

Practical examples for responding to unhelpful thoughts



The smallest exchanges can convey a compassionate action. Try to begin with an acknowledgement of the resident's distress. In doing this, you can use validation techniques to reduce the pressure to "prove" their pain or disability. Try to put yourself in the resident's shoes and imagine what you would like somebody to say to you.

General examples:

- "I'm sorry to hear how much pain you're in right now"
- "We know that when you're living with ongoing pain, your brain can become your worst enemy. It often thinks the worst. The more negative your thoughts, the more negative you will probably feel. We want your brain to be your friend, not your enemy. What's something helpful you could say to yourself right now?"

- "I hear you're upset about the things you're not able to do. However, let's try to think about the glass half full rather than half empty. There are other things you can still do"
- "It seems like you're quite distressed by your pain right now. We know feeling stressed or overwhelmed can cause short, shallow breathing. Can you try taking three deep breaths down to the diaphragm (belly) with me right now to help settle down the nervous system?"

Examples of how to encourage more helpful thinking:

Unhelpful thought	Example response
"I can't cope"	"I can probably cope better if I'm able to relax. Let's focus on my deep breathing to ride out this pain"
"I can't go on"	"By taking things one step at a time I'll get through the day"
"It's terrible and it's never going to get any better. I can't stand it anymore"	"My pain is worse on some days and better on others. Let's see what tomorrow brings and try to feel better tomorrow. Maybe I can aim for a short walk and for now I will try to take my mind off things"