



Taking your thoughts to court

Taking your thoughts to court is a common technique used in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT is a type of talking therapy which aims to help you to manage your feelings and understand your thoughts and consequent behaviours.

By understanding how your thoughts, feelings and behaviours interlink, you can hopefully challenge and reframe any negative thoughts which could modify how you behave.

Taking your thoughts to court can be an effective tool to use when managing heightened emotions such as stress and anxiety and can pave the way to a more balanced and healthy response.

When we are presented with a situation which causes heightened emotions, we can sometimes have thoughts which negatively distort our perception which is often referred to as 'cognitive distortions', such as:

- **Catastrophising:** thinking and expecting the worst will happen.
- **All or nothing/polarised:** swinging in your thinking to extremes with little balance in between.
- **Over-generalising:** forming negative beliefs based on single event/experience.
- **Jumping to conclusions:** making negative assumptions without evidence.
- **Discounting/disqualifying:** dismissing or invalidating anything positive in the situation.
- **Filtering:** filtering experiences and yourself through a negative lens, ignoring positives.

- **Personalisation:** attributing blame to yourself for aspects outside your control.
- **Emotional reasoning:** basing your emotions on your feelings instead of the evidence/reality of the situation.
- **Mind reading:** when you guess what others are thinking without clarifying.
- **Fortune-telling:** when you think the future is determined and you have no control over the outcome.
- **'Should' statements:** emphasis on your responsibility in a situation and judging what you should have done.

Sometimes we can mistakenly regard our thoughts as facts, but by taking your thoughts to court you can examine the evidence for and against a negative thought, also known as 'hot thought'. This helps you to take a step back, encouraging balanced alternatives and enabling a clearer understanding of the situation. You will be able to approach challenges and problems more calmly and rationally, gaining a clearer understanding of how you can control elements within your power and maintain healthy boundaries.

Examples



Work scenario

Your manager has informed you that you will be taken off a project that you've been working on for months but they will explain more in a meeting next week.

Emotional response:

This triggers an emotional response in you. You might feel, scared, worried, or angry.

What is the thought driving your emotional response?

In this case it might be: "I must have done something wrong".

Thoughts to court:

Here's where we take our thoughts to court. Start by looking at the factual evidence you have to support that thought.

For: I haven't been meeting all my deadlines recently.

Look for evidence that doesn't support that thought.

Against: My manager said the deadlines were unrealistic and hasn't given me any reasons for concern.

Alternative thoughts: Maybe I'm catastrophizing. I don't know all the facts and there could be another reason they are moving things around. Maybe there are reasons that are nothing to with me that I am unaware of.



Home scenario

Whilst preparing to leave the house for school your mum has asked you to hand over your mobile phone, saying she will return it at the weekend.

Emotional response:

This might trigger the following emotions: angry, upset, or frustration.

What is the thought driving your emotional response?

You might feel like your mum doesn't trust you or thinks you can't be responsible.

Thoughts to court:

Here's where we take our thoughts to court. Start by looking at the factual evidence you have to support that thought.

For: Your mum mentioned that you had exceeded your plan last month and she had cover the cost.

Against: Your mum was cautious about giving you a mobile for the first time and listed lots of reasons why she worried it might not be a good idea, like potential bullying or theft.

Alternative thoughts: Mum said finances were a bit tight so possibly the cost of having a mobile is causing her concern rather than anything I may or may not have done.



School scenario

You have written a script for a school play and the teacher has picked yours to be the one used at an assembly but they have said that you can't be one of the main characters in the play.

Emotional Response:

This might trigger the following emotions: upset, angry or annoyed.

What is the thought driving your emotional response?

"The teacher thinks I'm not good enough, that I'm not a good actor".

Thoughts to court:

Here's where we take our thoughts to court. Start by looking at the factual evidence you have to support that thought.

For: Last time you weren't chosen to perform in the play and now this time too.

Against: The teacher did say they like to share the acting parts out amongst the class.

Alternative thoughts: Your play was chosen and the teacher may be wanting to share the opportunities out to other pupils so that everyone has a chance to shine.

How do you feel now you've taken your thoughts to court?

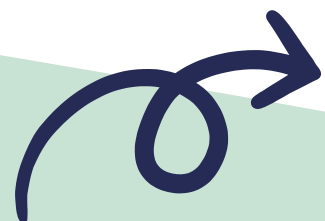
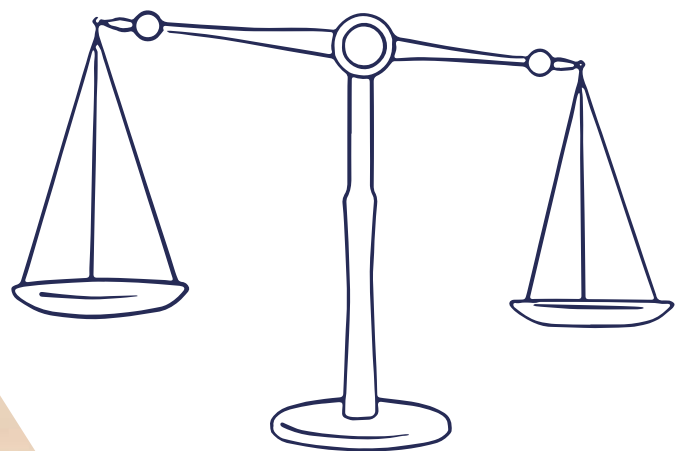
In looking objectively at whether your perception was skewed by negative thoughts, you will probably feel your emotions have become more manageable and you've gained clarity over next steps. As with the examples above, your alternative thoughts hold value, so it might be worth exploring and clarifying these with people involved in the situation as this could provide greater reassurance and comfort.

Taking your thoughts to court is a simple but valuable process to help calm us down and to encourage more balanced thinking. You can do this anywhere at any time. You could do this in your head, on paper, or talking with someone you trust.

With some practice you will hopefully notice that you experience negative thinking patterns less often or that you can challenge them as soon as they arise.

Click [here](#) to watch a video about taking your thoughts to court.

You can use the template overleaf to work through your own scenario.



Describe in a nutshell the situation or scenario:

Write down the negative thoughts or hot thoughts you had.



For:

What evidence supports this to be true?



Against:

What evidence suggests this is false?



As an impartial member of the jury consider the evidence for and against:

Are there any alternatives that could be considered from the evidence presented above?



Outcome and verdict:

Given all the evidence above, what do you think of the negative thoughts cited at the beginning? Are they realistic and balanced given all the counter arguments? What thought holds true for you now?



Cognitive distortions:

What cognitive distortions did you have at the very beginning, tick any that apply:

- Catastrophising
- All or nothing/polarized
- Over-generalising
- Jumping to conclusions
- Discounting/disqualifying
- Filtering
- Personalisation
- Emotional reasoning
- Mind reading
- Fortune-telling
- 'Should' statements

It might be helpful to recall these next time a situation presents itself, so you can see if there are patterns to your thinking that could be unhelpful or unhealthy.