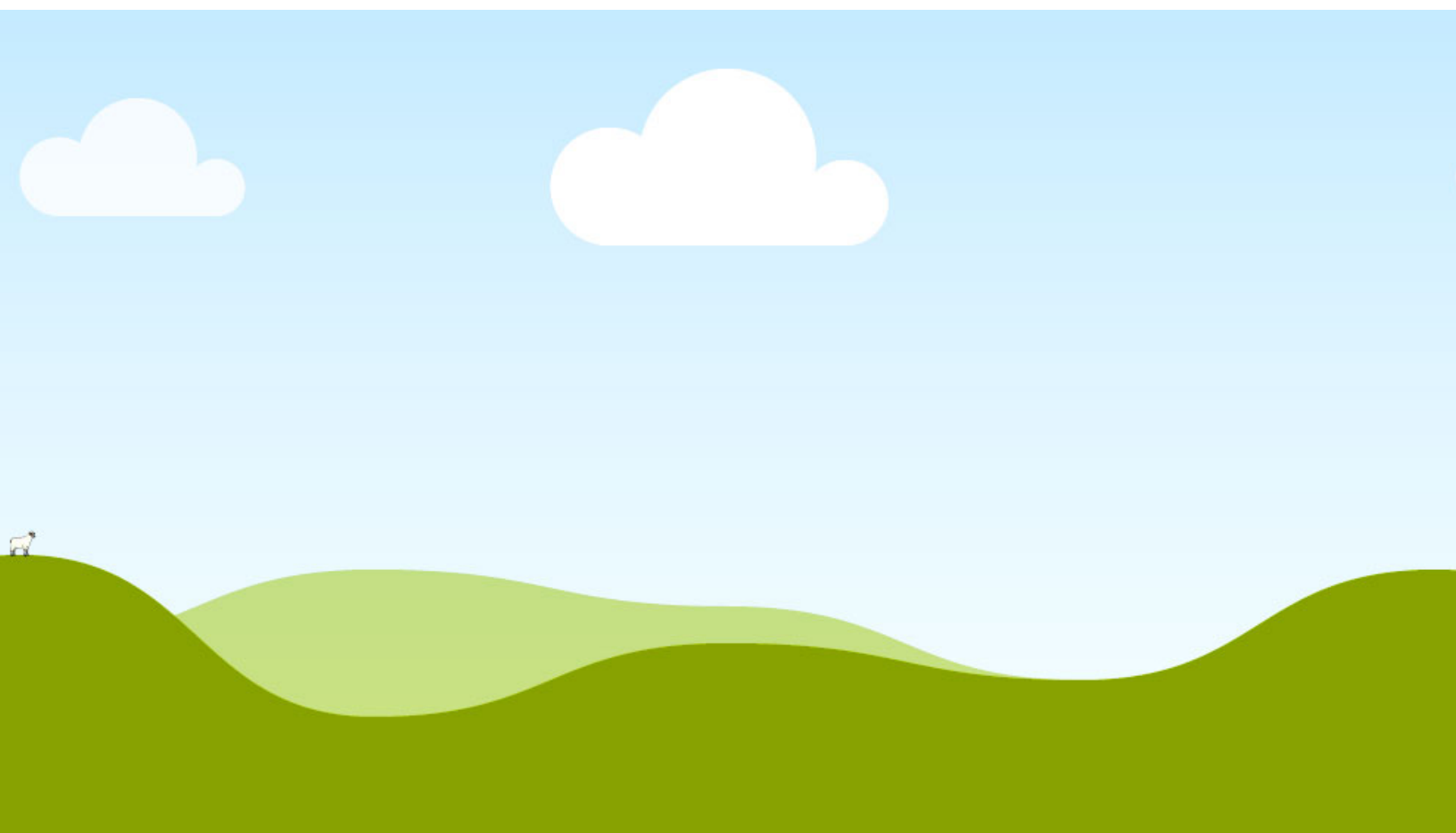


The Ultimate Step-By-Step Guide To

Heal Your Mind From 7 Damaging Thought Patterns



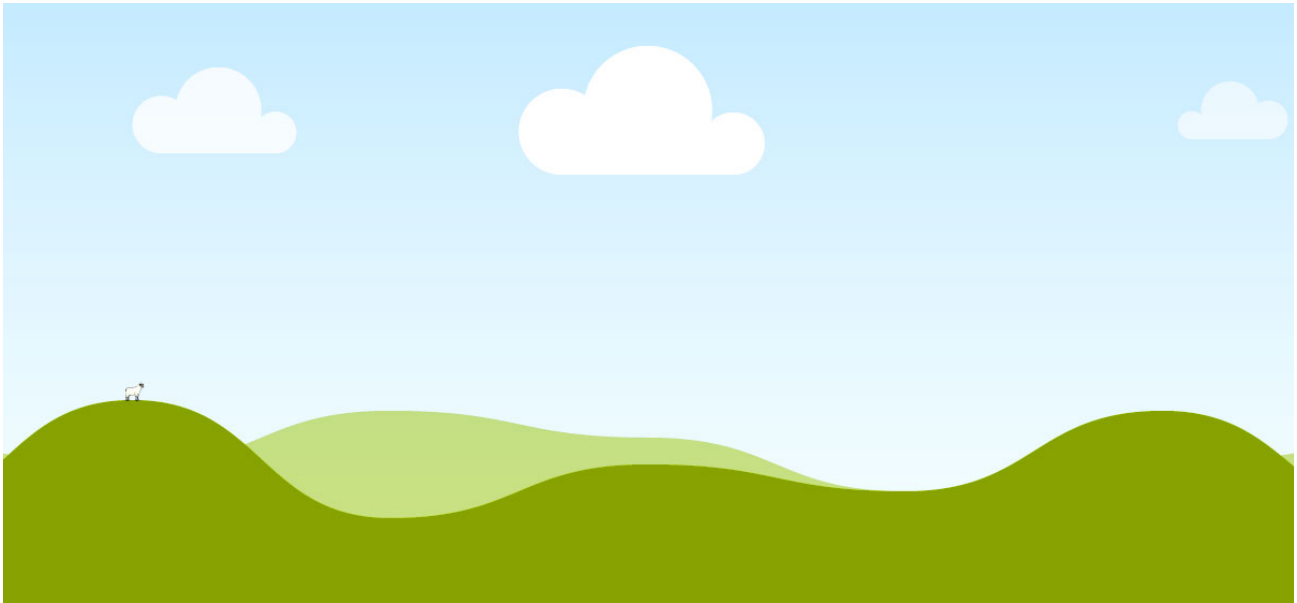
LEADERSHIP EDITION

FREE MEMBERSHIP GUIDE

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WELCOME



Do you Ever Wonder How To Heal Your Mind From Damaging Thoughts and Beliefs?

As a conscious leader it is important to examine your thoughts and beliefs in order to develop deeper self compassion and release suffering. Utilize this tool to gain self awareness, identify what is happening inside of your own unique brain, and regain mental freedom.

Self Compassion Quiz

Before we begin, it is important to gain deeper self awareness. Take this quick quiz to assess your self-compassion meter.

"During the past two weeks...."	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
When I made a mistake, I felt more self-condemnation than self-encouragement to learn from the experience.				
I was less compassionate with myself than others.				
I put off taking care of my own health due to time pressure.				
Taking care of my needs seemed incompatible with my work situations.				

Understanding Cognitive Loops

No matter how you scored each question, it is important to understand that most of us have areas of strength and areas of growth when it comes to being kind to ourselves.

Self compassion is fostered by thought management. When we learn how to examine our thoughts, especially the destructive or unkind ones, then we start the process of healing.

Let's take a look at the different types of thoughts that may be harming us.

What are Cognitive Loops?

Many unwanted thoughts can cause us to ruminate which means we are thinking deeply about something over and over again. This type of thinking is called a cognitive loop. There are seven different types of cognitive loops and we each tend to fall into a pattern of thinking that can be labeled as a type of cognitive loop.

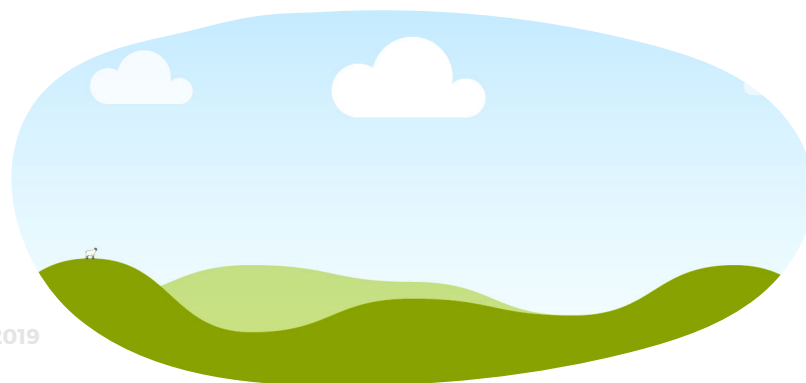
What exactly are these cognitive loops? A cognitive loop is a repeating pattern of thoughts causing us to stay in an unhealthy mental space. When you are stuck in a cognitive loop, you might notice yourself

- reliving an upsetting conversation
- intensifying the need to be right or
- beating yourself up over a stressful situation.

These thoughts may lead to beliefs which can rob us of self-compassion. Cognitive loops cause us to get stuck and stay in a state of exhaustion.

Why Do We Engage in Cognitive Loops?

- The human brain has adapted to process information and we are constantly inundated with information.
- On average, we make 35,000 decisions each day.
- Consequently, the brain has evolved to handle this by creating “shortcuts” – common thinking errors all humans unconsciously make daily, known as cognitive biases.
- For example, when faced with a stressful situation, individuals are likely to jump to negative and often extreme conclusions before considering all possible explanations.
- Based on our own life experiences, we tend to “believe” something without fully examining the full truth, event, or scenario. This is when the rumination begins!
- If left unchecked, cognitive biases can accumulate to form negative mindsets about the self, others, or the world, which can negatively influence daily emotions, behaviors, and interactions with others.
- Due to our unique own personality, biases, and experiences each of us tends to return to the same two or three cognitive loops that are most familiar to us. These loops are dangerous! Knowing what they are and which ones you tend to revert to is the next step in healing.
- On the next page, as you read each Cognitive Loop definition and its example, think about whether or not that loop type resonates with you.

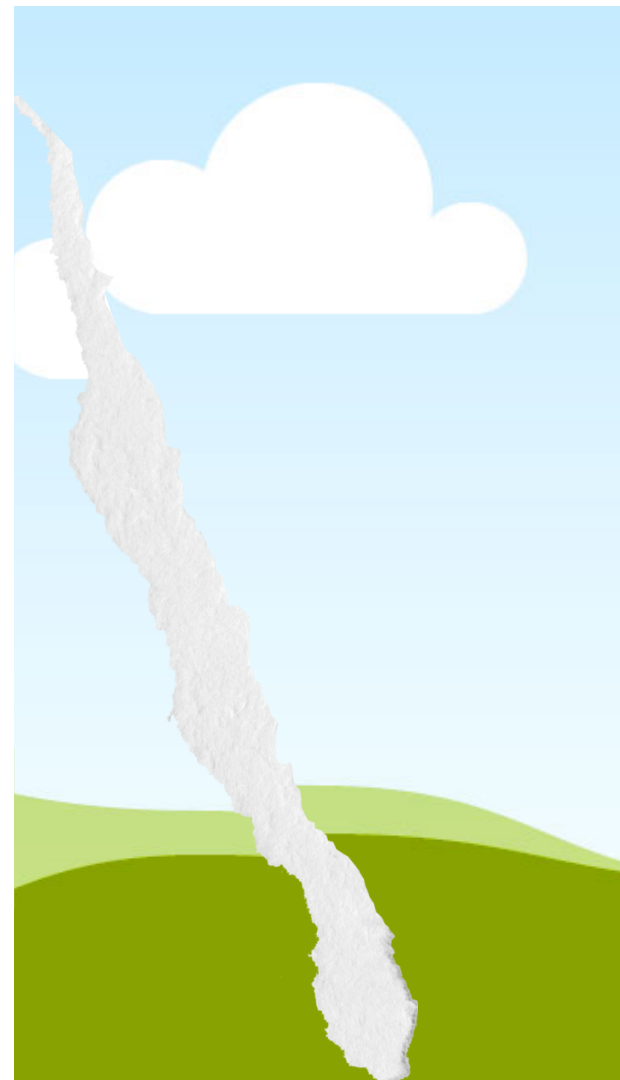


7 Types of Cognitive Loops

1. Confirmation Bias	Focusing on information that confirms your beliefs and ignoring information that contradicts them.	"I've always been terrible at math. I cannot even do simple problems in my head."
2. Black-or-White Thinking	Thinking that something is either perfect or a complete failure.	"I received feedback about one part of my lesson. My principal thinks I am a terrible teacher."
3. Should Statements	Placing unreasonable expectations on yourself or comparing yourself to an unattainable standard.	"I completed the task well, but it should not have taken me so long."
4. Emotional Reasoning	Believing that the way you feel proves that something is true.	"I feel guilty that my student is chronically absent, and it must be my fault."
5. "Catastrophizing"	"I feel guilty that my student is chronically absent, and it must be my fault."	"My team is arguing lately and I know we will never get along."
6. Global Labeling	Making extreme generalizations from a single piece of information or event.	"I became frustrated with my children this morning. I am always so short-tempered."
7. Heaven's Reward Fallacy	Thinking that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.	"I would rather relax than attend my friend's event. I am a bad friend if I do not go and show support."

Our Stress Levels When We Engage in a Cognitive Loop?

- Imagine this... you receive a text message from a loved one that reads "Call me." This is known as the situation. If it is unusual to get a text like this from your loved one, you may begin to think that something terrible has happened. These are your thoughts. You drop everything to call your loved one immediately. Unfortunately the loved one is not answering. This is your behavior. Now your heart is racing, you have shortness of breath, and nausea. These are your body's signals. As you wait longer, you experience heightened worry, panic, and fear. These are your emotions.
- In this example, your mindset influences your reaction to the situation and triggers a chain of events causing you to jump to conclusions.
- Think about the seven cognitive loops, which loop would you tend to apply in this situation?
- It is important to recognize that cognitive loops also occur in the workplace. For example, an observation that did not go as well as planned for a teacher (situation), causes the teacher to lash out at their own children at home (behavior), which causes the adult question their worth as a teacher and parent (thoughts), they feel nauseous or experience shortness of breath (body signals), and worry and panic for hours (emotions).



How Can We Stop This Harmful Thinking?



- Remember! If negative thoughts are causing anxiety, reframing them and staying open to what is behind them may be helpful in mitigating stress.
- Recognizing when cognitive loops are happening.
- Being aware of how your thoughts impact your decision-making and well-being.
- Identifying whether thoughts are helpful or unhelpful.
- Thinking in “shades of gray” rather than absolutes.
- Consider what you would tell a person you care about if they were in the same situation.
- “Zooming out” to examine a situation from multiple angles and a broader perspective.

Managing Cognitive Loops to Mitigate Damaging Thoughts

- Simply being aware that these types of loops exist, and that they are common can be helpful when trying to overcome problematic thinking patterns.
- It can be helpful to put thoughts “on trial,” by writing down or discussing credible evidence for and against a problematic thought pattern.
- Pause and reflect: Consider a recent stressful situation. You may want to pick a situation that isn’t too challenging as you are learning this new skill.

Record it here: _____

- What were your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to that situation, and how did they influence each other? Record your thinking in the space below.

Reflections (continued)

- What were your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to that situation, and how did they influence each other? Record your thinking in the space below.

- Next: Examine the various cognitive biases. Which of them aligned to your thought pattern? Were your initial thoughts correct or could “zooming out” help you gain perspective. Why or why not?

SUMMARY: As a conscious leader, you will still engage in cognitive loops. However, now you will know how to manage these thoughts before they cause yourself and others damage.



Meredith McNerney is a former principal, speaker, author and coach focused on trauma-informed practices to improve communication and wellness in schools and across organizations. Through professional development workshops and courses, school leaders and teachers learn to utilize trauma-sensitive interventions to serve underrepresented youth and their families, particularly multilingual learners. To book a speaking engagement: www.MeredithMcNerney.org

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