

RECOGNIZING & CHALLENGING ED THOUGHTS

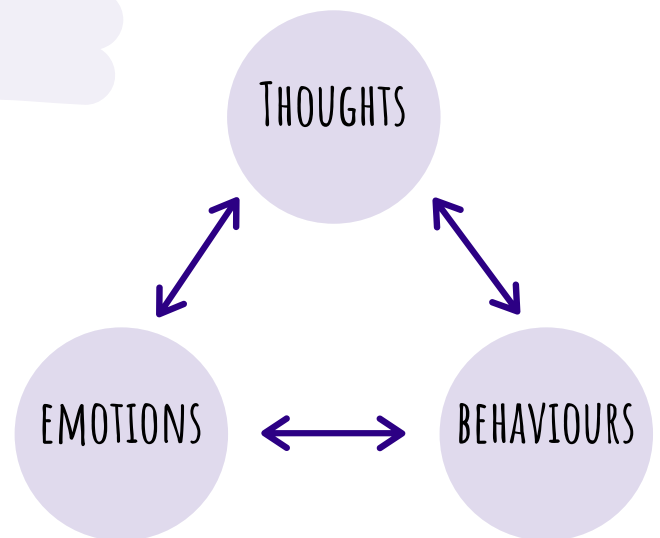
Eating Disorder (ED) thoughts are not your own. If you didn't have an ED, you wouldn't have ED thoughts. ED thoughts keep you using behaviours that harm your health. Challenging ED thoughts is necessary for the recovery of your nutrition, health and authentic self.

WHAT ARE ED THOUGHTS?

- An ED distorts the way you think about food, nutrition, and your body, causing you to eat and/or exercise in a way that can be harmful to your physical and mental health
- The unhealthy and distorted thoughts that someone with an ED experiences is sometimes referred to as their "ED voice"
 - It may be helpful for you to give your ED voice its own name/character to help you separate your thoughts from the ED

WHAT WILL YOU CALL YOUR ED?

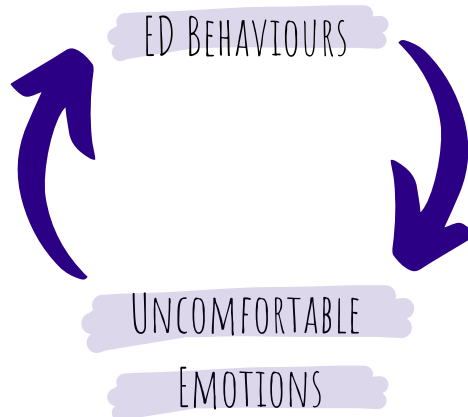
- Examples of what someone's ED voice may sound like:
 - "I'm going to gain ## pounds from eating that."
 - "I can't eat that unless I exercise for ## minutes."
 - "I need to track my calories because I can't trust my body."
- Your ED thoughts can negatively impact your emotions and behaviours, which are all interconnected
- You have control over how you respond to your thoughts
 - Identifying ED thoughts and recognizing how they relate to your behaviours/ emotions, can help you learn how to challenge and fight your ED



HOW DOES AN ED "WORK"?

Every ED has ONE Mission = to keep itself going (keep using behaviours)

Experiencing uncomfortable emotions triggers the ED to try to rush in and "spare you" from feeling negative emotions. It does this by distracting you with ED behaviours.



Using ED behaviours or "failing" at using ED behaviours creates more uncomfortable emotions.

RECOGNIZING DISORDERED THOUGHT PATTERNS:

- Your ED voice often gets louder when you start refraining from disordered eating and exercise behaviours
- The ED voice reinforces distorted thought patterns:

All-or-Nothing/ Black & White Thinking: contributes to perfectionistic tendencies because it causes you to believe that something is either completely okay/right or completely wrong.

- Example: You may feel like you will never recover if you struggle one day to follow the meal plan your Dietitian provided.

Over-generalizing: occurs when you believe that a negative experience or situation describes your life completely.

- Example: When you experience a relapse means you think that you will never recover fully, rather than seeing it as a temporary setback.

"Shoulds": are demands that you place on yourself that usually leave you with a sense of guilt and shame. Often ED "shoulds" might include thoughts about needing to exercise, what foods should/shouldn't be eaten, or what you should weigh.

- Example: Thinking "I should have done better." or "I must be perfect."

Catastrophizing: any time you believe that a situation is so bad that you simply cannot survive it, you may be catastrophizing about the situation or its outcome.

- Example: You might believe that if you weighed a certain amount, no one would like you or your self-worth would plummet. You might also believe that your weight will rise based on what you have eaten at one meal or snack.

Labeling: a distortion that attempts to place people and things in specific categories. Typically the labels are overly simplistic and are unable to describe all of the complexities humans possess.

- Example: "I'm such a loser," "I have no self-control," or "These foods will make me gain weight."

Rejecting the Positive: focusing only on the negative aspects of something and rejecting anything positive.

- Example: Criticizing mistakes or focusing only on the caloric content of food instead of the nutrition/ energy in the food.

Unfavourable Comparisons: comparing the way you look, what you weigh, and how much you eat etc. to the people around you. These comparisons tend to always be negative.

- Example: If you think someone weighs less than you do and the ED thoughts may focus on how you 'should' also weigh less, or if you believe that you weigh less, the eating disorder thoughts focus on keeping you at the lower weight

Blaming and Personalizing: when someone personalizes, they believe that everything is their fault, whereas when someone blames others, they believe that everything is someone else's fault. The truth likely lies somewhere in the middle—and sometimes it is no one's fault that something has happened.

- Example: You may think to yourself "If my friend didn't show concern I could continue with my ED without people being worried about me, it's their fault that I'm struggling with recovery right now."
- These negative thought patterns make it harder for you to separate yourself from the ED and keep you using ED behaviours -->this is how the ED achieves its mission of keeping itself going
- Learning to recognize and challenge the ED voice is vital to recovery; it allows you to reframe disordered eating thoughts into more rational and healthy thoughts about your food and body

EXAMPLES OF REFRAMING ED THOUGHT PATTERNS:

ED THOUGHT

To be happy, I need to lose
x# of pounds.



HEALTHY ALTERNATIVE THOUGHT

My weight is only one component of my health. It's healthy for weight to change during different stages of life. Fixating on my weight is a waste of time and prevents me from living fully.

I'm not hungry,
so I don't need to eat.



I'm not hungry because I haven't been giving my body the nutrition that it needs. Even if I'm not hungry I need to eat regularly so I can restore my hunger and fullness cues.

My anxiety gets worse if I don't
count calories or [insert ED
behaviour here].



Being obsessive about my food and body is not a healthy way to manage my anxiety. Feeling uncomfortable when I challenge my ED is normal and necessary to fully recover.

I'm fat. I hate my [body part].
I don't deserve to eat



My perception of my body is distorted and I'm not thinking rationally. I need to nourish my body to feel better emotionally, mentally and physically. I need to nourish my body and appreciate all that it does for me.

WHAT IS ONE THING YOUR
ED OFTEN TELLS YOU?



WHAT COULD BE A HEALTHY
ALTERNATIVE THOUGHT THAT YOU COULD SAY IN
RESPONSE?

WHAT IF I CAN'T THINK OF A HEALTHY ALTERNATIVE THOUGHT?

It is common to be overcritical and unforgiving towards yourself while being supportive and compassionate to your friends and family. If you're finding it difficult to think of healthy alternative thoughts to replace disordered thoughts, ask yourself:

What would you say to a friend if they talked to themselves this way?

DISOBEYING YOUR ED:

Similar to reframing your ED thoughts, you may find it useful to “disobey” the ED voice that you hear. It is recommended that you write down and speak your recovery focused responses out loud. This may sound cheesy but, it actually helps to actually rewire your brain! Consider this: In your head, start to recite the ABCs. While you are reciting the ABCs in your head, start to count from 1-10 out loud. Doesn’t work does it? By keeping your brain/ mouth busy with recovery focused mantras you don’t give yourself the opportunity to fall into the slump of negative, defeating ED focused thoughts. Give it a try below!

ED SAYS:

ED says Skip breakfast

ED says exercise today

RECOVERY REQUIRES:

recovery requires me to eat breakfast

recovery requires me to rest today

Sources:

- Measuring Health from the Inside: Nutrition, Metabolism & Body Composition (Chaffee & Kham)
- Nutrition Counselling in the Treatment of Eating Disorders (Marcia Herrin, Maria Larkin)
- Sick Enough: A Guide to the Medical Complications of Eating Disorders (Jennifer L. Gaudiani)
- Life Without Ed (Jenni Schaefer)
- Recover Your Perspective (Dr. Janean Anderson)