

## Unhealthy Thinking Questionnaire

In order to counter the effects of unhealthy thinking patterns, you must first identify which of these patterns are most common for you. After reviewing the statements below, put a check mark in the left column next to those that are true of you and a check mark in the right column next to those that you believe are true of your spouse.

- 1. I see things as pretty much black and white.
- 2. I tend to make mountains out of molehills.
- 3. I often take things personally.
- 4. I believe that past disappointments predict the future.
- 5. What I am feeling is more important than the facts.
- 6. I often think that people make too much of their problems. They should just get over it.
- 7. I believe that there is a place for everything and that everything should be in its place.
- 8. Everything seems to be a big deal to me.
- 9. It is very important that I sense others' approval.
- 10. I just know that things will not get any better.
- 11. I cannot really believe that I am loved unless I feel it.
- 12. I can handle almost any problem that comes my way without support from anyone.
- 13. Being perfect in what I undertake is essential to me.
- 14. I seem to overreact to relatively small irritations.
- 15. If someone in my family is upset, I feel that I must somehow be at fault.
- 16. I tend to write people off if they hurt or disappoint me.
- 17. If I feel unloved, I assume that no one loves me.
- 18. I do not believe that there is any reason to get very worked up or emotional.

Using the information below, determine which of the six unhealthy thinking patterns are most characteristic of you and your spouse.

Statements 1, 7, and 13 reflect a tendency to **polarize**.

Statements 2, 8, and 14 reflect a tendency to **magnify**.

Statements 3, 9, and 15 reflect a tendency to **personalize**.

Statements 4, 10, and 16 reflect a tendency to **generalize**.

Statements 5, 11, and 17 reflect a tendency to **emotionally reason**.

Statements 6, 12 and 18 reflect a tendency to **minimize**.

According to this exercise, I have a tendency to...

## Polarizing

Seeing everything in black and white, with no gray areas

**Description:** View life as all or nothing, good or bad, black or white. Hold to rigid rules for evaluating life. Feel little satisfaction in modest performance or genuine effort. Experience little joy when they succeed, since it was expected all along.

**Background:** Often raised in legalistic, critical, or performance-oriented families, or homes where there were many insecurities and fears. Perhaps whatever the child did was never good enough. Perhaps others around them were consistently criticized and evaluated.

### Self-talk:

“If it is not done this way, it will not work.”

“You are either totally for me, or you are totally against me.”

“If it rains today, the picnic (and my entire weekend) will be ruined.”

“My project was criticized; therefore, I am a total failure.”

**Truth:** Some issues in life are black or white, but many are “shades of gray.” The “middle ground” can often be accepted and enjoyed. Discernment is important, but judgmental attitudes toward ourselves or others must be avoided. Key Scripture passages include Matthew 7:1-5.

Take Thoughts Captive  
2 Corinthians 10:5

Think About What Is True  
Philippians 4:8

Replace: “If it is not done this way, it will not work.”

With: “My way is not the only way. Others’ ways may work, too.”

Replace:

With:

Replace:

With:

## Magnifying

Making mountains out of molehills

**Description:** Exaggerate events until everything seems like a catastrophe. May be volatile with anger, unmerciful with self-condemnation, or overwhelmed with fear or self-pity. May be viewed as self-absorbed, preoccupied with their own crises, whiny, and prone to overreaction. Frequently use extreme words and phrases such as “always,” “never,” “ever,” “all,” “nothing,” “worst,” “devastated,” “ruined,” “terrible,” “horrible,” “awful,” “beyond repair,” or “too late.”

**Background:** Often raised in environments in which little things were blown out of proportion. Discipline may have been excessive and disproportionate to the offense.

### Self-talk:

“Everything is ruined!”

“I will never have any friends!”

“I have not done anything right all day!”

“I might as well give up!”

“It was the worst thing that has ever happened to me!”

**Truth:** Molehills are not mountains. Not everything is a big deal. A minor problem only deserves a minor reaction. People sometimes treat us badly, but not always. We do some things wrong, but not everything. It is usually too soon to give up. Key Scripture passages include Romans 8:28, James 1:19-20, Colossians 3:15-16, and Galatians 5:22-23.

Take Thoughts Captive  
2 Corinthians 10:5

Think about What Is True  
Philippians 4:8

Replace: “Everything is ruined!”

With: “This situation is bad, but I can survive it with God’s help.”

Replace:

With:

Replace:

With:

## Personalizing

Taking everything personally

**Description:** Overestimate the extent to which events are related to them. Tend to be moody and easily hurt by apparent rejections. Often insecure and self-condemning. May blame themselves for everything. May be viewed by others as fragile, sensitive, childish, self-centered, or even hysterical.

**Background:** Often were rejected or neglected in childhood or came from highly critical home environments in which they were often wrongly blamed for whatever was happening.

### Self-talk:

“I am sure that it is my fault.”

“She is out to get me.”

“He deliberately did that to hurt me.”

“Nothing ever goes my way.”

“She did not speak to me-what did I do wrong?”

**Truth:** We are not the target or cause of everything that happens to us. Usually, what occurs is not aimed at us, or is more a statement about the other person than about us. Key Scripture passages include Romans 12:3, Philippians 2:3--4, and 1 Peter 5:7.

Take Thoughts Captive  
2 Corinthians 10:5

Think about What Is True  
Philippians 4:8

Replace: “I am sure that it is my fault.”

With: “I may have contributed to the problem,  
but I want to get more information  
before I accept total responsibility.”

Replace:

With:

Replace:

With:

## Generalizing

Believing that history always repeats itself

**Description:** Believe that past events always predict the future. Whatever has happened before will inevitably happen again. Nothing will ever change, including themselves. Often lack initiative and are usually pessimistic.

**Background:** Often “trained” in this thinking pattern in home environment by having it modeled by one or both parents. May have received painful labels at the hands of others.

### Self-talk:

“I have never made good grades before, so why bother studying?”

“I have never been able to lose weight, so why bother trying again?”

“I can never count on you when I need you.”

“We have always been unhappy-I know that will not change.”

“He has never listened before, so why would he now?”

**Truth:** What has happened before does not have to happen again. If I put forth some effort, things can be different, and even better. Key Scripture passages include 1 Timothy 4:7-8, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 8:29, and Philippians 2:12-13.

Take Thoughts Captive  
2 Corinthians 10:5

Think about What Is True  
Philippians 4:8

Replace: “I have never made good grades  
before, so why bother studying?”

With: “With effort, I can learn how to study  
more effectively and raise my grades.”

Replace:

With:

Replace:

With:

## Emotional Reasoning

Believing that one's feelings determine what is and is not true

**Description:** Believe that one's feelings are the equivalent of truth. Feelings are confused with facts, and also with thoughts. A person may say, "I just do not feel that you care," which means, "Since I do not feel your care, the fact is that you do not care." A more precise statement might be, "I do not think that you care," or, "I am afraid that you do not care." In this latter statement, the real emotion-fear-is honestly expressed.

**Background:** May have suffered deep emotional trauma in childhood, such as physical or sexual abuse. May have frequently felt afraid but did not receive any help dealing with their fears. May have seen emotional reasoning modeled. May have experienced frequent broken promises, prompting an attitude of, "I will believe it when I see it."

### Self-talk:

"That is just how I feel."

"I just do not feel that you..."

"I will believe that you love me when I feel it."

**Truth:** Even though I feel something, it may not be true. Feelings are not facts. When I say "I feel that..." I am really expressing a thought, and I may be feeling important emotions (such as hurt, fear, or anger) that need to be identified and expressed. Key Scripture passages include Romans 5:8, Romans 8:28-39, John 8:31-32, Romans 12:2, Matthew 5:4, and 1 John 4:19-20.

Take Thoughts Captive  
2 Corinthians 10:5

Think about What Is True  
Philippians 4:8

Replace: "That is just how I feel."

With: "My feelings are important, but they may not always be consistent with the truth."

Replace:

With:

Replace:

With:

## Minimizing

Insisting that nothing really matters very much

**Description:** Most if not all important or significant events are denied or discounted. Tend to not feel or express feelings, and thus tend to expect or demand the same from others. Even during life's major events, little emotion is shown. Often deny that anything is wrong or that anything troubles them. Much effort may be expended to "put a good face on things." Often impatient with those who show emotions.

**Background:** Often come from homes where personal needs were neglected or overlooked. To cope with pain, they "shut down" and acted as if nothing was wrong. May have learned or been encouraged to deny their needs, which promotes losing touch with their feelings. May have become self-reliant. May have seen this pattern modeled by others.

### Self-talk:

"It is no big deal."

"It will go away."

"This kind of thing happens to everyone. I will get over it."

"That is just life. Deal with it."

**Truth:** Some of life's events are a big deal and thus warrant a significant emotional and/ or behavioral response. Jesus came to give "abundant life." Pain needs to be mourned and comforted. Key Scripture passages include Matthew 5:4, Romans 12:15, and Hebrews 5:7.

Take Thoughts Captive  
2 Corinthians 10:5

Think about What Is True  
Philippians 4:8

Replace: "This kind of thing happens to everyone. I will get over it."

With: "As I feel my pain, grieve the hurt, and receive comfort from God and others, I will get over it."

Replace:

With:

Replace:

With: