

# Group Application: Identifying Unhelpful Thoughts

## Learning Objectives:

- Learn and internalize the PACT method for identifying unhelpful thoughts
- Identifying and understanding common thought distortions, and how to adjust thinking.

## Materials Needed:

- Scenario cards for pair practice
- Optional: PACT method visual aid
- Space for circle formation

## Part 1: Opening Activity: "Truth or Thought?" (8 minutes)

Setup: Have participants stand in a circle

Instructions for Facilitator: "We're starting with a game called 'Truth or Thought?' I'll share different scenarios, and you'll step forward if you think most people would have negative thoughts in that situation, or stay in place if you think people would stay positive. After each scenario, we'll hear some of the thoughts people might have."

Scenarios to Act Out:

1. One person waves to another, and the other person doesn't wave back.
2. One person says hello to another, and the other person stays silent.

Scenarios to Talk Through:

3. "Your social media post gets no likes after an hour"
4. "You're not invited to a party where most of your friends are going"

After each scenario, ask 2-3 participants who stepped forward: "What negative thought might someone have here?"

## Part 2: Introduction to Thought Distortions (2 minutes)

Key Concept Introduction: "Our thoughts aren't always accurate. Think about all the times you worried about something and it didn't happen or it wasn't true. We call inaccurate, unhelpful thoughts 'thought distortions.' Thought distortions are normal and are common. Today, we'll be talking about how to spot a thought distortion and what to do about it.

Today we'll learn the 'PACT' method:

- Pause the thought
- Analyze the evidence
- Consider alternatives
- Take a new perspective

## Part 3: Common Thought Distortions (15 minutes)

Present each distortion with an example:

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking: (Always and Never) Seeing things as completely good or completely bad.
  - Unhelpful thought: "I didn't get the job, I'll never get a job."
  - PACT process:
    - Pause: Notice the extreme language
    - Analyze: "Does not getting hired for one job really mean you can't be hired for a different job?"
    - Consider: "Is this job connected to all other potential jobs? Could there be reasons outside of my control for why I didn't get this job?"
    - Take: "There are things I can learn from this, and one job application doesn't determine my future job prospects."
2. Catastrophizing: Assuming the worst possible outcome

- Unhelpful thought: "I made a mistake, now everyone will think I'm stupid forever"
- PACT process:
  - Pause: Notice the extreme prediction
  - Analyze: "How have people actually reacted?"
  - Consider: "How long do people actually remember mistakes? Will this really matter in a week? A month?"
  - Take: "This moment will pass, and I can learn from it."
- 3. Mind Reading: Assuming you know what others are thinking
  - Unhelpful thought: "They're not texting back because they hate me"
  - PACT process:
    - Pause: Notice assuming others' thoughts and you don't have enough information
    - Analyze: "What do I actually know?"
    - Consider: "What else could be happening?"
    - Take: "There are many reasons for delayed responses. They might be busy or didn't see my message yet"
- 4. Displacement/Projecting
  - Unhelpful thought: "I feel insecure about my appearance, so everyone must be judging how I look"
  - PACT process:
    - Pause: Notice transferring internal insecurity to external perceptions
    - Analyze: "What actual evidence do I have that others are focused on my appearance?"
    - Consider: "Are people really spending this much time thinking about me?"
    - Adjust: "My insecurities are my own internal experience, not everyone else's reality."
- 5. Should Statements
  - Unhelpful thought: "I should be dating someone right now. I'm a loser for being single."
  - PACT process:
    - Pause: Notice the pressure words and unrealistic relationship expectations
    - Analyze: "Who made this rule?"
    - Consider: "Is romantic status a measure of my entire worth?"
    - Take: "My value as a person isn't determined by relationship status."
- 6. Disqualifying the Positive
  - Unhelpful thought: "I made the basketball team, but it's only because they needed players"
  - PACT process:
    - Pause: Notice dismissing success
    - Analyze: "What skills got me here?"
    - Consider: "Would they actually take someone who couldn't play?"
    - Take: "I earned this opportunity through my abilities."

#### **Part 4: Interactive Practice (15 minutes):**

Have participants work in pairs. Each pair receives a scenario card with an unhelpful thought. They practice the PACT method and share with the group.

Example scenarios:

- "Your friend doesn't respond to your text, it's left unread"
- "Everyone is going to the cookout, but you weren't invited"
- "You applied for a job, but no one called you back"

#### **Part 5: Closing Exercise: "Rapid Reframe" (5 minutes)**

Instructions: "Let's practice quick reframing. I'll call out an unhelpful thought, and you'll raise your hand to share a reframe using PACT. Remember: Pause, Analyze, Consider, Take a new perspective!"

Rapid-fire scenarios:

1. "I'll never be good at schoolwork"

2. "Everyone thinks I'm fake"
3. "I always mess everything up"

Closing Message: "Remember, thoughts aren't facts. When you catch an unhelpful thought, use PACT: Pause, Analyze, Consider, and Take away a new perspective. This takes practice, but it gets easier over time."

**Facilitator Notes:**

- Monitor participant comfort levels during discussions
- Be prepared to provide appropriate examples based on group dynamics
- Maintain an encouraging, non-judgmental atmosphere
- If participants share personal examples, acknowledge bravery in sharing