saying to yourself, "this is my out breath." Focus your full attention on your breathing. Try to make your in breath and out breath equal in length. If a thought interrupts you (which it probably will), notice it and let it go gently, returning your full awareness to your breathing. (It might be helpful to use your imagination so that when a thought enters your mind, you can observe it floating by like leaves on water or clouds in the sky.) Feel your breath go deeply in and out of your lungs. Notice how relaxed you feel after a few minutes of mindful breathing.




Although this practice suggests you sit in a chair and close your eyes, you can practice mindful breathing anytime and anywhere. You will notice that it slows down your heart rate, calms your mind and relaxes your body. It's a wonderful thing to do before a test, a difficult conversation, a performance, a speech or any time you feel stressed or unfocused.

Activity



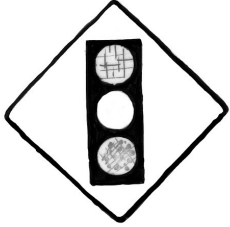
Review the types of Sinking Thinking. Can you think of times when you reacted to something in one of those ways? In the boxes below, label the type of Sinking Thinking you experienced, draw a cartoon or picture of what happened (or just use words), and write down what you said to yourself. Then, considering what you just learned about Sinking Thinking, write down what you would say and do now.

Type of Sinking Thinking:	What happened:	What I did and said at the time:
		

What I would say and do now:



Activity



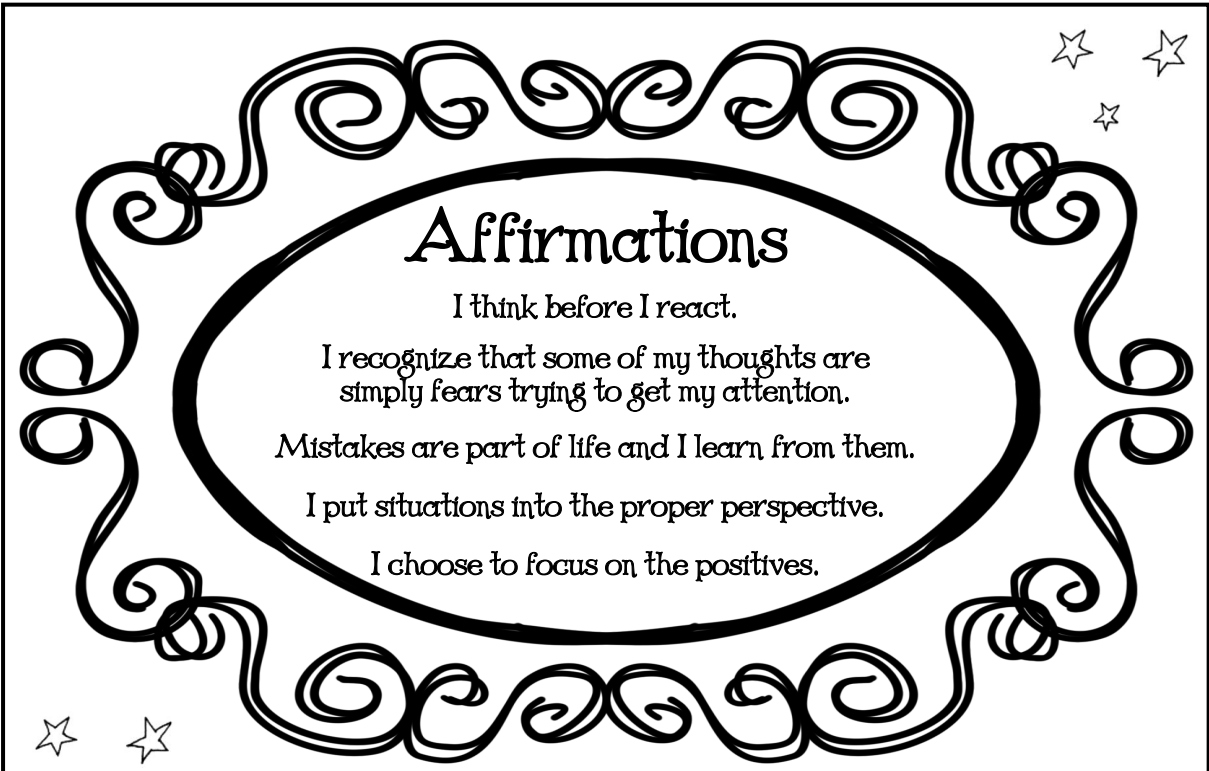
For the next week, before you go to bed, review the list of Sinking Thinking and reflect on your day. Did you experience any examples of Sinking Thinking? If so, write about it on the calendar below. Then at the end of the week, see if there is a pattern to the types of Sinking Thinking you experience. Remember – these reactions are very common to most people at one time or another. The trick is to catch yourself! Now that you're aware of the different ways your brain may respond incorrectly, try to recognize them and change how you react.

Examples of Sinking Thinking throughout the day

Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	

Did you recognize a pattern?





Affirmations

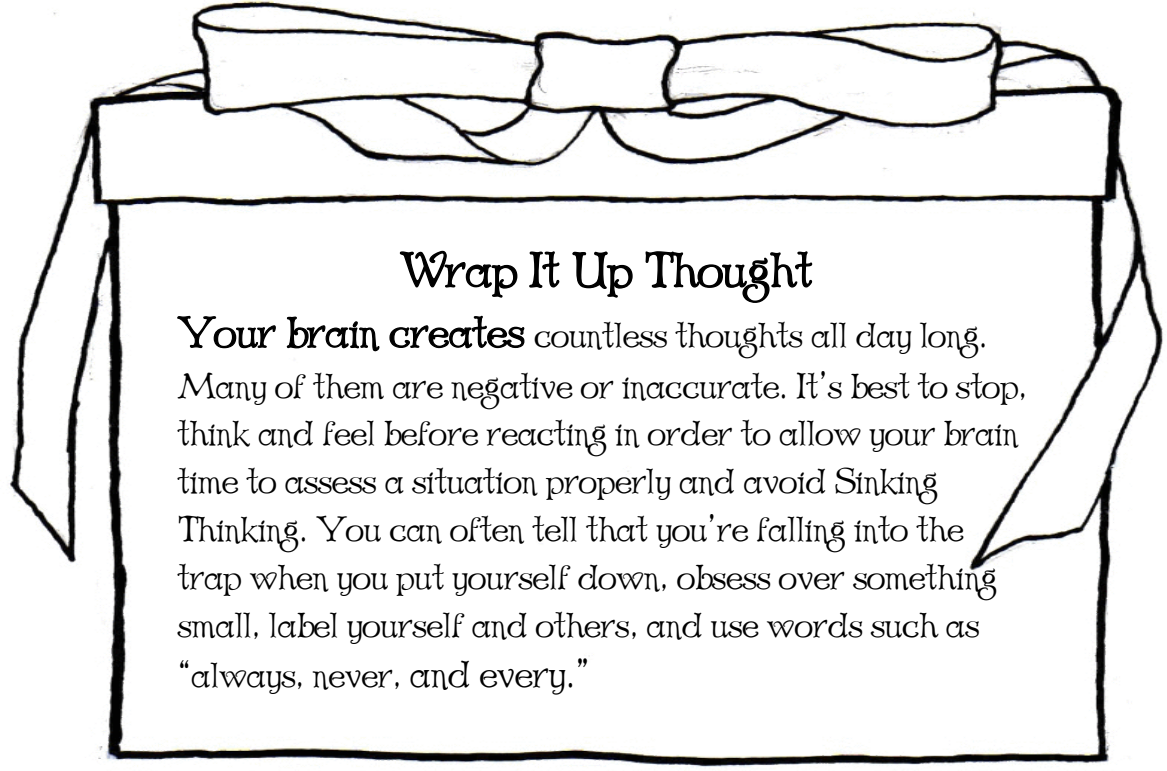
I think before I react.

I recognize that some of my thoughts are simply fears trying to get my attention.

Mistakes are part of life and I learn from them.

I put situations into the proper perspective.

I choose to focus on the positives.



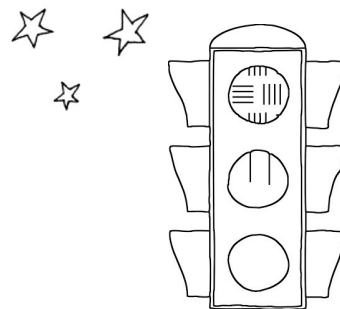
Wrap It Up Thought

Your brain creates countless thoughts all day long. Many of them are negative or inaccurate. It's best to stop, think and feel before reacting in order to allow your brain time to assess a situation properly and avoid Sinking Thinking. You can often tell that you're falling into the trap when you put yourself down, obsess over something small, label yourself and others, and use words such as "always, never, and every."

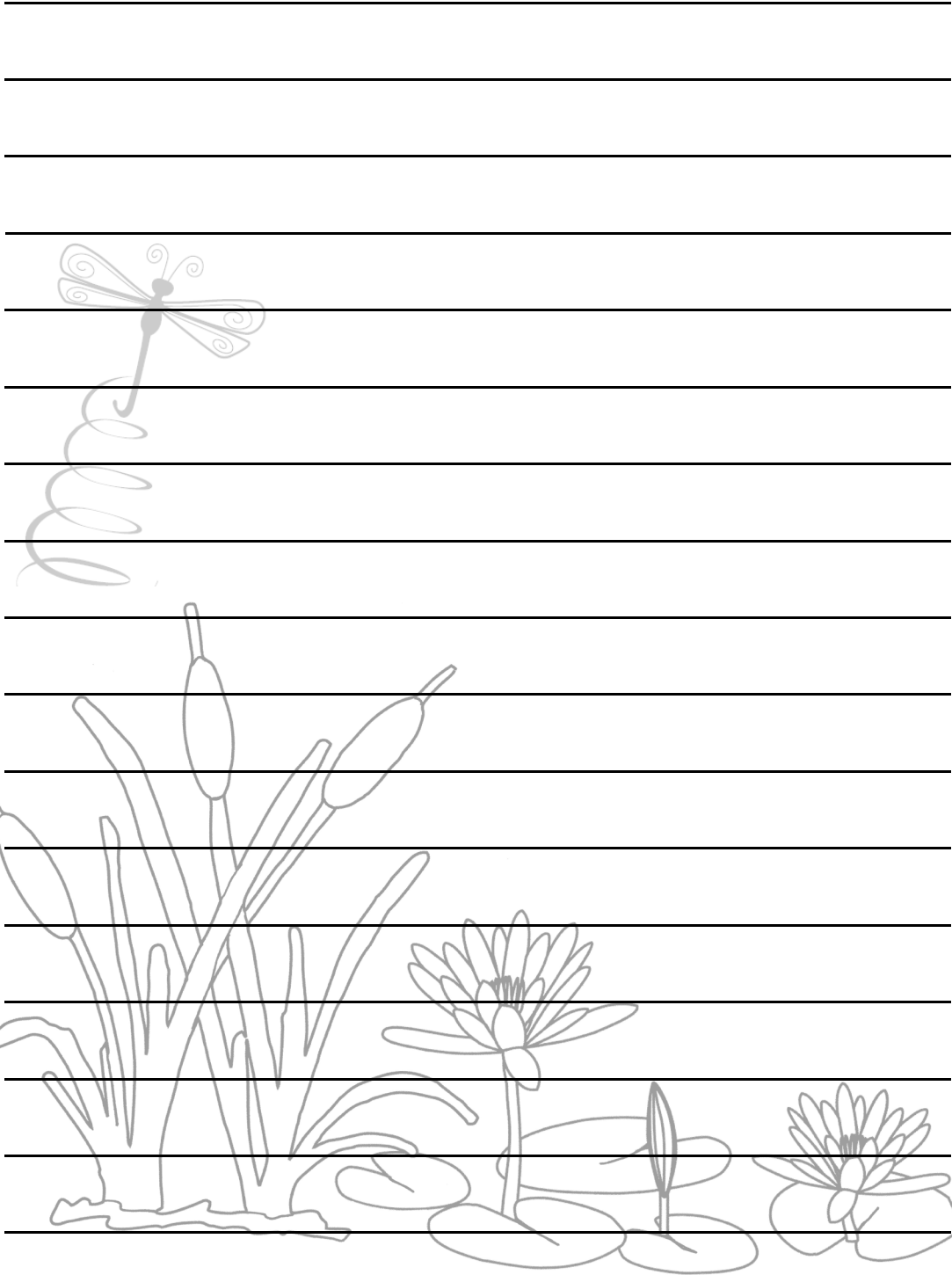
Bead #3

You are capable of managing your thoughts and emotions. The bead for this section is a stop light (red, yellow, green) to remind you to STOP before you act or speak and assess whether the thoughts in your mind match what's in your heart.

It is easy for the emotional part of your brain (Roxie) to hijack your thinking. Learning to STOP (red) and take a moment to be mindful (yellow) before moving forward with confidence (green) will help you to communicate and relate to others authentically.



explore, embrace, empower



explore, embrace, empower

