S4.cbt2

***Stress Management Training***

**Session Four: Lecture Script**

***Negative Thinking Habits (introduction to CBT)***

We all have a running commentary of thoughts going on in our heads in every situation we are in. These thoughts can be positive and therefore helpful to us, or negative and unhelpful to us. Negative thinking can lead to greater stress. It is a way of thinking about yourself and the world which distorts how situations really are. I am going to describe some common habits of negative thinking. See how many apply to you.

**The Habit of Overgeneralisation**

This is when you make a general rule of one fact or event, for example. “Nobody likes me”. The habit of overgeneralisation stops you asking yourself if this is true. There are some key words which people often use when overgeneralising about themselves. These are words like *Never,* *Always.* *Every*, *Nobody*, *Everyone.* For example, “ I ALWAYS make a fool of myself”, or “ I’ll NEVER be able to cope”.

**The Habit of Self-Blame**

This is when you blame yourself for everything whether it is your fault or not. You may find you blame yourself if someone else is upset, though in reality other people’s feelings are not in your control. Do you feel it’s your fault if your child fails an exam or if your spouse is rude to someone? A common symptom of Self-blame is if you find yourself *constantly apologising.*

**Personalisation**

This happens when you are taking things to yourself that are not meant to apply to you. If a friend says he is bored, you think he means he is bored with you. Another aspect of this negative thinking habit is if you constantly compare yourself negatively to others. If, for example, you think you are less clever, less attractive, less competent than others.

**Mind Reading**

This habit of thought assumes that everyone else agrees with your negative opinion of yourself. You may jump to conclusions about what other people think of you on no evidence at all. For example, “I know he hates me”, or “She must think I’m stupid”. If you do this, you are imagining you can read people’s mind.

**Perfectionism**

This is the habit of thinking that you must do everything perfectly and never make a mistake. Even though you know that no-one is really perfect. You may find that you set yourself such high standards that you are bound to fail, then when you do fail to meet these standards, you blame yourself.

**Catastrophising**

This is the habit of thinking that things are much worse than they are. For example, if you have heart palpitations you assume you are having a heart attack, or, if your boss wants to see you, you immediately wonder what you have done wrong. This habit of thinking always assumes the worst.

**Selective Seeing**

This is when you tend to *pay attention to negative facts and ignore positive ones.* You may see examples of rejection and failure in your life and actively ignore your successes. When you think back over a social event do you find yourself concentrating on how you spilt your drink and forgot the rest of the event? You may find you take positive things about yourself for granted, refusing to give them value. You may be a wonderful cook or a skillful gardener but ignore these qualities in yourself. Selective seeing also contributes greatly to anticipatory worry. So that you worry about a situation long before it actually happens. This anticipatory worry is based on some wrong assumptions: The assumption that you can predict the future, that you can predict that negative things are going to happen in the future, and that these predictions will come true. When in reality, you cannot predict the future, you have no idea what will happen at some future event which you are currently worrying about.

You may be able to identify with some, or all, of these negative thinking habits. *The problem with negative thinking is you don’t just believe these things are true, you also* ***ACT*** *as if they were true*. For example, if your boss wants to see you and you think “What have I done wrong?” Your body will respond to this thought with the Fight or Flight Syndrome. This will cause you much greater stress than if you merely thought “My boss wants me, I wonder why”.

* Negative thoughts have negative effects on our lives.
* Negative thoughts always make things seem worse than they are.
* Negative thoughts stop you from doing what you want.
* Negative thoughts try to predict the future negatively.
* Negative thoughts make you think you can read others’ minds.
* Negative thoughts are very rarely true.

Negative thinking is only a habit and habits can be changed. The first step toward changing negative thinking is to listen to your thoughts. *When you catch yourself thinking negatively, write the thought down on the Stress Mood Log, you will soon see your particular pattern of negative thinking habits emerge.*