



Paying attention to our thinking

Sometimes our thinking can be unhelpful. Our thinking can be distorted in a number of ways and over the coming weeks we will look at some common thinking errors. Many people can relate to these and the first step in addressing these errors is recognising them.

Noticing our distorted thinking

Even when our thinking is distorted it influences how we act and react. Simply talking to a trusted friend, partner, colleague or other person may well be enough to start to notice our distorted thinking. Many of us do this informally where we have an idea and ask someone for their opinion or perspective.

During times of stress it is easy for our thinking to become unclear. Many people can relate to the idea of leaving an exam and suddenly remembering the answers, thinking of an important point for that job interview as you drive home or, the killer comeback two days after the argument! The current period of public health restrictions represents a potentially stressful situation and it is worth exploring if we are engaging in some common thinking errors.

Today we will consider one example of distorted thinking – ‘**All or nothing thinking**’. This is also known as **black-and-white thinking**. With this form of thinking people may consider things in terms of right or wrong, good or bad, always or never. This can apply to any aspect of life be it work, relationships or a host of everyday concerns that impact on us.

For example, the current public health restrictions are seen by some as either all good or all bad. While extreme thoughts may be appealing they are generally unhelpful. It may be more satisfying to denounce something utterly or support it unreservedly and yet life is rarely black or white but mainly shades of grey. One way to move towards more balanced thinking is to view the public health restrictions by rating them on a scale from 0 to 100 (from awful to excellent). The reality is that there are positives and negatives that will influence our individual scores and reflect our unique set of circumstances. Sometimes reminding ourselves that it is not all black or white is one of the first steps in retaining hope and optimism, two factors that are very important in general and apply to the current situation.