

Sometimes just recognising that you are feeling stressed and that this is reflected in your thinking can be enough to help you take a step back and change your perspective. It is also

possible, however, to change your mindset, although this takes practice. Look back at your stressed example and stressful situation in the three-column chart (Fig. 10, page 142). Write down the thought here (often identified as why was I stressed):

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Now run through the following questions, writing down each answer in order to identify a calmer and often more self-supportive approach. If you can routinely practise this, it can quickly become something that you do automatically, so you won't necessarily have to go through a written process each time. It is, however, helpful to write things down when first starting out, to help you to consider how you might approach the situation differently next time and reduce its impact.

1. What are the pros and cons of this way of thinking in this situation? Consider the impact in terms of emotions, behaviour and general impact on you or others.
2. What would you say to a friend or family member in this situation? Would you agree 100 per cent with the thought or would you offer a different perspective? How might you support them through it?
3. Is there any evidence that does not fit this thought? Write down any factual evidence that does not fit this thought.

4. Is there a possible alternative perspective or outcome in the situation – if we asked a hundred people about the situation, would all of them have this thought or would other people perhaps have a different approach?
5. What would a naturally calm person say about this thought? How would you approach the situation if you were feeling calmer or if you were taking a self-compassionate approach?
6. Can you identify any thinking errors that may be active? What parts of the situation have you not taken into account that may offer an alternative perspective or additional information?

Then from your answers pull out the things that did not ‘fit’ the stressful perspective and write down a more realistic and helpful alternative thought:

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If you find it tricky to identify an alternative perspective, consider how you may do things differently the next time you are in the situation to minimise the impact on yourself, or write down how you can support and encourage yourself within the situation again to minimise the impact it has on you.

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These questions underpin a cognitive approach to many issues that have an emotional impact, be they stress, menopause symptoms, or problems with implementing wellbeing issues due to feeling guilty. We will refer back to them throughout the section and suggest additional cognitive strategies that you can use.