a mini field guide from
thriving bravely

Reframe your thoughts (to feel better)

Tiny yet mighty ways to reframe thoughts that are getting in your way
(so you can feel better, right now.)

Our minds are gloriously complex, creative, imaginative - capable of remarkable things. And sometimes our minds take off on their own (not where we want them to go.) The same untold capacities for imagination can produce thoughts, worries, and obstacles that are painful, stressful and certainly not helpful when we feel depressed or anxious. Left alone, these thoughts and worries can become overwhelming (and even paralyzing.)

Reframing our thoughts can be incredibly useful in returning to a state of possibility and empowerment (even when we are in distress). Reframing is not a panacea, it's not "techniquey" – it's capitalizing on our innate strengths to turn the ship around when it starts to go off course.

Yes, the first step is to notice your thoughts. Try getting in the habit of hearing what you say in your head about a situation, about yourself, or about anything at all that feels unhelpful and negative. To build this self-awareness, say your thoughts out loud so you can practice really hearing what is happening inside your head. (Will it feel weird at first? Of course! But it really does help.)

Here are lots of ways to challenge those sticky mind habits that are not working for you. If a few seem similar, that's by design - some will speak to you more than others – but I think there is something here for everyone :)

THE CHALLENGE	EXAMPLE	THE REFRAME
CATCH THE THOUGHT Notice "predictions of the negative	"I'm going to fail at this presentation."	"That's false. I've done this before and done it well."
LABEL THE THOUGHT		
• All-or-nothing thinking?	"If it's not perfect, it's going to be awful."	"Perfection isn't necessary for me to succeed. I can do this ."
• Catastrophizing?	"I'm going to make a fool of myself."	"That hasn't happened yet, so why should it now?"
• Overgeneralizing?	Blanket statements that include: "never", "always", "everybody", "everything", "nothing"; being convinced of a negative outcome	"It's just not true that my boss always criticizes me. Just last week she praised my work. I did get constructive criticism in my review but she was kind and supportive."
FIND THE EVIDENCE Is this thought based on facts or assumptions?	Thoughts that include predictions are usually assumptions based on fear	"I've prepared thoroughly, and my presentations have gone well before."
TURN THE THOUGHT UPSIDE DOWN	"I can't do this. It's too hard."	"Sure, I'm anxious but I've done hard things before."
FIND THE GRAY AREA	Black/white thinking; "I'm too inexperienced."	"I have things to learn and I'm getting better all the time."
TALK TO YOURSELF LIKE A FRIEND	Would you tell a friend she is likely to make a big mistake? (Of course not!)	You'd say: "It's normal to be scared. I believe in you and you're well prepared."
FOCUS ON JUST ONE THING	"I'm overwhelmed by everything."	"What one action can I take right now?"
NOTICE WHAT IS GOOD	"Today was the worst."	"Well, I'm glad that's over with. I got through it."

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REMEMBER YOU CAN CHOOSE	"I'm stuck. I have to do this."	"I am up to this challenge even though I'm anxious, and it might even build my confidence."
ZOOM OUT	Ask yourself if you can remember a mistake you made 3 months ago, that felt very big at the time.	"I sort of remember it but I don't think anyone else does. Anyway, someone told me if I'm not making mistakes then I'm not growing."
REPLACE JUDGMENT WITH CURIOSITY	"I really hate that I'm like this."	"That's really harsh. I wonder why I am judging myself this way?"
USE EMPOWERING LANGUAGE	"This is impossible."	"No it's not. I did these 3 things before that felt impossible. I've got this."
FLIP IDENTITY WITH EMOTION	Identity statement: "I'm a loser."	Emotion statement: "I'm feeling scared and discouraged."
CHANGE "WHAT IF" INTO "EVEN IF"	"What if I mess this up?"	"Even if I do mess up, I'll bet I can handle it."
TURN "I ALWAYS" INTO "SOMETIMES"	"I always say yes to things I don't want to do."	"Sometimes I've said yes when I wanted to say no. I'm working on it."
SHIFT FROM PROBLEM TO SOLUTION	"I'm upset at this crazy new deadline I was given."	"It's wasting time to be upset right now. I can do this and I know who can help me."

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USE THE POWER OF "YET"	"I don't know how to do this."	"I don't know how to do this yet, but I can probably find a tutorial.
IMAGINE BEST-CASE SCENARIO	Overthinking the worst outcome	"What's the best thing that could happen?"
TRY RADICAL ACCEPTANCE	"This shouldn't be happening."	"This is actually happening and I'll give myself a minute to figure out how to respond wisely."
CHANGE "STUCK" TO A "PAUSE"	Feeling stuck + anxious = fear and paralysis	"I'm not so much stuck as I am giving myself a little patience to see what idea might come to me."
EXAGGERATE THE THOUGHT TO RIDICULOUSNESS	"If I'm late I'll get fired. And then I'll be living under a bridge with no WiFi."	"Lateness happens. I'll call ahead and let them know. (And anyway, what kind of person would fire someone for being five minutes late?")
SEE IT AS TEMPORARY	"This feeling/situation will never end."	"This will end. Right now I can breathe and remember all things change."
TURN SELF-CRITICISM INTO SELF-INQUIRY	"I'm not good enough."	"I wonder why I say that to myself. Plus it's not helpful or true. I showed I was plenty good enough many times."
ACKNOWLEDGE THE EFFORT	"I failed."	"It didn't go well but I tried my best and I can learn from trying."

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USE "IT'S OK" STATEMENTS	"I'm a hot mess."	"Sure feels like it, but being a mess is being human."
FOCUS ON GROWTH, NOT FLAWS	"I'm so behind, I'm afraid I won't catch up."	"This took longer than I thought. But look how far I've come already."
REPLACE BLAME WITH OWNERSHIP	"They didn't work as hard as me so the project was unsuccessful."	"I probably could have spoken up and addressed the issue directly."
USE "I FEEL" STATEMENTS	"They don't care enough about me."	"I feel lonely and need more connection."
FLIP JEALOUSY INTO INSPIRATION	"She's better than me."	"Her success is admirable and shows what's possible for me, too."
CHANGE FINALITY TO OPENNESS	"This is the end of _____."	"This could be the beginning of something new and wonderful that I can't see yet."

Sarah x