

Thoughts like buses

Explanation: We are not our thoughts. Just because you think something or something crosses your mind doesn't make it true. But often when we think negative and destructive thoughts they feel very real and we can get caught up in the same thoughts going round and round, causing more upset, misery and distress. But we have more control over our thoughts than you might think!

How to do it: Let's imagine that you are sitting on a lovely bench in your favourite place in nature. It also happens to be a bus stop. You can see the buses coming and going, and on the front of every bus is the destination – these are your thoughts. You don't have to get on every bus that comes by – you can choose. If you see a familiar bus arriving that you don't like, you don't have to get on – you already know where it goes and how it goes round and round. It's not taking you anywhere of value, so stay on your bench. Maybe choose another bus – a bus where you remember a really good holiday, or your favourite food, or one where you plan something nice to do. If you find yourself on the wrong bus, you can just ring the bell and get off and come back to that bench.

When it's useful: This can be done when you feel your thoughts running away with you on a negative spiral – perhaps a thought you've had many times before. Reminding ourselves that we don't have to just accept every thought as it appears helps reset the brain. It can take a bit of practice, but the more you reset yourself and come back to the bench, the more your brain gets the message that you don't have to have these unhelpful thoughts. Another way of looking at it is to think of your thoughts like clouds – you are the sky above. The clouds may cover the sky sometimes, and some stick around longer than others, but they are not you and they always pass in the end.

