

Introduction to Mental Gremlins: Example

From the scenario below please identify the situation, thoughts, and emotions/feelings.

Bob has been working for Big Corporation for 12 years and has his annual performance evaluation today. During his review, he was commended on his professionalism and expertise. He was told that he was highly regarded by all of his peers and had been doing a great job. Bob was also given feedback that the rest of the staff would really like Bob to speak up more during meetings and be more assertive. Bob left the meeting only thinking about the comment about his assertiveness. “I can’t believe they said that I don’t speak up very often. Does everyone think this...do they think that I’m too shy or that I have nothing important to say? Am I seen as a complete pushover? I can’t believe my boss told me that I’m not assertive enough.

PRACTICE:

What is the situation?

What are Bob’s initial automatic thoughts?

What are Bob’s emotions/feelings likely to be?

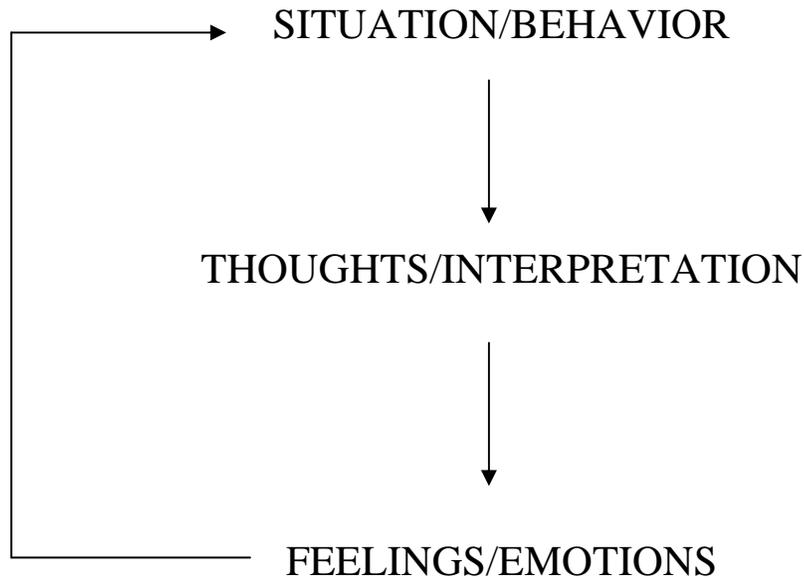
Would you have had similar thoughts if you were in this situation? Why or why not?

Introduction to Mental Gremlins: Example

| SITUATION | MOOD | AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS | EVIDENCE FOR | EVIDENCE AGAINST | ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS | NEW MOOD RATING |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| <p>State in neutral terms.</p> | <p>Use one word to describe your mood and rate the intensity (0-100%)</p> | <p>What was going through my mind before I started to feel this way? What does this say about me? What am I afraid of? What is the worst thing that could happen if this were true? What does this mean about me? My life? My future?</p> | <p>Circle the thought from the previous column for which you're seeking evidence. Write factual evidence to support this belief or conclusion? (Try to avoid mind reading and interpretation of facts).</p> | <p>Is there an alternative way of thinking or viewing this situation? Has there been a time that I have felt differently? What would I say to a loved one who was in the same situation and had these thoughts?</p> | <p>Rate how much you believe in each alternative thought (0-100%)</p> | <p>Copy the feelings from the original mood column and re-rate the intensity of each of those feelings (0-100%)</p> |

Group Activity: Introduction to Mental Gremlins

Why Do We Feel and Act the Way We Do?



Example:

Jenny overslept and scrambled to get to work on time. She skipped breakfast because she was running so late. By midmorning, Jenny felt starving! She went to her favorite fast food restaurant for lunch and ordered all of her favorite foods, ate very fast and finished everything. Jenny then felt guilty for overeating and making unhealthy choices. She thought that she had blown it for the day, and that she was never going to be successful at managing her weight. Since she had already “blown it” at lunchtime, she decided to give up for the day and order pizza for dinner and would focus getting back on track again tomorrow.

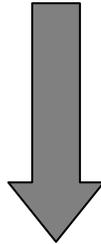
From the example above:

- 1) What is the situation and what are her behaviors?
- 2) What are her thoughts?
- 3) What are her feelings/emotions?

The Thought & Feeling Connection

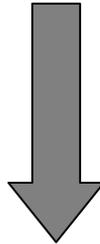
The Event Occurs

Examples: You eat a meal, you go to a party at which you don't know anyone, you try on clothes, you overeat, you step on the scale, you change at the gym, etc. Believe it or not, these are all neutral events.



You make an interpretation of the event

Based upon your past experiences, your interests, and your core beliefs, you focus your attention on certain parts of the event and make your interpretation accordingly.



Consequences: Feelings and Behaviors

Your interpretation of the event then contributes to your subsequent feelings and behaviors. For example, if you interpret a mistake as "all my fault" you may feel sad and hopeless and you may be hesitant to try new things in the future.

Events are neutral. It's how we interpret the event and the meaning we assign to it that impacts how we feel and respond (not the event itself).

- **Are there alternative ways to interpret the situation?**
- **How will this alternative interpretation impact how you feel?**

| Mental Gremlin | Description | Example | Challenging Response |
|--|---|---|--|
| All-or-nothing/Black and white thinking | Viewing things in only two categories instead of a continuum | Either I'm perfect on my diet or I have blown it/failed. | A slip is not the same as a failure or relapse. |
| Catastrophizing/Exaggeration | Sweeping generalization based upon limited data; Negative predictions of the future without considering other, more likely outcomes | I don't want to go to the party. Everyone will notice how much weight I've gained...I'll have a lousy time. | People may or may not notice my weight, but that doesn't mean that I should deprive myself of the opportunity to socialize and spend time with my friends. I'll probably enjoy myself and it's unlikely that my weight will be the focus of the party. |
| Discounting the positive | You discount positive experiences, deeds, or qualities as if they don't count or think that you just got lucky | I know I've lost a few pounds and have become more active, but I don't deserve credit until I've lost all of the weight I need to. | I deserve credit for every positive change that I make, whether or not I have lost weight. |
| Emotional reasoning | When you think something must be true because you "feel" (or believe) it so strongly that you ignore or discount evidence to the contrary | I feel overwhelmed by the idea of changing my lifestyle. It must really be too much /overwhelming. | I may have a lot of changes to make, but I can take them one and a time and each day at a time. If I'm taking steps in the right direction (no matter how slowly), I'll get there. |
| Labeling | You attach a negative label to yourself or someone else rather than refer to a specific event. | I was bad today...I overate. | I'm not bad. I overate today because I let myself get too hungry and then had a hard time managing my portions. My challenges managing my health are not related to my worth as a person. |
| Magnification/minimization | You exaggerate the importance of your challenges and/or minimize the positives | I don't like myself because of my weight (you discount your intelligence, sense of humor, and kindness). | My weight does not equal my worth. I'm an intelligent, kind, funny person and I'm working on getting my vehicle healthier. My body shape and size has nothing to do with my value. |

| Mental Gremlin | Description | Example | Challenging Response |
|---|---|--|--|
| Irrelevance | You link two unrelated concepts | It's ok to eat because I had a really stressful day. | Emotional eating is not going to help me towards my goals. I need to learn other strategies to manage my stress and self-soothe. Eating will not help in the long run. |
| Overgeneralization/ Jumping to conclusions | When you see a single negative event/challenge as a never ending pattern of defeat ("always" and "never" are often used to describe the event). You take one observation and are sure that it has only one meaning. | I really blew it today. I'm never going to be able to manage my weight. I haven't lost any weight this week, losing weight is impossible! | People who are successful at managing their weight do not eat perfectly every day. It's not realistic to think that I'm going to lose weight every week. |
| Positive fortune-telling | You are overly optimistic and don't acknowledge the most likely outcome. | I will be able to eat just one brownie, feel satisfied, and stop. | My history suggests most of the time I have a hard time only eating only one. I usually end up overdoing it, then feel really guilty afterwards. |
| Negative fortune-telling | You make a negative prediction without considering other possible outcomes. | I won't be able to manage my weight on vacation. | I don't know that. I just need to plan ahead and use the skills I've learned |
| Mind reading | You are sure you know what other people are thinking, even without any compelling data | I can't eat normally in front of other people because they'll think that I shouldn't be eating because of my weight. | Most people probably don't care or won't notice what I'm eating. Even people who successfully manage their weight don't eat perfectly all the time. |
| Self-delusion | You tell yourself things in the moment that you would not believe at other times | This milkshake doesn't count because I exercised this morning. | My exercise does not cancel out the milkshake. Successful weight management is all about energy balance. |
| Unhelpful rules/"Should" and "Must" statements | When you have precise, fixed ideas about how you or others should behave, without taking circumstances into consideration. | I shouldn't waste food | It's better to throw food away in the trash when I'm not hungry, than in my body. |

Introduction to Mental Gremlins: Homework and Examples

| SITUATION | FEELINGS | AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS | EVIDENCE SUPPORTING | EVIDENCE AGAINST | ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS | FEELINGS RATING |
|--|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| <p>My boss asked me to revise the report that I submitted to him.</p> | <p>Overwhelmed 80%</p> <p>Upset 85%</p> <p>Frustrated 80%</p> <p>Embarrassed 90%</p> | <p>My report was lousy.</p> <p>My boss doesn't think I do good work.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto; padding: 5px;"> <p>I'm not good at my job</p> </div> | <p>The report I submitted was returned to me and I was asked to revise it.</p> <p>My report did not meet his expectations.</p> | <p>This is the first time that I have ever been asked to revise one of my reports.</p> <p>My last performance review was very positive.</p> | <p>My report needs some revisions, but that doesn't mean that it wasn't any good or that I'm not good at my job. 100%</p> <p>I'm good at my job, but I can always learn more and improve. Feedback will help me to strengthen my skills. 85%</p> | <p>Overwhelmed 15%</p> <p>Upset 10%</p> <p>Frustrated 10%</p> <p>Embarrassed 5%</p> |
| <p>State in neutral terms.</p> | <p>Use one word to describe your mood and rate the intensity (0-100%)</p> | <p>What was going through my mind before I started to feel this way?</p> | <p>Circle the thought from the previous column that you intend to explore. Write factual evidence to support this belief or conclusion? Be as objective as possible and try to avoid mind reading and interpretation of facts.</p> | <p>Is there an alternative way of thinking or viewing this situation?</p> <p>Has there been a time that I have felt differently?</p> <p>What would I say to a loved one who was in the same situation and had these thoughts?</p> | <p>Rate how much you believe in each alternative thought (0-100%)</p> | <p>Copy the feelings from the original mood column and re-rate the intensity of each of those feelings (0-100%)</p> |

Homework: Over the course of the week, identify some examples of automatic thoughts in your daily life and complete the chart below. Refer to handout “Process for identifying automatic thoughts and emotions” and the mental gremlins chart for help generating alternative thoughts.

| SITUATION | FEELINGS | AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS | EVIDENCE SUPPORTING | EVIDENCE AGAINST | ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS | FEELINGS RATING |
|-----------|----------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| | | | | | | |

| SITUATION | FEELINGS | AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS | EVIDENCE SUPPORTING | EVIDENCE AGAINST | ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS | FEELINGS RATING |
|-----------|----------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| | | | | | | |

Adapted from Mind Over Mood by Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky. 1995 The Guilford Press.

Process for identifying automatic thoughts and emotions

- 1) What is the situation (describe in neutral terms and try to avoid interpretation)?
- 2) How do I feel about this?
- 3) Why do I feel this way? What are my thoughts about the situation?
- 4) What is the real evidence for/against this? Which mental gremlin trap could I be falling into?
- 5) What is the impact of believing my thought...what are the emotions/feelings that I experience?

Questions to help generate alternative thoughts

- 1) Have I had any experiences that suggest that this thought is not completely true all of the time?
- 2) If my best friend or someone I really cared about knew I was thinking this thought, what would they say to me?
- 3) If my best friend or someone I really cared about was having this thought, what would I say to them? If this situation was happening to someone else, what other interpretations of the situation would I suggest to them?
- 4) Have I been in a similar situation in the past? What happened? What have I learned from previous experiences that could help me now?
- 5) Are there any strengths or positives in me or the situation that I could be discounting or not paying attention to?
- 6) Am I blaming myself for something that I don't have complete control over?
- 7) Has there been another time that I have been able to view this situation differently? Is it possible that I might see things differently tomorrow?
- 8) When I am not feeling this way, do I think about this type of situation differently? Does it impact me differently? Do I respond in the same way?
- 9) Could my thoughts or interpretation of the situation be an example of one of the mental gremlins (see chart)?

Homework

Tracking

| | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food & activity records online (myfitnesspal) | <input type="checkbox"/> Meditation practice _____ days this week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food, activity & mood journal (paper) | <input type="checkbox"/> Journal 3 pages _____ mornings this week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Specific food or eating behavior goal: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Specific action related to support system: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Specific activity /fun goal: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxation practice _____ days this week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Notes