

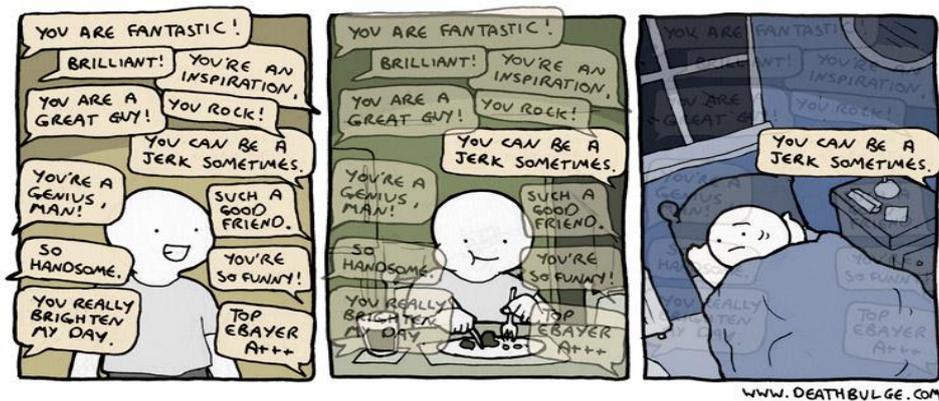


## Our thinking can be unhelpful at times.

There is a constant interplay between our thoughts, our emotions, our behaviour, and our physiology (body), much like cogs all working together as part of one system. Therefore, a change in one area affects all the other areas. For the next few 'Mental Health Notes' we will focus on some common thinking errors.

Last week we had a look at 'All or Nothing Thinking', also known as 'Black and White' Thinking. This is one type of cognitive distortion or faulty way of thinking. This week we will examine another common cognitive distortion - **Mental Filter**.

A person engaging in mental filtering will only focus on the negative aspects of a situation and will discard all the positives. Picture sieving flour into a bowl, and then only focusing on the lumps that remain in the sieve whilst ignoring the contents of the bowl. As humans we tend to react more strongly to negative stimuli, and pay attention to negative things more frequently than positive ones. For example, when we reflect on past conversations with people, it is the criticisms that often have a bigger impact on us than the compliments.



This may be attributed to our negativity bias – a tendency to pay attention to, and then dwell on, the negative aspects of a situation. When we engage in this type of unhelpful thinking without challenging it, we are more likely to experience anxiety or depression. So, the first step is to **recognise** our patterns of thinking. Then we can **challenge** our unhelpful thoughts so that we can engage in more **balanced thinking**.

For some people the current pandemic presents significant challenges. Our mental filter may focus our attention solely on negative aspects. It is not about ignoring or glossing over the bad stuff, it is about reactivating more balanced thinking. Take a moment to reflect on how you have coped over the last few days, acknowledging the challenges that you have faced and also recognising the successes.