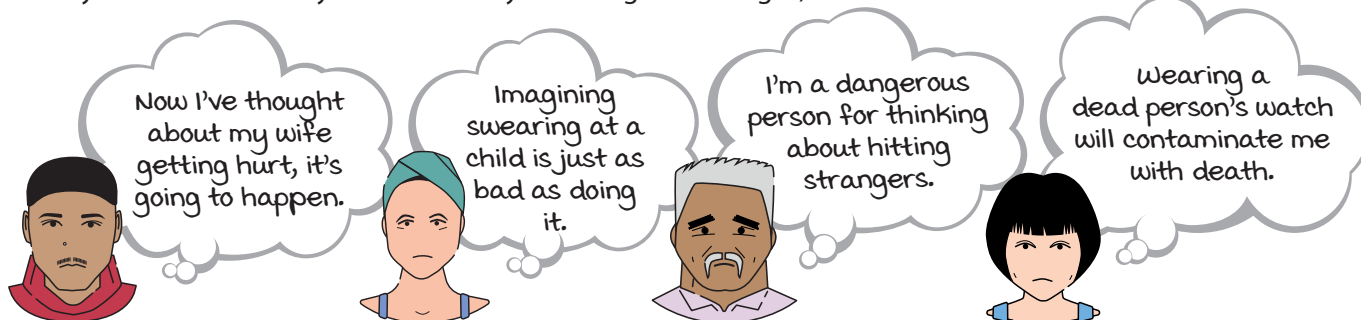


When we feel strong emotions – such as fear, sadness, shame, or hopelessness – we have often just had an *automatic thought*. These thoughts can happen so quickly and effortlessly that we are not even aware we've had them. It can take practice to notice them as they arise. Automatic thoughts often feel convincing, but they are not always 100% accurate.

They are often *exaggerated, biased, distorted, or unrealistic*. There are different types of biases, which psychologists call *cognitive distortions* or *unhelpful thinking styles*. We all think in exaggerated ways sometimes, but it can become a problem if your thoughts are distorted very often or very strongly.

Thought-action fusion (TAF) is a style of 'magical thinking' where you believe your thoughts can directly influence the world around you. There are different types: '**Likelihood TAF**' (you believe having a negative thought makes it more likely that something bad will happen to you or another person), '**Morality TAF**' (you believe having a thought about doing something is just as bad as actually doing it), '**Thought-Object Fusion**' (you believe that thoughts and feelings can be transferred to certain objects), and '**Thought-Shape Fusion**' (thoughts about eating certain food make you feel bad about yourself or as if you have gained weight).



Thought-action fusion is associated with a wide range of problems:

- Eating disorders
- Depression
- Generalised anxiety disorder
- Health anxiety
- OCD
- Panic disorder
- Psychosis
- Social anxiety
- Suicidality

Overcoming thought-action fusion

Noticing and labelling

The first step in overcoming thought-action fusion is to notice when you are doing it. Practise self-monitoring so that you get better at catching your unhelpful assumptions as they happen. When you notice one, say something to yourself like:

- "That's an unreasonable response to the thought I'm having."
- "I'm placing too much value on my thoughts again."



Evaluate your thinking

There are lots of ways of viewing a situation or experience. You can practise putting your thoughts in perspective by asking yourself these questions:

- Have thoughts like this always caused bad things to happen in the past? Why not?
- How would my thoughts cause this to happen? Is there a scientific explanation?
- Everyone experiences thoughts like these, so are we all dangerous/bad or is it just me?



Know your facts

It's important to remember that your thoughts are not as 'bad' or 'dangerous' as you believe they are. Extensive research has shown that:

- Everyone experiences negative, unwanted thoughts or 'intrusions' sometimes.
- Intrusions cause distress when we think they are more important than they are (e.g., when we think they make us 'immoral').
- Thoughts don't affect the external world (for example, there's no evidence that telekinesis exists).



Test out your thoughts

You can test out whether your thoughts influence external events by using experiments. For example, you could:

- Buy a lottery ticket and wish for the jackpot – did you win?
- Think about catching a cold – did you become unwell?
- When you feel ready, try more challenging experiments. For example, you could write "I wish that <a loved one> becomes unwell today".

