


**SMART Tool**

## IDENTIFYING UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES

**Psychologists have identified a number of typical unhelpful thinking styles. Familiarising yourself with them can help you recognise them quickly so you can challenge them and reframe them as more helpful or balanced thoughts.**

<b>1. Mental filter</b>	This type of thinking is characterised by ‘tunnel vision’ – looking at only one element of a situation (usually negative) to the exclusion of everything else. <i>Example: Having a disagreement about where to park the car has ‘ruined the whole evening.’</i>
<b>2. Jumping to conclusions/ mind reading</b>	This style of thinking involves drawing conclusions without considering all of the available evidence. <i>Example: ‘My boss wants to speak to me so I must be getting sacked.’</i>
<b>3. Taking it personally</b>	Taking it personally involves ignoring other factors that may have contributed to an outcome. <i>Example: ‘It’s my fault that we had a bad meal because I chose the restaurant.’</i>
<b>4. Catastrophising</b>	This mindset involves imagining the worst possible scenario unfolding and seeing situations as terrible, awful, dreadful and horrible. <i>Example: ‘My chest hurts... I must be having a heart attack.’</i>
<b>5. Black and white thinking</b>	Also known as ‘all or nothing’ thinking, this approach leaves no room for a middle ground. <i>Example: ‘I didn’t get the top mark, so I’m a failure.’</i>
<b>6. ‘Shoulds’ and ‘musts’</b>	Thoughts that begin with ‘I/You/They/People should...’ or ‘I/You/They/People must...’ tend to be rigid and inflexible. They put unreasonable demands on others and create unrealistic expectations. <i>Example: ‘I must never be upset with my partner’ or ‘She should know better.’</i>
<b>7. Over-generalising</b>	This thinking style takes one instance and imposes it on multiple situations. It often includes words such as ‘always,’ ‘never,’ ‘every’ and ‘all.’ <i>Example: ‘Things never work out for me,’ or ‘I always do the wrong thing.’</i>
<b>8. Labelling</b>	This style involves making big statements about ourselves or others on the basis of our behaviour in specific situations. <i>Example: ‘I missed the bus... I’m a total idiot.’</i>