

Thoughts and Feelings

Mowing the Lawn

Here is a “real life” example of how negative thoughts contribute to and often intensify negative feelings. I typed most of this in one sitting as an attempt to manage my anxiety and anger about having to start the mowing season again. It did help a little to get it all out! The good news is that choosing positive thoughts helped soothe those bad feelings, and some of them even went away completely. I hope this gives you ideas for how to use the thought-change process.

From, Lexi

SITUATION:

It's spring and time to mow the lawn again... Yay! (No.)

NEGATIVE thoughts and feelings:

☹️ The grass looks long already. I wish I had trimmed it lower last fall. FEAR, REGRET, DREAD

☹️ I'm afraid of what my neighbors think (e.g., why isn't she getting out there, her lawn looks horrible, what's her problem). SELF-CONSCIOUS, DEFICIENT, DOING SOMETHING WRONG, SELF-LABELING (LAZY, NEGLIGENT, BAD HOMEOWNER, JERK)

☹️ I don't want to deal with this! I never intended to be responsible for mowing (i.e., ex-husband did it). I hate mowing!! Why do I have to do this? I have to schedule around life and weather. It takes up time, and I feel mad when I'm “forced” to do it during my alone time which is vital to my mental health. THREATENED, RESENTFUL, TRAPPED, UNGRATEFUL

☹️ My dad tries to help with ideas and knowledge which feels like pressure. Sharpen the mower blades... It's too much! I didn't sign up for this! Why do I have to do this on my own? I don't have the knowledge or experience. I could ask my brother, but he's busy and lives far away. ANGRY, INDIGNANT, DEFICIENT, INCAPABLE, LIKE A DISAPPOINTMENT

☹️ I'm tired. It's just one more thing to track, take care of, schedule in, etc. I have to schedule around activities, weather and my own mental/emotional state. I can't always do it when circumstances are ideal for me. OVERWHELMED, DISCOURAGED, EXHAUSTED, PARALYZED, EVEN MORE DEFICIENT, DEFECTIVE

☹️ I always have to check for and pick up dog poop (sometimes 5 piles!!), and I don't even own a dog! I hate this. It ticks me off. I can't “not” do it. If I don't take care of it, I risk stepping in it and/or mowing over it which then spreads it around and makes me have to clean both my shoes and the mower right away. The smell of dog poop is the worst, and it's hard to clean. How do I adequately sanitize things? WORRIED, ANGRY, HELPLESS

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☹️ It feels hard! I don't like doing hard things unless I absolutely have to! I shouldn't have to force myself to do this! Why?? I hate this!! STRONG RESISTANCE, RAGE, EXASPERATION

☹️ I'm feeling all of this anxiety, anger and stress in my **BODY** too: Pit in my stomach, heart beating faster, adrenaline rush, tight chest (gasping for air), and tense/clenched muscles.

☹️ **Negative thought count:** approx. 30

NOTICE that the negative thoughts choices tend to be: Harsh, irrational, restrictive, punitive, not fact-based (i.e., mind-reading and assuming), discouraging, and disempowering.

What are my CHOICES?

DO NOTHING. Lawn becomes too long to mow. Neighbors now have more reason to complain. I risk getting a citation from the city, which means I have to take care of it anyway (and on a tighter timeline) plus pay a fine of \$250 or more. If I leave it un-mowed after being cited, the city will send someone to mow it for me, and I'll be sent a bill.

PAY SOMEONE ELSE TO DO IT. I'd have to identify an individual or company (where do I find that information?). I'd have to pay said individual or company (can I afford it?). Would I have to check for dog poop before they arrive? I hope they don't trim or mow over my plants.

ASK SOMEONE ELSE TO DO IT FOR FREE. This seems hard, probably because I feel self-conscious. Logically, I know with 100% certainty that I have two neighbors who would automatically say, "Sure!" I imagine my ex-husband would even do it, if I asked (oh, my pride!). And if I *really* needed it, my brother or brother-in-law would probably come help although they both live an hour+ away.

DO IT MYSELF. Essentially free with exception of time and energy cost. Don't have to interact with anyone (which can be depleting).

POSITIVE thoughts and feelings:

😊 I can give myself the option to delay mowing if I am feeling too tired, overwhelmed, protective of alone time, strong resistance (loud "NO"), etc.

😊 I can give myself a flexible timeline versus rushing to get done.

😊 I can remind myself that if I just mow, it takes about 45 minutes to an hour.

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😊 If I trim, it takes about 15-20 minutes more. If I don't trim, I can go inside sooner. I can practice thoughts to help me tolerate seeing some shaggy edges without beating myself up. I can practice not guessing (or caring about) what my neighbors *might* (and probably don't) think.

😊 I can remind myself that it's not the end of the world if the grass gets too long. I can mow at the highest level and do it in shifts if the batteries run low (although less convenient). I can ask one of my neighbors to mow or to borrow a mower if mine can't handle it.

😊 I can remember some of the proven positive things about mowing:

- + Once I get started, it feels less difficult and uncomfortable.
- + It feels good to stop for a water break. I have cold water bottles ready.
- + After I'm done, it feels good shower, feel clean again, and eat something yummy.
- + I feel a sense of satisfaction when it's done (lawn looks nice), and I feel proud of myself. I also feel relief that my neighbors aren't judging me anymore (just kidding!).

😊 Regarding the mowing season, I can keep track of approximately how many times I end up mowing, or how many weeks there are in the mowing season, and count them down. (However, it could also discourage me that I know going in I'll have to do "x" number of mows, so again, how I feel depends on what thoughts I choose.)

😊 Regarding maintenance, my dad sent me a set of new mower blades, so that gives me the option to use them versus trying to sharpen the current ones myself. I don't have the know-how or tools to change them myself, but I didn't let those negative thoughts take over again. (Update: I asked my brother to replace my mower blades, and he said, "Easy!"). I also have the option to ask one of two neighbors who have the tools and who would most likely do it with no hesitation.

NOTICE that positive thoughts choices tend to be: Kind, logical, rational, creative, funny, compassionate, reassuring, comforting, encouraging, uplifting, hopeful, and empowering.

I recommend that you apply this process to a problematic area of life and see what happens!