

Thoughts

Creating trenches of truth

Our brains are amazing!! We process over 11 million bits of information in 1 second.... Yes, in 1 SECOND! It may not seem like that much is happening in our brain every second because we are only consciously aware of about 50 bits of information each second, which is still A LOT. Because we process so much information, we have around 60,000 thoughts each day!! Some of these thoughts are negative and some are positive. Unfortunately, negative thoughts typically far outweigh positive thoughts, and about 85% of our thoughts are negative.

These negative thoughts become a problem because 95% of our thoughts are repetitive thoughts, meaning we think the same negative (or positive thing) over and over again. These repetitive thoughts create mental ruts or "trenches of truth" in our minds. So, we generally "only see what we are looking for because the mind can gather any evidence to back up the story it is already telling." So, for example, if you believe that you don't belong, or that you are not liked, you will only see or notice those actions around you that prove this is true. The more we find evidence to support our false belief, the more we believe it. This makes those mental ruts, or ditches, deeper and deeper. So, when a certain scenario happens, our thoughts very easily head down the path where the mental rut is the deepest. We have to create new "trenches of truth" so our brain has a better, more accurate, more true, more encouraging path to follow. The more we follow this path in our mind, the easier it will become. That trench will become deeper and deeper and the old, false, discouraging mental rut, will become less traveled in our minds.

So, how do we create new trenches of truth? Below we explain some practical steps to start the process. And remember, the word **process** is important. This does not happen overnight or in a week or month. You will slowly get better and better at this with practice. It takes 66 days for a habit to become automatic in our mind. It takes time, but don't give up... this is worth it. You are worth it. Having a mind that more often tells you what is actually true, encouraging, life giving, is worth it. You can do this and we are here to help you. You matter to us, to your family, to your loved one. Again, do not forget, you are worth it, and you are loved.

How to create new "truth trenches" in our minds

1. **Remove** the lie **and replace** it with truth. To stop a behavior, we need to stop telling ourselves the same lie. We need to start consistently telling ourselves things that are true such as: I am loved. I can be brave. I
This "digs" new neural pathways in our brain. The more we repeat what's true about ourselves to ourselves, the easier it will be for our brain to remember these truths instead of the lies we have repeated again and again.

2. **Reframe.** This is a core COPE principle meaning, we can't control what happens to us, but we can control how we respond. What we think affects what we feel, which affects how we behave, and **YOU HAVE THE POWER** to reframe negative thoughts and change how you respond to them. Because these negative mental thoughts have been formed in our minds, we continually think things about ourselves that our not true, and then this becomes the easiest pathway for our minds to follow. We must look for and take hold of those lies that our mind sometimes tells us. We can "capture the thought" by quickly recognizing the thought as untrue, telling ourselves "Hey, this is a lie!," and then pushing the thought away (imagine looking at the sky and pushing a cloud away, into the distance or over the horizon), and finally, telling ourself what is actually true. Then, keep on reminding yourself of what is true. Examples of things that are true include:
- What I am going through is so hard, **AND**, I have been through hard things before **AND** I can get through this
 - I feel so alone **AND** even though I feel this way, I know that have people in my life who love me deeply and care about what happens to me. I know that I matter.
 - I hate this internal struggle that I keep battling **AND** I know that it can get better. There are things I can do to make it better. I've been through hard things before, and I know I can do them again. People are available to help me if I need it. I am not alone.

Notice these are all **AND**, rather than **BUT** statements, because what you are going through is hard **AND** you can get through it. Saying **BUT** after mentioning something that is hard or hurtful discounts your feelings, and feelings are normal, and should recognized. For example, instead of saying in your mind "No one talked to me at lunch today **BUT** it will be okay," you might try "no one talked to me at lunch **AND** that was so hurtful and made me feel like no one likes me. I hate this feeling. **AND** I know that I am liked by ____, ____, and _____. I am a good friend."

3. **Change.** To help change our perspective, we need to be quick to remember how far we've come and the things that we have to be grateful for. There are many different ways to do this. For those who enjoy praying, praying prayers of gratitude can be very life giving. Others find peace and affirmation by starting a gratitude journal. There is no right or wrong way to journal about gratitude. You just need a notebook where you can periodically write down accomplishments, people and things you're grateful for, and things about yourself that you really like (remember, you were created on purpose for a purpose!). Read back through the journal often to look back and see how far you've come and all the things you've been thankful for in the past. Another way to change perspective can be to do something for someone in need (be kind to someone at school who no one likes, volunteer to serve meals to someone in need, visit a nursing home). If you need ideas, ask your parents to help.

"Your thoughts become your beliefs. Your beliefs become your truth. Your truth becomes your story. Your story become your reality"