



Mindful Thinking Lessons 1-10
Teacher Guide



1. Thinking Error: I Can't

Background for teacher: *When adolescents have the “I can’t!” thinking habit, they automatically feel scared and helpless, even if they don’t realize this. That feeling can lead to a myriad of external behaviors and challenges in the classroom, with students tending to freeze and give up before even trying, become anxious, sad, or depressed, because they immediately conclude that they have no control. Teaching students to be proactive to disrupt this thinking error is crucial so that students can learn how to bounce back from disappointments and take risks. It’s not enough to encourage a student who says, “I can’t” by saying “yes you can”. Instead, we can re-train the brain to look for evidence that we can and develop an action plan. Looking for evidence is empowering and fosters a sense of confidence.*

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- When faced with a problem or challenge, often times our mind automatically goes to “I can’t” before we even know it.
 - Academic example: David opens his math homework and immediately gets really frustrated and thinks “I can’t do this assignment; the formulas are too confusing”.
 - Social example: Sarah’s best friend stays home from school one day. When she walks into the lunch room and doesn’t see her friend, her brain automatically thinks, “I can’t eat at my usual spot because there’s no one to sit by me” and then, “I can’t make friends”
- What are some other examples of times that the brain might think “I can’t”? (1-2 minute class discussion)

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- Sometimes we don’t even realize that our brain is thinking “I can’t” so it’s important to learn how to recognize it.
- Breaking this thinking habit is also important because thinking “I can’t” causes the brain to freeze and not take any action at all.
- It often leaves us feeling helpless, stuck, stressed, or disappointed, which only makes the problem feel worse.

Now what?:

- The key to breaking the “I can’t” thinking habit is to pause and consider what can be done.
 - This is called **cognitive restructuring** when we can learn to catch ourselves when we think “I can’t”. Cognition=thinking, and cognitive restructuring literally means the restructuring or changing of how we think.

Ask yourself:

Consider creating an anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week.

- When we notice that we're thinking "I can't", here are the questions to think about:
 - What is the evidence that I can't do it?
 - What small step can I take right now to start tackling this problem?
 - What steps have I taken in the past to learn new skills or handle other problems?
 - Is it possible to ask someone for help?
- For example, David with the math assignment could think:
 - Until I try, how do I know I can't do it?
 - What would happen if I read the directions again?
 - What have I done in the past when I get stuck on math?
 - Who can I ask, text, or call to help me figure out this assignment?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- Cognitive reframing helps us re-train our brain from our old ways of thinking.
- We learned our first strategy, which is disrupting the "I can't" thinking error. Thinking like that will limit us in what we are willing to try.
- What's one question a student can think about when their brain thinks "I can't"?



2. Thinking Error: Worst-Case Scenario (Catastrophizing)

Background for teacher: The habit of believing the worst is bound to happen leads to needless panic and worry and eventually chronic anxiety. Blowing the danger out of proportion can lead students to retreat from problems, expect disaster and spend a lot of energy worrying about something that might not be true. Teaching adolescents to interrupt this thinking pattern will allow them to react in more effective ways, while also fostering feelings of calm and confidence to better problem solve. It's not enough to encourage students by saying "everything will be fine". We need to provide tangible steps and strategies they can employ to work through the thoughts on their own. Thinking through alternatives is a great way to re-train the brain.

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- Sometimes our brain jumps to the worst-case scenario, which feels like a disaster or "catastrophe" which is why it's called catastrophizing.
- This habit is also called "what if?" because as the brain prepares for the worst, it also pictures what the situation will be like when the terrible thing happens.
 - Academic example: Tamir gets a bad grade on his math test and his brain automatically jumps to the idea that because of his low grade, he won't get into advanced classes in high school which will hurt his chances of going to college.
 - Social example: Abby's best friend goes to spend a week with her grandparents. While she's gone, Abby sends her a text to stay in touch but gets no response all day. Abby's brain jumps to the worst possible explanation and thinks their friendship is over.
- What are some other examples of times that the brain might jump to the worst-case scenario? (1-2 minute class discussion- other examples include parent said they'd pick you up and haven't arrived yet so the brain envisions a car accident, someone unfollowing you on an app feels like your life is ruined, a headache feels like a brain tumor)

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- Breaking this thinking habit is important because anticipating disaster causes the brain to be stuck in a state of alarm. When we constantly "scan" and look for things to go wrong, we may develop anxiety and feel more stressed.

Now what?:

- The key to breaking this thinking habit is to catch ourselves predicting a terrible event.
- The goal is to become a "what's most likely really true?" type of thinker instead.

- Practice recognizing that worst-cases thought are just that! They are thoughts, not reality.

Ask yourself:

Add this to the anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week.

- When we notice that we're thinking the worst might happen, here are the questions to think about:
 - How likely is the worst-case scenario?
 - Is there any evidence that this could actually happen?
 - What are five other things that are more likely to happen?
 - What would I tell a friend who had the same thought?
- For example, Abby with the friend who didn't text back could think:
 - Is our friendship actually over?
 - What are some other reasons my friend isn't texting me back? Could her phone be dead, could she not have cell service?
 - Has anything happened that would lead my friend to completely block me from her life?
 - What would I tell someone else who thought this extreme?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life? Can you think of an example when you've done this?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- We learned our second strategy for reframing our thinking (aka cognitive restructuring), which is disrupting the worst-case scenario thinking error. We have to challenge ourselves not to think this way because it will always get us down.
- What's one question we can think about when our brain thinks goes to the most terrible reason something is happening?



3. Thinking Error: All or Nothing

Background for teacher: Teens are prone to all or nothing thinking that leads to seeing the world in black and white extremes, meaning that things are either “this” or “that” and nothing in between is possible. It also leads to perfectionist tendencies, where students begin to expect that other people also need to do things the “right” way or how what they feel is right. So, this affects how you think and how you think about others. But, living with an all or nothing attitude brings no satisfaction or joy, because any failure, regardless of magnitude, feels absolutely unacceptable. Self-esteem suffers and this deficit way of thinking can lead to depression and anxiety. The key to breaking this thinking habit is to pause and consider the extremes of hot and cold. This is a great visual and analogy for students to start to work through the extremes of their thoughts. The goal is to develop an ability to look at all the points on the spectrum, noting a wide range of possibilities instead.

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- At times we may develop ideas that things are black-or-white extremes, this or that, all or nothing---and we think that there can be nothing in between.
- When something isn't perfect, we see it as a failure; when something goes wrong, we may feel the whole day is wasted.
 - Academic example: Destiny has a solo in a song for band class but messes up a few of the notes. Her brain immediately thinks that because of the mistake, she is the worst player and that she will be asked to leave band.
 - Social example: James sees a group of his friends in the cafeteria. He calls out to say hi, but nobody responds. He immediately thinks “they hate me, they don’t want to be my friend anymore”.
- What are some other examples of times that the brain might have an extreme all or nothing reaction? (1-2 minute class discussion- other examples include forgetting a part of a report that leads to thinking the whole group got a failing grade, or messing up in a sports game means you’ll be kicked off the team)

So what?! Why does this matter?:

- But there ARE so many possibilities between the black and white, the this and that, the all or nothing.
- Breaking this thinking habit is important because expecting perfection from ourselves and others isn't realistic.
- Rigid ways of thinking lead people to feel angry and resentful a lot.

Now what?:

- The key to breaking this habit is to catch ourselves in the act, and pause to think about many possible ways that events can unfold.
- The goal is to become a "let's look at all the points on the spectrum" thinker.
- Just as there are dozens of temperatures in between hot and cold, or many shades of the color blue, try to imagine a whole range of what else might be true in the moment with anything that you are dealing with in our lives.

Ask yourself:

Add this to the anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week.

- When we notice that we're thinking a really extreme version of something happening, here are the questions to think about:
 - Is my thought at one extreme?
 - Is there evidence to support my thought?
 - Is there evidence against it?
 - What are some possibilities that fall in between the extremes?
- For example, James with the friends in the cafeteria could think:
 - What are other possible reasons my friends didn't say anything? I wonder if they didn't hear or see me?
 - How do these friends normally treat me?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- We learned our third strategy, which is disrupting the all or nothing thinking error. What's one question we can think about when our brain thinks in extreme versions?



4. Thinking Error: Zooming-In on Negative

Background for teacher: *The brain is designed to be an excellent filter, but in adolescence more than any other developmental stage, it tends to filter out the positive to focus on the negative. This selective attention gives a distorted perception of reality, leading students to ignore the bigger picture, and blow disappointments out of proportion. Getting stuck on the disappointing or embarrassing experiences leads them to think about the same event, comment, or feeling over and over. With time, this habit of psychological inflexibility leads teens to withdraw from others, develop anger and resentment, or become depressed. Explicitly teaching students how to “zoom out” provides alternate perspectives and helps develop a more balanced view. By learning to focus on more than just the one distressing detail, students can begin to feel more optimistic.*

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- Sometimes, our attention can zoom in and focus on a negative event or experience that happens during the day.
- Our brain gets stuck thinking about the bad stuff and blows the negative moments way out of proportion, making it feel much bigger than it really is.
 - Academic example: Layla raises her hand to answer a question in class but gets it wrong. She can't stop thinking about how embarrassing it was and how her whole day, and week, is ruined.
 - Social example: Hassan is a straight A student, and recently took a math test. When he gets it back, he notices that he got one question wrong that he knew the right answer to. However, by focusing on that one wrong question, he misses the fact that he got an A on the test overall.
- What are some other examples of times that the brain might zoom in on the negative? (*1-2 minute class discussion- other examples include missing a basket in PE while ignoring all the points scored, not getting to hang out with friends due to family obligations ruins the benefits of seeing a favorite cousin*)

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- Catching the times we have this thinking habit is important because focusing on the negative all of the time can lead to feeling bad about ourselves, others, and life in general.
- Over time, we may begin to negatively view the future and withdraw, which can make us sad or depressed.

Now what?:

- The key to breaking this habit is to notice and pay attention to times when we are zoomed in on the negative.
- The goal is to become a “let’s look at the big picture” thinker to step back and see things on the whole instead of focusing on the one detail.
- By taking in the big picture rather than zooming in, we can see that disappointments and challenges aren’t so overwhelming.

Ask yourself:

Add this to the anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week

- When we notice that we’re focusing on the negative, and “zoomed in” on a bad moment or thought, here are the questions to think about:
 - Am I focusing too much on one detail?
 - What good things happened that I’m forgetting? Try to list five things in your head.
 - When I think back on today, what will be the most accurate way to remember the bigger picture?
- For example, Layla with the incorrect class response could think:
 - Am I looking at my whole day or one small part of my day?
 - What else happened today that was good? What has gone well? (list 5 things)
 - When I think back on this school day, is answering one question the picture of the entire day?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- We learned our new strategy, which is zooming out to see the bigger picture when our brain starts to zoom in and focus on the negative. Most of our lives is actually positive, and we need to help ourselves see that!
- What’s one question a student can think about when their brain starts to zoom in?



5. Thinking Error: I Should, You Should

Background for teacher: Teens that have this “I should, you should” mentality, constantly hold themselves, their families, and their peers to a rigid set of rules about how they should behave. Constantly thinking “I really should be funnier” or “I should always get an A on math tests” causes them to set an unrealistically high bar for themselves, or impose those expectations on others. This can lead to frequent hurt, disappointment, and irritation when expectations aren’t met. They completely miss that other possible behaviors or outcomes are more reasonable and acceptable. The key to interrupting this habit is to teach students to analyze the “shoulds” and “musts” and learn to identify which ones are actually sensible and which expectations are more rooted in wants and desires. The goal is to learn to be more accepting, and more flexible in general. By learning to accept and reframe thoughts as “it would be nice if...” students can develop more realistic expectations and an open-minded disposition.

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- Sometimes, the brain can set unrealistic expectations about our own behavior and the behaviors of others.
- It often uses the word “should” to express a feeling.
 - Academic example: Walking to fourth hour, Alana remembers that the binder she needs is still in her locker. She runs back to grab it but her teacher marks her tardy. She thinks, “I should have brought my binder with me the first time because now I’m late and in trouble.”
 - Social example: Jade’s birthday was yesterday and although her friends all said happy birthday, she keeps thinking, “they should have done more for me on my special day.”
- What are some other examples of times that the brain might make "should statements ? (1-2 minute class discussion- other examples include "he should respond right away when I text him", "my grandma should never be late picking me up", "our teacher should let us go outside even if it's lightly snowing", "I should talk more in class")

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- It’s not healthy for us to constantly look for what we, and others, need to be doing differently.
- These patterns of thinking cause us to ignore reality, criticize or set the bar too high.
- These inflexible ways of thinking often lead to feelings of disappointment, regret, betrayal, and anger.
- When we apply such intense rules to our own actions and then don’t measure up, we are likely to feel like we messed up and let others down.

Now what?:

- The key to breaking this thinking habit is to look hard at the times when our brain thinks “I should” or “they should”.
- When we learn to identify and name what we actually want, we learn that the “should” statement is a reflection of our own preferences, and not a firm rule.
- By reframing our thoughts as preferences, we can stop being angry or upset that things aren’t different.
- This also allows us to be more accepting and become more flexible in general.

Ask yourself:

Add this to the anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week.

- When we notice that we’re thinking “should”, here are the questions to think about:
 - Were my expectations reasonable?
 - What do I want? What’s my preference?
 - What if I change it to think “it would be nice if…” or “I’d like to…” instead?
- For example, when thinking about her birthday, Jade could ask:
 - Am I getting down about something that wasn’t anyone’s fault?
 - What is my preference for how people celebrate my birthday? Does that mean everyone needs to celebrate that way?
 - What if I changed it to “it would be nice if my friends all signed a birthday card for me”?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: Can you think of a time you’ve made this thinking error? When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- We learned a new strategy, which is disrupting the “should” thinking error. When we think like this, we will often be disappointed. We cannot control what everyone else does, and we cannot always have things go the way that we prefer. It’s OK for things to go other ways.
- What’s one question a student can think about when their brain thinks “I should” or “they should”?



6. Thinking Error: Fortune Telling

Background for teacher: Adolescents who have the fortune-telling habit jump to the conclusion in any situation, assuming they can predict the future. This habit has a lot in common with the worst-case scenario habit, but with fortune-telling, teens don't expect disaster but do think that the future is going to be negative. They jumping to conclusions and it often leads to feelings of worry or discouragement. It can also be destructive to relationships and friendships, too. The goal is to become a "look before you leap" thinker, to catch the brain when it's jumping to an unfavorable conclusion about the future. Challenging these negative predictions will lead to more positive interactions with others and a more hopeful outlook on the future.

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- The thinking error of fortune telling is when the brain assumes it can predict the future.
- Instead of waiting to see what happens, it jumps to a conclusion and thinks it knows what is going to happen.
 - Academic example: Charlie is really confused on a class assignment and wants to ask the teacher for help. But before he does, his brain thinks "she won't help me even if I ask," which causes him to stay in his seat, not ask for help, and get more frustrated about the work.
 - Social example: Kiara is texting a friend but doesn't fully understand what her friend is saying. She asks a question but doesn't get an answer. Her brain thinks, "I'm still confused but she will call me annoying if I ask her another question." So Kiara doesn't ask and her mind spins to negative assumptions.
- What are some other examples of times that the brain might try to be a fortune teller and make predictions about the future? (1-2 minute class discussion - other examples include assuming a friend will say no to hanging out before you even ask, hearing your name called from the office and automatically thinking something is wrong or you're in trouble)

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- When the brain makes predictions without knowing what will really happen, it leaps right over what is probably actually true.
- Believing we're doomed from the start makes our brain freeze and then....guess what? Sometimes the negative prediction ends up coming true!

Now what?:

- The key to breaking this thinking habit is to pause and question the automatic predictions you are making about the future.
- The goal is to become a “look before you leap” thinker, to catch yourself when your brain jumps to make a prediction about the future.
- By challenging predictions, we start to see the world in a different, more positive way.

Ask yourself:

Add this to the anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week.

- When we notice that we’re predicting something about the future, here are the questions to think about:
 - Is my prediction reasonable? Does it make sense?
 - What evidence do I have to base my fortune-telling on?
 - How often have I been right in the past when I jumped to a conclusion that something bad will happen?
- For example, Charlie with the class assignment could think:
 - Does it make sense that my teacher will refuse to help me?
 - What evidence do I have? Has my teacher helped me or other students before?
 - Until I ask, how do I know for sure?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- We learned our new strategy, which is disrupting the fortune telling thinking error. What’s one question a student can think about when their brain begins to be a fortune teller and predict the future?



7. Thinking Error: Mind-Reading

Background for teacher: *The mind-reading habit is a very common type of thinking error that involves adolescents jumping to conclusions by assuming they know what someone else is thinking. This is different than fortune-telling, which focuses on what you assume others are going to **do**. Teens quickly become convinced that they know what is going on in another person's head without any evidence. Oftentimes, it turns out that the other person isn't thinking about the teen at all. Those who struggle with mind-reading are more prone to social anxiety, self-doubt, and anger. These challenges lead to an increase in fear to try new things, which can lead to isolation. Adults can teach adolescents to interrupt this habit by explicitly instructing students to use actual evidence to make a determination. It's not enough to say "we don't know what another person is thinking;" we have to also provide tangible steps for students to begin breaking this thinking habit.*

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- The thinking error called "mind-reading" is when the brain thinks it knows what someone else is thinking and assumes that whatever the person is thinking is mean or critical.
- Instead of using evidence, it automatically assumes to know what's going on in the mind of someone else.
 - Academic example: Danielle gets to school late one morning and her teacher is quiet when she enters the room. Danielle thinks, "my teacher is so mad I missed the first part of class; she hates me"
 - Social example: Juan is waiting for her ride in the library. He overhears his good friend ask another friend to hang out after school but doesn't ask Juan. Juan immediately thinks, "my friend doesn't like me as much as the other kid, that's why he didn't invite me".
- It's almost always wrong.

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- When we assume we know what others think, it can make us feel really down about ourselves.
- It can also make us feel really insecure and awkward around others, because we worry that others are judging us.

Now what?:

- The key to breaking this thinking habit is to stop assuming people are thinking badly of ourselves by recognizing what we're doing each time we mind-read.

- Pause to remind ourselves that nobody can read minds, then look around and begin to really listen to others.
- Look at facial expressions, body languages, and listen to words that are being said.
- The goal is to become a “what else could they mean?” thinker to stop from guessing what others are thinking.

Ask yourself:

Consider creating an anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week

- When we notice that we’re trying to be mind-readers, here are the questions to think about:
 - Is it actually about me?
 - What does the body language, facial expressions, and words tell me?
 - What else could they mean?
 - What would I tell a friend who was trying to be a mind-reader?
- For example, Juan with the friend in the library could think:
 - Is this conversation about me at all?
 - Why else might my friend only invite one other kid to hang out?
 - What about their facial expressions tell me they didn’t even know I was in the library?
 - What would I tell someone else who was experiencing this same situation?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- We learned our new strategy, which is disrupting the mind-reading thinking error. What’s one question a student can think about when their brain starts to make assumptions about what other people are thinking?



8. Thinking Error: Blaming

Background for teacher: Many teens have the blaming habit, where they look to place blame on themselves or those around them. When something goes wrong, some look to blame someone else for their misery, while immediately beat themselves up and take on all the blame. This leads students to feel enraged or victimized, guilt, and shame. It can eventually turn into gloom and passivity, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Teaching students to interrupt this thinking habit starts with encouraging a healthier response to challenging moments. The goal is for students to learn to think “that’s a bummer, how can I respond to this?” instead of reacting so harshly.

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- Sometimes our brains have this problem where they focus on blaming someone or something for a situation that happens.
 - Academic example: Erika is really annoyed when she gets back her English paper. Her teacher gave her a C because she didn’t have enough biographical information. Even though she sees that the kid next to her got an A, Erika blames her teacher for the grade saying “He’s a terrible teacher! He gave horrible instructions, and this is all his fault”.
 - Social example: Dezmond’s mom is upset when she picks him up from school. She snaps at him to put his seatbelt on and Dezmond automatically thinks, “This is all my fault, I made her mad.”
- The automatic habit of blaming ourselves or other people when something bad happens doesn’t do any good, because blaming can’t fix anything.

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- When we focus on blaming someone or ourselves for what has happened, we feel guilty or angry.
- This can lead to feeling like we’re always in trouble, or we’re always the one getting hurt by others.

Now what?:

- When we immediately jump to place blame, we’re not seeing clearly what actually happened.
- Maybe no one was at fault, or maybe a bunch of other factors together have made this situation occur.

- The goal is to become a “that’s a bummer, how can I respond?” thinker instead because things are going to happen but it’s more helpful to focus on to respond better instead of focusing on who to blame.

Ask yourself:

Add this to the anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week.

- When we notice that we’re worried about who to blame, here are the questions to think about:
 - Am I being fair to myself by taking all the blame? OR Am I being fair to others by blaming them?
 - How does blaming help me?
 - What else contributed to this situation?
 - What can I do now to make the best of the situation? And to do differently for next time?
- For example, Erika with the English grade could think:
 - Is it fair to blame my teacher for the grade if I’m the one who wrote it?
 - How does blaming him help me get a better grade?
 - Did my writing or lack of reading directions or lack of asking for help contribute to the situation?
 - What can I do now to make the best of the grade?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- We learned our newest strategy, which is disrupting the blaming thinking error. What’s one question a student can think about when their brain starts to blame?



9. Thinking Error: It's Not Fair

Background for teacher: This thinking habit is one of the most common for adolescents. Students have very strong beliefs about what ought to happen in their life that are based on unrealistic expectations. Rather than understanding that life is complicated and different for everyone, they seem to expect that someone should be keeping score to make sure they don't get shortchanged. This kind of off-target thinking can be very hard for teens who become tense and grouchy for feeling like they are being treated unfairly. When decisions are made, they might become angry and feel like a victim rather than learning to become proactive. Teaching students to interrupt this habit is important because it helps teens learn how to problem solve, be resilient, and bounce back from disappointments. We need to provide steps to accepting the reality of the situation and appreciate another point of view.

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- Automatically thinking "It's not fair!" when something happens to us is one of the most common thinking errors.
 - Academic example: Demarco and Liam both raise their hands to answer a question in class. Their teacher has said that the first person to answer gets a jolly rancher. The teacher calls on Liam, and Demarco immediately reacts and thinks "That's not fair! She always picks other students! I never get called on!"
 - Social example: Jessie is playing videogames and loses a life because of a wrong move she made. Her brain automatically thinks, "That's not fair! I didn't even mean to make that move."

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- Obviously, there are times when justice is important and worth standing up for, like when a student is being treated unfairly or something unjust happens in the community.
- But demanding that others meet our standards to "play fair" leaves us feeling constantly helpless, like a victim, disappointed, or angry.
- We must be clear, however, that we are not talking about the general human right to fair and equal treatment in society in general....we are talking about situations that happen between people that we sometimes misintepret because we think something is not "fair" but really it just is how it is. We don't always get what we want!

Now what?:

- When we automatically think "It's not fair" in these types of situations, we miss the chance to learn how to bounce back from disappointments or moments when things don't feel fair.

- The key to breaking this habit is to remind ourselves that being equal and fair all the time is absolutely impossible.
- The goal is to become an “It is what it is” thinker and learn to let go of the idea that we are owed equal treatment in every type of situation.
- When we stop getting stuck on keeping score, we can begin to feel happy for others and think about ideas for what to do next.

Ask yourself:

Add this to the anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week.

- When we notice that we’re thinking “it’s not fair”, here are the questions to think about:
 - Can life always be fair and equal? And is this a situation that is really about fairness? Or is it just that I don’t like how it went for me?
 - What did the situation look like from the other person’s point of view?
 - What action steps can I take to move forward from this?
- For example, Demarco who didn't get to answer the question could think:
 - In a class of 30 students, is it possible that I always get to answer every question?
 - How can I be glad for Liam who did get to answer?
 - What can I do to move forward from this? Should I try to answer another question later?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

We learned a new strategy, which is disrupting the “it’s not fair” thinking error. What’s one question a student can think about when their brain thinks “no fair”?



10. Thinking Error: Feelings as Facts

Background for teacher: This thinking error is also known as “emotional reasoning.” It happens when an adolescent feels an emotion strongly and concludes that the emotional reaction defines what is real. That is, feeling guilty must mean you are guilty. Feeling lonely leads to the automatic deduction or conclusion that no one cares about you. With this, any observed evidence is disregarded, regardless of how much it might disprove the fact, and instead the teen will think “I feel X and therefore X must be true.” This type of thinking can lead to withdrawal and failure to start something out of fear of the controlled feeling. Teaching students to interrupt this habit will help them begin to see differences between emotions and reality.

Teacher Script

What is it?:

- Sometimes, when we feel a strong emotion, our brain takes that feeling and tries to turn it into a fact.
 - Academic example: Mia says she feels “stupid” as she studies for her state test, which leads her to think “I feel stupid so I know I’m dumb”.
 - Social example: Korey is eating lunch with his friends but feels like he has nothing to add to the conversation. He thinks “I have nothing cool to share today, I’m so boring,” which leads his brain to think he is a boring person.

So what?/Why does this matter?:

- When we let our feelings turn into facts, and use those facts to make decisions about ourselves and others, it can often lead to extra stress and anxiety in our lives.

Now what?:

- When we follow the line of thinking that our feelings are true and must be facts, we assume things about ourselves and others, which isn’t healthy or fair.
- The key to breaking this habit is to remind ourselves that feelings are feelings, and these emotions don’t control who we are as people.
- The goal is to become a person who can think “I’m feeling ____ but it’s just a feeling.”
- When we can move past the feeling and look for evidence about the truth of the situation, it will help us feel more calm and ready to manage emotions that come up.

Ask Yourself:

Add this to the anchor chart or visual to hang around the room to revisit throughout the rest of the week.

- When we notice that we’re thinking “I’m feeling ____ so it must be true”, here are the questions to think about:

- What are the real facts, outside of the feeling, that supports this idea?
- Have I ignored the facts because the feeling is so strong?
- How can I manage the feeling so that it doesn't turn into a fact in my mind?
- What can I do when I feel ____ to help me cope?
- For example, Mia studying for the state test could think:
 - Are there any facts, outside of my feeling stupid, that supports the idea that I'm dumb? What grades do I have in my classes?
 - Have I ignored my real grades because I feel dumb?
 - How can I manage feeling stupid? What can I do to help me cope? Who can I ask for help? What resources can I use?

Application:

- Take a moment to think silently: When and where can you practice this reframing in your own life?
- This is very important that you intentionally apply this in all areas of your life—at school and home, with friends and family, and in academics, sports, and other activities.

Wrap-Up:

- We learned our last strategy, which is disrupting the feelings as facts thinking error. What's one question a student can think about when their brain takes a feeling and makes it a fact about them self?