



I just want
to be...
ME!

Resource Guide For Parents & Carers

What To Do When Your Mind Beats You Up

“I’m dumb!” “I can’t do this!” “I’m no good at sport!” “There’s no point in trying, I’ll just fail!” “I’m so ugly!” “I’m not good enough!” “No one likes me!”

Ever heard your child say any of the above? Or said it yourself? Sometimes our minds get stuck on telling us these negative stories about ourselves. The problem is, too often we ‘buy in’ to those stories and actually start to believe them. And when we start to believe them, we start to notice all the times that fit in to the story, and miss all the times that the story really isn’t right!

When we get stuck in our thoughts, we look at them like this:

Thoughts are Reality; it’s as if what we’re thinking is actually present, here and now!

Thoughts are The Truth; we literally believe them!

Thoughts are Important; we take them seriously, and give them our full attention!

Thoughts are Orders; we automatically obey them!

Thoughts are Wise; we assume they know best and we follow their advice!

But when we ‘unstick’ ourselves and look AT thoughts rather than FROM our thoughts:

Thoughts are merely sounds, words, stories, bits of language, passing through our heads.

Thoughts may or may not be true. We don’t automatically believe them.

Thoughts may or may not be important. We pay attention only if they’re helpful.

Thoughts are not orders. We don’t have to obey them.

Thoughts may or may not be wise. We don’t automatically follow their advice.

So how can you help your child when they come out with one of these unhelpful statements?

Our automatic, and very natural, response as adults is to reassure our kids. If they say, “I’m dumb!”, we often reply, “Of course you’re not!” or “I don’t want to hear you talk like that- you’re very clever!” or something similar.



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Sometimes these reassurances might work- for a little while. But often the thoughts come back- because that's what minds do. We are always comparing ourselves to others, and coming up short. And being human, we often notice the things that we can't do or have, rather than the things we can!

The other problem is this- when a child comes out with such a powerfully negative statement, it probably took a lot of courage. It's a pretty vulnerable thing to say, and they obviously trust you enough to say it to you. If they are disputed (even in the spirit of reassurance and love), they could also then feel not listened to, weak for even thinking that way, or that they are the only ones in the world to have such thoughts about themselves.

Instead, try some of the following:

Explore what has happened to make the child think this way- for example, "Wow- your mind is doing a good job of beating you up today! What's happened to make you think like that?" Then discuss some things the child can do to work on what troubles them. (It is more helpful to do something, than get stuck on how unpleasant a thought is. The point is that our thoughts come and go. Just as situations pass, so can our thoughts)

- Share examples from your own life of when you had unhelpful thoughts- and how you managed to keep doing what was important to you anyway- for example, "Some days I feel like a terrible mum/brother/accountant/etc. I know that's just my mind telling me an unhelpful story, so I try and remember what's important to me- like my family or doing my best at work- and keep on trying. I know that thought won't hang around forever, so it is best not to give it too much attention"
- Remind kids of how the learning process works- with small and often subtle improvements. Positive results are not always instant. Remember what it was like learning to drive a car! Talk to them about what it was like watching them learn to walk- that they had to keep toppling over many, many times before they stood up and got going. They've already shown how resilient they are by what they have achieved so far in their life!
- Also, sometimes we get so caught up in the things we can't do, that we forget the many things we can do. We also forget that other people might be wishing they could play sport/draw/talk with others/sing/write/ as well as someone else. Reminding kids of their own talents and interests is vital- and that there are



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others that secretly wish they could do the things that come so easily to your child. You can do some modelling here again – talk about the things you know you can do, and the things you wish you could do better.

- Model positive ways to deal with mistakes or doubts in your own life...your kids are watching how you deal with setbacks and adversity!

Helpful things to say to yourself when those thoughts come up:

“Ah- it’s the old ‘I’m dumb’ story- thanks mind!”

“I’m noticing the thought that I’m ugly.” (Helps you to look AT the thought, not as if you WERE the thought)

“Is this thought in any way useful or helpful?” (If not, get on with what’s important!)

“Is this an old story? Have I heard this one before?” (Who likes re-runs?!)

“Does this thought help me take useful action? Or does it keep me stuck?”

“Am I going to trust my mind or my experience?”

“If I wasn’t thinking I was ugly, what would I be doing?” (Then try and find one small thing you can do that is consistent with this- for example, if the answer is “I’d be spending more time going out with my friends”, go and make contact with a friend, look at some photos of times you had fun with your friends, write a note to a friend saying something you like about them...etc!)

Finally: Remember that although sometimes our minds ‘beat us up’, minds are also amazing and fantastic- they help us learn, teach, imagine, plan, and heaps more. So when the ‘boxing gloves’ come on, we need to become good at **NOTICING** the gloves are on, take a deep breath, and **ACT** in a valued way, rather than being a punching bag!

Ref: “The Happiness Trap” Dr. Russ Harris. www.thehappinesstrap.com