unhelpful thinking styles
personalisation

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these, "unhelpful thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness. However, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. One of these thinking styles is called "personalisation".

personalisation

Can you think of some occasions when something hasn't gone quite as you wanted, or the way you expected, and you've blamed yourself totally for what's happened? The toast burns at breakfast, and you blame yourself not the toaster, your child plays a wrong note at a concert, and you blame yourself for not making him practice harder. Without realising it, you relate external negative events to something you have or have not done.

When you personalise something, you take total responsibility for external events occurring, and ignoring other important factors. As a consequence you end up blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong or that could go wrong - even when you may only be partly responsible, or not responsible at all.

If you were to consistently say to yourself, "This is my fault", "I'm to blame" – how do you think you'd start to feel?

Carrying 100% of the responsibility is a rather large burden to bear, and one that's likely to leave you feeling discouraged or overwhelmed. It's tough trying to carry the world on your shoulders. Although accepting responsibility for your actions is considered a positive characteristic, it is unhelpful to accept total responsibility for events that are beyond your control, or to accept more responsibility than is your share.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?