

Are Your Thoughts Helping You? **By Jeffrey Bornstein, MS, LPCC**

Many of us spend countless hours focusing on negative ideas, worries, possibilities, events, etc. This focus can interfere with our sleep, work productivity, and quality time with friends and family. It can also lead to anxiety and depression. According to Albert Ellis, author of *How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself Miserable about Anything: Yes Anything!*, you can improve your mental health by becoming aware of, disputing and replacing unhelpful thoughts with productive and positive thoughts. Here are some examples:

- **All-or-Nothing Thinking**
 - **Become Aware of It:** Do you find yourself thinking that if something is not great it must be horrible? As things can seldom meet the high expectation of being great all of the time, do you then label them as being bad?
 - **Dispute It:** Is it true that things can only be great or awful? Maybe it is truer that many things in life can be rated on a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being awful and 10 being wonderful. You may find that things are rarely a 1 or a 10 but somewhere in between.
 - **Replace It:** Maybe a truer statement is that there are some challenging things in life (e.g. the economy, fear of losing my job) but other things are hopeful (e.g. I have good friends or I enjoy watching television).
- **Focusing on the Negative, Ignoring the Positive**
 - **Become Aware of It:** Do you find yourself focusing on a few negative aspects of life (e.g. there is a pimple on the middle of my nose, why didn't he call me yet?, I am really not going to enjoy this meeting.) and ignoring some of the positive aspects of life (e.g. that was a really good lunch, the weather was perfect today, I am going to enjoy *American Idol* tonight)?
 - **Dispute It:** Now think about the benefits and costs of being negative. One benefit is that being negative will protect me from being disappointed. Another benefit is that I may avoid certain pitfalls in the future. A cost is that having negative thoughts may lead to negative emotions (e.g. anger, sadness, guilt). Another cost is that by focusing on the negative, I might miss opportunities that are right in front of me (e.g. my spouse / friends / children want to spend time with me).
 - **Replace It:** Once you become aware that you are focusing on the negative, consciously switch your focus to something positive. If someone cuts you off in traffic and you become angry, switch your focus to what you will be having for dinner or something nice somebody said about you in the past week.

I focus on offering you skills to become more aware of and gain control of your thoughts. When you want to start making your thoughts benefit you, please give me a call on my confidential voicemail at **(323) 362-6555**.