

Identify Sabotaging Thoughts

You've been reading a lot about sabotaging thoughts on this programme. I've included the most common ones that I've heard from clients or have experienced myself. I've also found that everyone has additional sabotaging thoughts so it's important that you recognise your unique sabotaging thoughts and respond to them effectively.

As I've mentioned before, eating doesn't happen automatically. Before you take that first bite of something you didn't plan to eat, you almost always have a thought or series of thoughts. Once you identify and respond to those thoughts, you'll be better able to control your eating.

Think About It:

Take a note of your sabotaging thoughts as you identify them. You might not always notice these thoughts right away because your attention might be focused on how you're feeling. If you notice that you're tempted to eat something that you're not supposed to eat. Ask yourself, what was just going through my mind? Or what was I just thinking?

If you're not sure what you were thinking, take a look at the table below listing common sabotaging thoughts and see if any of these jog your memory. If nothing on the list was going through your mind, try to figure what you definitely *were not* thinking. For example, if you have an urge to eat something you hadn't planned to eat, ask yourself if you were thinking about any of the following:

- How unappetizing the food looks and smells?
- How glad you are that you're not supposed to eat it?
- How easy it'll be to resist it?

You'll undoubtedly answer in the negative, followed by your actual thought:

I was thinking I really want to eat it!

Take a note of each thought you identify, for now don't worry how to respond to them, you'll will learn that very soon.

Common Sabotaging Thoughts:

- ✓ Dieting is too hard
- ✓ I don't care
- ✓ It's okay to eat this
- ✓ I'm being punished
- ✓ It's not fair
- ✓ I deserve to eat this
- ✓ I'll just eat these crumbs
- ✓ I should be able to do what I want
- ✓ I can't resist
- ✓ I really want it
- ✓ I'm really hungry
- ✓ I have no willpower
- ✓ No one will know
- ✓ I'm not going to let anyone tell me what I can and can't eat
- ✓ It's not that fattening
- ✓ I'll make up for it later
- ✓ I should eat it because it's free
- ✓ Everyone else is eating
- ✓ I don't want to disappoint or inconvenience anyone
- ✓ I'm stressed/tired/sad/bored/upset
- ✓ It's a special occasion
- ✓ I'm treating myself
- ✓ I can start dieting again tomorrow
- ✓ I'll never lose weight anyway
- ✓ I'll end up eating it eventually

What are you thinking? If you're concerned about your ability to learn this skill, read the sabotaging thoughts and responses below:

Sabotaging Thought: I don't know if I can figure out what I'm thinking

Helpful Response: It's not that crucial to figure it out right now. It's a skill I'll get better at over time. Meanwhile, I can reread relevant parts of the programme to jog my memory whenever I need to

Sabotaging Thought: I'm not thinking anything when I stray from my diet. It just happens.

Helpful Response: Eating is not automatic. I just try to ignore my thoughts so I can eat. The next time I'm tempted to stray, I'm going to look for some sabotaging thoughts that give me permission, such as: it's okay to eat this because

Recognize Thinking Mistakes

It's important to realise that thoughts are just ideas, not necessarily truths. Your thoughts about anything might be completely true, partially true, or completely false.

Common Thinking Errors

There are nine common thinking mistakes

- ✓ **Thinking Mistake No 1 – All or Nothing Thinking**
You see things in only two categories when there's really a middle ground
Examples:
Either I'm completely on my diet or I'm off my diet
Either I'm 100 per cent successful or I'm a failure and may as well give up trying
- ✓ **Thinking Mistake No 2 – Negative Fortune Telling**
You predict the future negatively, without considering other possible outcomes
Examples:
Since I didn't lose weight this week, I'll never be able to lose weight
Since I gave into that craving, I'll never be able to tolerate cravings
- ✓ **Thinking Mistake No 3 – Overly Positive Fortune Telling**
You predict the future too positively, without considering other possible outcomes.
Examples:
I'll be able to eat just a little of this food I crave, feel satisfied, and stop
It's okay if I just estimate the amount of food I'm supposed to have instead of measuring it.
I'll still lose weight.
- ✓ **Thinking Mistake No 4 – Emotional Reasoning**
You think your ideas must be true even though objective evidence says not
Examples:
Since I feel like a failure for having strayed, I really must be a failure
I feel like I just have to have something sweet right now
- ✓ **Thinking Mistake No 5 – Mind Reading**
You're sure of what others are thinking, even in the absence of compelling data
Examples:
People will think I'm strange if I don't drink alcohol at the party
She'll think I'm rude if I don't try the cakes she'd baked
- ✓ **Thinking Mistake No 6 – Self Deluding Thinking**
You rationalize by telling yourself things you don't really believe at other times
Examples:
If no one sees me eating, it doesn't count
It won't matter if I give into cravings

✓ **Thinking Mistake No 7 – Unhelpful Rules**

You impose rules on yourself without taking circumstances into consideration

Examples:

I can't waste food

I can't inconvenience my family by cooking healthier meals or getting the junk food out of the house

✓ **Thinking Mistake No 8 - Justification**

You link two unrelated concepts (to justify your eating)

Examples:

I deserve to eat this because I'm so stressed out

It's okay to eat this because it's free

✓ **Thinking Mistake No 9 – Exaggerated Thinking**

You make a situation seem greater or worse than it really is

Examples:

I can't stand this craving

I have no willpower

Master the Seven Question Technique

You now have your list of sabotaging thoughts and thinking mistakes. Now you'll create Response Cards to help you more effectively reply to these thoughts.

How to Make Your Cards

As you review the notes you took when examining your common sabotaging thoughts, reflect on each one by asking yourself, *What do I wish I could remember the next time I have this thought?* Write down your response using the technique below. Not all questions will apply to every sabotaging thought, but write down responses to the ones that do:

1. What kind of thinking error could I be making?
2. What evidence is there that this thought might not be true (or completely true)?
3. Is there an alternative explanation or another way of viewing this?
4. What is the most realistic outcome of this situation?
5. What is the effect of my believing this thought and what could be the effect of changing my thinking?
6. What would I tell a close friend if she/he were in the same situation and had this thought?
7. What should I do now?

Over time, as you practice these ideas again and again, you'll begin to automatically respond to your sabotaging thoughts, even without Response Cards

*Here's an example of how I used the Seven Question Technique to design my card, I frequently used to have the thought, **I can't control myself, when eating out and friends offer me dessert:***

Sabotaging Thought: *I can't control myself*

1. What kind of thinking mistake could I be making?

Exaggeration

2. What's the evidence that this thought might not be true?

I control myself all the time in other areas, especially at work, I do lots of things I don't want to do and don't do lots of things I do want to do. In fact, I control myself a lot when it comes to dieting.

3. What's an alternative explanation or another way of viewing this?

That I can control myself, but I don't want to right now

4. What's the most realistic outcome?

I'll stop craving once I firmly tell myself, NO CHOICE and get busy with something else.

5. What's the effect of believing this thought and what could be the effect of changing my thinking?

If I believe it, I'll give in to this craving, feel terrible afterwards, maybe not lose weight this week, and be at greater risk the next time I have a craving. If I change my thinking I won't give in and I'll lose weight!

6. What would I tell my friend if she were in this situation and had this thought?

I'd tell her that she could decide to control herself if she wanted to and that I don't want her to feel bad later.

7. What should I do?

Tell myself, NO CHOICE. Turn my attention away from the food. Focus on the conversation, if needed, go to the bathroom and read my Response Cards!

Based on the answers above I was able to create the following response card:

It's not that I can't control myself. It's that I don't want to control myself right at this moment. This craving is strong, but there are a lot of things I can do to counteract it. I'll be glad if I do.

There will be times when you'll need to use the Seven Question Technique to write your Response Cards. At other times, it might be helpful just to read short, direct statements, such as the following examples:

- ✓ I'd rather be slim
- ✓ Get out of the kitchen- now!
- ✓ No Excuses!
- ✓ This is just a craving! It'll go away! Don't eat!

Short commands like these are also good to repeat to yourself at the first sign of cravings.

What are you thinking? Some clients resist making their cards at first because of such sabotaging thoughts as. I can't do this ...I don't know what to write. Like any skill, creating cards based on the Seven Question Technique becomes easier over time.

Sabotaging Thought: This is a lot of work, it might not even help

Helpful Response: That might be true, but I might as well do everything I can to lose weight. When I'm slimmer, I'll be so glad I put in the hard work today.

Sabotaging Thought: I've always thought this way. I don't think I can change my thinking.

Helpful Response: This is a skill that I can learn. It wasn't easy learning how to drive a car or to ride a bike, but I eventually got good at those things. If I practice, I can get good at responding to my sabotaging thoughts.