

Module 6
Detective Work & Disputation

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Moving on to **D**: Challenging Our Unhelpful Thoughts

Previously, we established that it is our thoughts that influence our feelings, emotions, and behaviours – the thoughts and feelings connection. We also discussed and identified some unhelpful thinking patterns and styles that we frequently use. Often, a depressed person will think negative thoughts that are characterised by these unhelpful thinking patterns, which lead them to feel depressed, miserable, and distressed. This, in turn, maintains and perpetuates the depression.

The key to changing the way we feel is found in challenging and changing our unhelpful thoughts and beliefs. This begins with you taking a good hard look at them. Imagine that you are a detective and a lawyer, and your unhelpful thoughts and beliefs are to be investigated or on trial.

To assess whether or not your thoughts and beliefs are valid, you need to gather and examine evidence. As such, we liken this process to that of being a detective. Therefore, “D” stands for “Detective Work” where you look for evidence that does or does not support your thoughts and beliefs. Like all good detectives, we need to find out the facts, and gather the evidence. Here are some helpful questions:

- What is the evidence (or proof) that my thoughts/beliefs are true?
- Is there any evidence that disproves my thoughts/beliefs?
- How do I know that my thoughts/beliefs are true?
- Are there facts that I’m ignoring or I’ve overlooked?
- What other explanations could there possibly be?
- How realistic are my thoughts, beliefs, and expectations?



D also stands for “Disputation.” Remember, you are also like a lawyer, asking questions that challenge your thoughts, beliefs and expectations, ultimately testing and challenging whether or not they stand true, and whether they help or hinder you. Here are some other helpful questions to ask yourself:

- What other ways are there of viewing the situation?
- How might someone else view the situation?
- If I were not depressed, how might I view the situation differently?
- Realistically, what is the likelihood of that happening?
- Is it helpful for me to think this way?

Detective work and disputation is about trying to be objective about our thoughts. It is about analysing them, assessing, and evaluating them to see if they are indeed valid and true, as opposed to accepting these thoughts and believing them without question.

In Module 4, an example of a Thought Diary was provided for you. We will continue with that example to work through the next steps of the Thought Diary, incorporating what has been discussed in this module (detective work and disputation) and the previous module (unhelpful thinking styles). In the example provided below, a section on Unhelpful Thinking Styles has been added, while sections A, B, and C of the thought diary remain the same as the example provided in Module 4.

Thought Diary (Example)

<p>A Activating Event This may include an actual event or situation, a thought, mental picture or physical trigger.</p> <p><i>When my partner came home this evening, she said 'hi' but didn't give me a kiss like she usually does.</i></p>	<p>B Beliefs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List all self-statements that link A to C. Ask yourself: "What was I thinking?" "What was I saying to myself?" "What was going through my head at the time?" 2. Find the most distressing (hot) thought and underline it. 3. Rate how much you believe this thought between 0 to 100. <p><i>"She must be tired of me moping around and feeling depressed."</i></p> <p>Thought discovery question: "... and what does this mean?"</p> <p><u><i>"She probably doesn't care about me anymore. Maybe she doesn't even love me anymore."</i></u> (90)</p>
<p>C Consequences</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write down words describing how you feel. 2. Underline the one that is most associated with the activating event. 3. Rate the intensity of those feelings (0 to 100). <p><i>Hurt</i> <u><i>Afraid</i></u> (90)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Jot down any physical sensations you experienced or actions carried out. <p><i>Chest feels very tight and sore</i></p>	<p>Unhelpful Thinking Styles</p> <p>Do you recognise any unhelpful thinking styles you might have been using? (Mental filter, jumping to conclusions, personalisation, catastrophising, black & white thinking, shoulding & musting, overgeneralisation, labelling, emotional reasoning, disqualifying/ignoring positives)</p> <p><i>Jumping to conclusions - mind reading</i></p> <p><i>Mental filter</i></p>

Note that a section on Unhelpful Thinking Styles has been added to the Thought Diary. Look at what you have written in the **B** section and see if you can identify any unhelpful thinking styles you might have

The next step requires you to begin doing some Detective Work and Disputation. The example of the Thought Diary continues below.

D Detective Work & Disputation (Example)

Now refer to the hot thought and ask yourself: “What is the factual evidence for and against my hot thought?”

My HOT Thought: <i>She probably doesn't care for me anymore. Maybe she doesn't even love me anymore.</i>	
FACTUAL EVIDENCE FOR MY HOT THOUGHT	FACTUAL EVIDENCE AGAINST MY HOT THOUGHT
<i>She told me to go and see a psychologist to do something about my depression.</i>	<i>She has been telling me that she understands my struggles and will support me through this period. She made a special dinner for me last night.</i>

Disputation Questions:

What other ways are there of viewing the situation?

She might have had a difficult day at work and was just feeling tired and distracted.

She might have wanted to put the groceries away quickly.

She might have wanted to go to the toilet quickly.

If I were not feeling this way, how might I view the situation differently?

I might remember that she shows her affection to me in many ways.

I might remember that she stuck by me when we went through a rough patch.

On the next page is a Thought Diary that incorporates all the steps up to this point. If you have completed Module 4, you might have filled out a Thought Diary. Continue with Detective Work and Disputation to challenge the unhelpful thoughts and beliefs from your thought diary. If you have not previously filled out a thought diary, this might be a good time to do one (see Module 4 for more details on how to start an ABC analysis).

Thought Diary ²

A Activating Event

This may include an actual event or situation, a thought, mental picture or physical trigger.

B Beliefs

1. List all self-statements that link A to C. Ask yourself: “What was I thinking?” “What was I saying to myself?” “What was going through my head at the time?”
2. Find the most distressing (hot) thought and underline it.
3. Rate how much you believe this thought between 0 to 100.

C Consequences

1. Write down words describing how you feel.
2. Underline the one that is most associated with the activating event
3. Rate the intensity of this feeling between 0 to 100.

4. Jot down any physical sensations you experienced or actions carried out.

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

Do you recognise any unhelpful thinking styles you might have been using? (Mental filter, jumping to conclusions, personalisation, catastrophising, black & white thinking, shoulding & musting, overgeneralisation, labelling, emotional reasoning, disqualifying/ ignoring positives)

D Detective Work & Disputation

Detective Work: Now refer to the hot thought, and ask yourself, “What is the factual evidence for and against my hot thought?”

My HOT Thought:	
Factual Evidence For My HOT Thought	Factual Evidence Against My HOT Thought

Disputation: Ask yourself the following questions ...

- What other ways are there of viewing the situation?
- If I were not feeling this way, how would I view the situation?
- Realistically, what is the likelihood of that happening?
- How might someone else view the situation?
- Does it really help me to think this way?
- Think of some helpful self-statements

Module Summary

- Detective work is about trying to be objective about our thoughts. It is evaluating if we are tuning out valuable information that may help us feel better
- Detective work requires you to gather evidence for and against your unhelpful thoughts and beliefs, particularly your hot thought for every activating event
- Disputation is about asking yourself questions that will help you look for other information around you so that you can make an informed decision about your thoughts instead of just accepting them
- Here are some typical detective work and disputation questions:
 - ⇒ What experiences do I have that show that this thought/belief is not completely true all of the time?
 - ⇒ What is the evidence for/against my automatic thoughts?
 - ⇒ Are there other ways of viewing the situation?
 - ⇒ How might someone else view the situation?
 - ⇒ If I were giving advice to a friend, what would I say?
 - ⇒ Are there any strengths or positives in me or in the situation that I am overlooking?

Stay Tuned ...

In the next module, we will discuss how you can develop balanced thoughts to replace any unhelpful thoughts, and ultimately improve your mood.