Thoughts and Feelings

The Song

This simple example illustrates how our thoughts can "take off" and flood us with negative feelings. I felt hurt by the behavior of a loved one, and I held on to that feeling until I could choose new thoughts about what happened. I hope this story helps you see the thought-feeling connection at play and helps you better understand the power of your thoughts.

From, Lexi

SITUATION

About 20 years ago, my sister and I were in a car going to who-knows-where. I had just started dating M's father, and I was over the moon. I decided to play a song I liked (about love of course) and ended up singing along for a line or two. I have to admit, I probably looked a little… earnest. So, she burst out laughing. I stopped singing and said, "What?!" She said: "You were going like this," and copied how it looked. Did I mention we're twins? Immediately, I was hit with the following thoughts which caused strong negative feelings.

NEGATIVE thoughts and resulting feelings:

☹ What the heck?? Did she just make fun of me? SURPRISED, CONFUSED

☹ Does she think I'm a terrible singer? EMBARRASSED, MORTIFIED, HUMILIATED

☹ Maybe I do sound bad. I feel like such an idiot. SELF-CONSCIOUS, SELF-LOATHING

☹ Why did I share that song? I should have known better. SELF-BLAME

☹ I can't believe she mimicked me! ANGRY, INDIGNANT

☹ That was so mean! OUTRAGED, INFURIATED

☹ How could she do that to me?? VULNERABLE, SAD, HURT, WOUNDED, BETRAYED

Notice how my thoughts set off a ton of negative feelings. Many of the feelings overlap, but I list them all to show the swiftness and intensity of my response in that moment. Plus, they would start up again any time I thought of the situation, and that began to cause resentment. I carried those feelings with me for years because I didn't have the tools or the understanding to help myself. As I continued to learn about how our minds work, I realized: I could *think* differently about the situation in order to *feel* differently. Note: The new thoughts work best when they are believable.

What POSITIVE thoughts did I choose to feel better?

☺ I know my sister is not mean-spirited. REASSURED, SOOTHED

☺ I'll give her the benefit of the doubt. TRUSTING, CALMER

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☺ I've also blurted things out and spontaneously laughed! HONEST

☺ She's entitled to her opinion. ACCEPTING

☺ I think my singing skills are okay. ENCOURAGED, CONFIDENT

☺ I can see why she found it amusing. UNDERSTANDING

☺ I'm not an idiot for sharing something. AFFIRMED, SUPPORTED, LOVED

☺ I had no way of knowing she would react that way. I can't read her mind. RATIONAL, LOGICAL

☺ Even if she *had* meant to offend me, I can choose how to react. EMPOWERED, STRONG

Again, I give lots of examples to illustrate the point. Even choosing one or two of the positive thoughts (and repeating them) helped redirect me from the bad feelings. Today, I can think of the situation and not be bothered by it.

Some of you may be thinking: "Did your sister ever apologize?" I have to laugh about this one. I'm 99% sure she did, either right away or shortly thereafter, but my brain glossed over that part. When I asked her about it, she said: "I don't have a specific memory of that." ☺

Two other possible outcomes:

1. Let's say she didn't apologize. Then even more thoughts could pile on, such as: "She should have said she was sorry! That's so selfish. What's her problem?" And hence more bad feelings.
2. Let's say she apologized, but I didn't believe she was sincere. Same idea here: The negative thoughts get reactivated, and the bad feelings don't (or can't) go away.

Even if my twin *had* tried to offend me, I was the one who decided to be offended (or not). How I felt depended solely on what thoughts I chose. Said another way, my sister didn't "make" me feel anything… I did that to myself through my thoughts.

This concept can be tricky because most people believe others have the ability to make them feel a certain way. If our feelings are dependent on what other people say and do, we're in big trouble because those things are never within our control! I like to say it this way: If I can make myself feel bad by thinking negative thoughts, this is actually GOOD NEWS because I can then make myself feel good by thinking positive thoughts. I can choose new thoughts without anything outside of me having to change or be a certain way (or without getting an apology!). Like I did above, when I choose new thoughts, I can feel better regardless of the situation. This is a powerful tool to have.

I recommend observing your thoughts to see what good or bad feelings they cause.

For example: When I thought "x," I felt "y." or When I thought "this," I felt "that."

For bonus points: When "x" happened, I thought "y" and then felt "z."