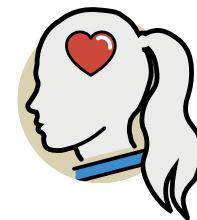


When we feel strong emotions – such as fear, sadness, shame, or hopelessness – we have often just had an *automatic thought*. These thoughts can happen so quickly and effortlessly that we are not even aware we've had them. It can take practice to notice them as they arise. Automatic thoughts often feel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

Emotional reasoning is a style of thinking where you assume that something must be true because you feel it strongly. In other words, your feelings, hunches, or instincts guide how you interpret a situation. Unfortunately, emotional reasoning can be misleading because our feelings are not always an accurate reflection of reality.



Emotional reasoning is associated with a number of problems.

- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder
- Delusional beliefs
- Depression
- OCD
- Panic disorder
- Phobias
- PTSD
- Social anxiety

Overcoming emotional reasoning

Noticing and labeling

The first step in overcoming emotional reasoning is to catch yourself doing it. Practice *self-monitoring* so that you can spot these thoughts as they arise. When you notice one, say something to yourself like:

- “I’m using emotional reasoning again.”
- “There goes my ‘emotional reasoning’ again.”



Do some ‘reality testing’

Compare your emotional reasoning with reality. For instance, if you are feeling anxious, can you see or hear any clear signs of danger? Reality-testing can help you see things more accurately and objectively.

- “I feel like something bad is going to happen...”
- “...The reality is I am in a safe place with people who love me. I’m not in danger.”



Shift your emotional state

Changing how you feel can help you see things differently. Spend a few moments focusing on your breathing, visiting a ‘safe place’ in your mind, or distracting yourself. When you feel better your emotional reasoning might change too.

- “I feel like such a failure...”
- “...I’ll do some relaxed breathing, take a walk outside, and come back to that thought afterwards.”



Do the opposite action

Instead of acting on your emotional reasoning, do the opposite. For instance, if you feel afraid, don’t avoid the thing that scares you – approach it instead. Taking opposite action is one of the best ways to change your thoughts and feelings.

- “Everything feels so pointless – I want to stay in bed...”
- “...I’m going to take the opposite action and get on with my day anyway.”

