

# SESSION 13:

## How to handle thoughts that don't help me

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### Objectives

1. Participants will learn to distinguish self-defeating thoughts from self-enhancing thoughts regarding the practice of safer sex.
2. Participants will identify their own self-defeating thoughts.
3. Participants will learn how to shift from self-defeating to self-enhancing thoughts.
4. Participants will practice arguing against self-defeating thoughts.
5. Participants will be able to substitute self-enhancing thoughts for self-defeating thoughts concerning safer sex.

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### Rationale

Cognitions play a critical role in directing behaviors toward safer sex. If an adolescent male believes that he must have sex by the time he is thirteen in order to be a real man, he is likely to engage in risky situations. If he also believes that condoms cut out the pleasure in sex, he will be unlikely to have protected sex. Sometimes dysfunctional thoughts are based on lack of information, but more often they are a product of both basic negative beliefs and assumptions about oneself and myths incorporated in the immediate social structure. Accepting these myths is a part of the socialization process.

Dysfunctional thoughts can cut across most areas of the adolescent's life, but the focus in this session is on those thoughts which lead to unsafe sex practices. These self-defeating thoughts show up with regard to abstinence, condoms, screening partners, invulnerability, fatalism, and differences between girls and boys.

Cognitive interventions have been successful in dealing with dysfunctional thoughts. The typical pattern is to help people recognize self-defeating thoughts and self-enhancing thoughts, identify their own dysfunctional thoughts, and switch from self-defeating to self-enhancing thoughts. Modeling and behavioral rehearsal are strategies for bringing about these changes.

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### Procedures

1. Introduce the topic for the day. Introduce group members having them say what they tell themselves to make them feel good. Check on homework of finding where there was pressure on them and what they did about it. Also look for successes in practicing safer sex.
2. Explain about thoughts that help us and those that hinder.
3. Have them play a game which teaches them to discriminate between self-defeating thoughts and self-supporting thoughts.
4. Have group members write down one self-defeating and one self-supporting thought of

- their own. Use partners to explain why the thoughts were either helpful or hindering.
5. Model the process of switching from self-defeating thoughts to self-supporting thoughts.
  6. Have groups members practice switching from unhelpful thoughts to helpful thoughts through being given a scene and a negative thought to work from.
  7. Have boys and girls separately identify the most common unhelpful thoughts.
  8. Have the groups work on substituting helpful thoughts for these commonly used self-defeating thoughts.
  9. Give out appreciatory statements.
  10. Check Feeling Thermometers.
  11. Give out homework assignment of catching defeating thoughts and trying hand at replacing the thought with a more helpful one.

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## Materials

Feeling Thermometers

Tokens

Thoughts cards

Blank 3 x 5 cards and pencils

Newsprint and marking pens

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## ***Exercise 1: Introducing and reviewing***

### ***Leader says***

Welcome back to today's session of "Stay Safe!"

Today we are going to work on our thoughts.

We are going to learn to deal with those thoughts that lead us to unsafe sex.

In "Stay Safe!" one of the main goals is to help you cope with all the different things which contribute to your being involved with unsafe sexual behavior.

That's why today we are going to get inside your head and look at what you are thinking.

By the way, would each of you hold up the condom that you carry with you at all times?

***Have each person hold up a condom that they have been carrying with them. Give tokens to those group members that produce them.***

You see, we don't want you to get HIV.

If you already are HIV-positive, we don't want you to make it worse for yourself by getting re-infected.

We want to slow the spread of HIV and AIDS in ourselves, our friends and the community.

Also we want you to know your goals and to reach the goals you have set.

Each one of you has plans for the future.

***Ask a few group members where they want to be in 3 years. Give tokens.***

I am convinced that you will make things better for yourselves.

By being here at Stay Safe you have already started.

Let's go around and introduce ourselves.

Tell your name and tell us what you say to yourself to make you feel good.

Like "I'm OK" or "It's a great day" or "Somebody up there loves me."

Just say "I'm Sharon, and I'm the greatest!"

I'll start. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and to make me feel good I say \_\_\_\_\_.

***Have everyone give their name and what they say to make them feel good.***

That was great.

How are you feeling right now on the Feeling Thermometer?

***Encourage responding and pass out tokens for participation. Pass out tokens for group members to use.***

Remember how important it is to stay in touch with how much discomfort you are feeling and to label correctly what those feelings are.

At the end of the last session I asked you to keep a record of the number of times you felt there was pressure on you to get involved with drugs and alcohol.

Also how could you use problem solving to deal with the pressure?

***Encourage presentations of pressures and how problem solving might have helped. Use tokens.***

What did you do since we last met to stay safe?

I'm interested in anything you did no matter how important or unimportant it might seem to you.

Achievements not related to sex are good to describe also.

Every step you take leads you to staying healthy so you can live the kind of life you want.

So what did you do?

***Encourage sharing and give out tokens. Catch someone doing something good.***

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## **Exercise 2: Which thoughts help and which ones hinder**

As I said earlier, today we are going to work on thoughts.

When you are faced with any difficult situation, there are two kinds of thoughts that you have.

Ones that are self-defeating and ones that lead you to your goal.

We could call the ones that lead you to your goal "self-supporting."

The same is true when it comes to practicing safer sex.

Some thoughts will help us practice safer sex, and some thoughts will hinder us in practicing safer sex.

Let's say I am a twelve year old boy.

Now you know most 12 year old boys don't know what you know about safer sex and HIV.

And they are rarely mature enough to make good decisions.

So if I say to myself, "I must have sex soon. All my friends are screwing like crazy." Will that lead me toward or away from unsafe sex?

**Obtain answers. It will lead toward unsafe sex.**

And what doesn't make sense about saying, "I must have sex" and "All my friends are screwing?"

**Encourage ideas. It is unlikely that all his friends are. Why must he have sex? What will happen if he doesn't have sex? Would he know what to do if sex was offered to him? Does he know a thing about practicing safer sex?**

Now what if I was another twelve year old boy and told myself, "I can wait until I'm older to have sex."

Would that thought help me practice safer sex or defeat me in practicing safer sex?

**Obtain answers and discuss them. The thought would help in the practice of safer sex.**

You may not realize it, but what we think plays an enormous role in what we do.

We think first, and then we do.

Our thoughts direct what we do.

The point is that the way you think can either push you toward unsafe sex or help you practice safer sex.

Obviously we want you healthy; so we want your thoughts to be self-supporting.

We are going to play a game which will help us figure out which thoughts help us and which ones hinder us in practicing safer sex.

There will be two teams.

The goal is at the front of the room: practicing safer sex.

In the middle of the room is half way there.

At the back of the room is where you start.

If you get a card with a helping thought on it, you move to the middle of the room - that's half way there.

If you get a second card with a helping thought on it, you reach the goal of safer sex.

If you get a card with a self-defeating thought on it, you stay at the back of the room or where you are.

The objective is to get your whole team at the front of the room practicing safer sex.

Has everyone got the idea?

***Answer questions. Then divide the group into two teams. Give out the cards one at a time switching teams each time. After the group decides which the card is - helping or hindering - have the person move according to which it is. Some ideas to help the group decide if the card is a dysfunctional thought are as follows:***

- \$ Is the logic faulty?
- \$ Is this an exaggerated statement?
- \$ What evidence is there that the statement is accurate?
- \$ How much chance is there that the outcome will happen?
- \$ How good have past predictions been?
- \$ Does the statement imply the person feels helpless?

I'll give out the cards one at a time - first to one team and then the other.

After you get our card, read it aloud; then we'll decide if it is a self-defeating thought or a self-supporting thought.

***Make sure the cards are well mixed up. About forty cards are self-defeating and thirty cards are self-supporting.***

## **Thought Cards**

**(One thought to a card)**

1. I should have had sex by now.
2. I'm not that attractive or else I could have been with somebody.
3. Everybody does it, so I have to also.
4. If I don't have intercourse, I'm not having sex.
5. She will think I'm a wimp if I don't have sex.
6. He will think I'm afraid of sex.
7. People will think I must have something physical to hide if I don't have sex.
8. I will not be able to feel my partner as well if I use a condom.

9. Wearing a condom puts a barrier between me and the one I love.
10. Wearing a condom will make it hurt and be dry.
11. Wearing a condom takes all the spontaneity (freedom or fun) out of sex.
12. Sex becomes too planned with a condom.
13. Condoms cost too much.
14. Carrying a rubber with me means that I admit I will have sex.
15. Having the guy pull out early is as good as using a condom.
16. Condoms aren't really that safe anyway.
17. I can't get condoms. I don't know how.
18. My partner won't like using a condom, and even if he agrees, sex will be ruined.
19. Using non-oxynol 9 is just as good as using a condom; so a condom isn't necessary.
20. If I carry a condom around, my parents or friends or teachers or priest or minister might find out.
21. My partner will think I don't trust her or him.
22. He will go with someone who does not ask him to use a condom.
23. She will tell everyone else that I am a scared wimp if I use a condom.
24. If I ask him to use a condom, he will think I am having sex with others.
25. If I use a condom, she will think I have HIV.
26. If I make him use a condom, he will get turned off.
25. She doesn't ask me about what I did before with sex and drugs; so it's not fair to ask her.
26. He won't tell me the truth about what he has done with sex and drugs, so why ask?
27. She is too young to have gotten AIDS.
28. He is more experienced than I am, so it is up to him to talk about past sex with others.
29. She'll tell others what I tell her about my past sex life.
30. He will think I'm not serious about our love if I try to find out about his past sex life.
31. She looks healthy; so she couldn't have HIV.
32. By the time I would get symptoms, there will be a cure.
33. I am basically a good person. God would not let me get HIV.
34. I am not gay, and I don't shoot drugs. I am safe.

35. I never get sick.
36. I'll be old by the time I'd get AIDS. I don't have to worry about it now.
37. If I get AIDS, it is God's will. I cannot do anything about that.
38. If I get AIDS, that's fate.
39. Life is Russian roulette. I could get killed by a car five minutes from now. So why worry about AIDS?
40. Girls say "no" when they really mean "yes." So it is OK to push them to have unsafe sex.
41. When I meet a girl, I try to have sex with her. That's what girls are made for.
42. AIDS is a health threat that I take very seriously.
43. AIDS is the scariest disease I know.
44. Anyone can get AIDS if they aren't careful.
5. I could get AIDS if I didn't take care of myself.
46. People can protect themselves from getting AIDS.
47. Using a condom when having intercourse reduces the risk of getting HIV.
48. Screening people about their past behavior is a smart thing to do.
50. Asking people about their past sexual behavior is not always easy for me, but I can handle it and it is worth the trouble.
51. I can wait until I'm older to start having sex.
52. I know how to say "no" to drugs.
53. If people put me down for wanting to have safer sex, I can stand up for myself.
54. I can control my sexual impulses.
55. I know how to use a condom.
56. When I'm safe. I'm sexy.
57. I know how to have fun sexually without getting semen, vaginal fluids, or blood in me.
58. I know how to make wearing a condom sexy.
59. In the future I will always be able to practice safer sex.
60. Carrying condoms with me every day is a habit I can keep.
61. I know how to ask good questions to screen people about sex and drugs.
62. I know how to say "no" to unsafe sex.

63. I can figure out which situations are risky for me.
64. Being attractive has nothing to do with how many times I have sex.
65. There are plenty of people my age who don't have sex.
66. So what if people think I'm afraid of sex. They won't be laughing when they get HIV.
67. The best sex I ever had was a lot of touching and tenderness - no intercourse.
68. If my partner doesn't care enough about me to practice safer sex, I don't want that person.
69. I have a right to take care of my own body.
70. Practicing unsafe sex is dumb, and I don't want to be dumb.

***Play the game until all the cards are used or until one team has everyone in the safer sex goal area - whichever comes first.***

That was really good.

***Pass out tokens as often as possible.***

So where are your Feeling Thermometer levels now and what did you think of the game?

***Obtain feeling readings and discuss what was learned or experienced in the game.***

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### ***Exercise 3: My self-defeating and self-supporting thoughts***

I hope you have a good idea about thoughts that help and thoughts that hinder practicing safer sex.

Now we want to get a better look at which thoughts you use.

I am going to give you a blank card.

One the front of it write the self-defeating thought that you use a lot, and on the back of it write a self-supporting thought that you use.

***Allow time for writing the thoughts.***

Now I want you to get with a partner.

***Arrange the group members into pairs.***

Exchange cards with your partner.

Look at your partner's card and tell your partner why the self-defeating thought keeps your partner from practicing safer sex and why the self-supporting thought helps practicing safer sex.

Each partner is explaining what the other partner had on his or her card.

***Allow about five minutes for each person to explain the other person's card.***

How did looking at your own thoughts make you feel?

***Get feeling levels.***

What was your overall reaction to writing down your thoughts and then explaining what your partner had written down?

***Discuss the exercise.***

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***Exercise 4: Switching from unhelpful to helpful thoughts***

How do you change what you are thinking?

First, you have to catch yourself thinking a self-defeating thought.

That's what we have been working on.

Second, you stop the unhelpful thought.

Third, you tell yourself why it is unhelpful.

And fourth, you substitute a self-supporting thought.

Let me show you.

I am with a new lover, and I want sex.

I'd like to ask her (him) if she (he) has been sleeping around and practicing unsafe sex.

I think, "What a stupid question! She'll (he'll) never tell you the truth."

Then I shout to myself,

***Really yell out "stop" and startle everyone.***

"Stop! That's not a helpful way to think. It is not a stupid question. You don't know if she (he) will tell you the truth."

Now I say to myself, "I will be careful about having sex with her until I know more. I have to try and find out what she (he) has been doing. I know how to ask her (him) about her past."

That's an example of catching the self-defeating thought, stopping it, challenging it, and substituting something more helpful.

I'll put those steps up so that you can see them.

***Write on newsprint: catch, stop, challenge, substitute.***

Let's have you try switching from self-defeating to substituting something self-supporting.

Who will be Jimmy?

***Select a volunteer.***

Jimmy, you are just about to have intercourse with a girl for the first time. She has asked you to use a condom.

I'm going to write up here what you think.

Then you say it aloud and practice switching to a helpful thought.

After he's finished, we'll get a couple of others to try.

The rest of us will observe and then give feedback to all of you.

***Write up on newsprint: "If I use a rubber, it will feel terrible. There is no sense doing it if I have to put on a rubber."***

Go ahead.

***When the first person is finished, give a token and ask for another volunteer. When the second person is finished, give a token and seek a third volunteer. Then ask the group for feedback.***

So we had three brave people practice switching.

***Give tokens.***

Let's give them some feedback.

Start with what you liked about their efforts and then say what you would do differently.

Remember don't say, "What you did wrong was ...."

***Obtain feedback and discuss.***

Now we'll try a different one.

Who will be Barbara?

***Select a volunteer.***

We'll do this one the same way.

Barbara, you are with a guy you like and are about to have intercourse.

You want him to wear a condom.

I'll write up here what you think.

Read it aloud and show us how you would switch to a better thought.

***Write up on the newsprint: "I'm afraid that if I ask him to wear a condom, he'll leave me and lay some other girl."***

After you are finished, we'll get a couple of others to try and then the rest of us will give all of you feedback.

Why not get started.

***When the first person is finished, give a token and ask for another volunteer. When the second***

***person is finished, give a token and seek a third volunteer. Then ask the group for feedback.***

So we had another group of courageous people practice switching.

Let's give them some feedback.

Start with what you liked about their efforts and then say what you would do differently.

Remember don't say, "What you did wrong was ...."

***Obtain feedback and discuss.***

What are people's feeling levels at this point?

***Obtain feeling level responses and discuss.***

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### ***Exercise 5: Substituting self-supporting thoughts***

From the first game we played with all the cards showing thoughts that keep you from safer sex, you probably have a good idea of how common these thoughts are.

You are the experts in knowing how other teenagers like yourself think.

What we need is to come up with the five most common self-defeating thoughts used by girls and the five for boys.

After we get them, then we'll work on substituting a more helpful thought for the ones on both of these lists.

So the girls will go in the front corner of the room and the boys in the back.

Take newsprint with you and marking pens.

The girls' task is to come up with a list of the five most commonly used self-defeating thoughts that girls have.

The boys' task is to come up with the five most commonly used self-defeating thoughts used by boys.

Put them on newsprint.

Go ahead and get started.

***Allow ten minutes to come up with lists.***

Let's have each group present your list.

***Present lists***

Now we want to say what helpful thought could we substitute for each of these.

For example, if the self-defeating thought was, "She'll think I'm a nerd if I say I want to use a rubber" then the self-supporting thought might be, "I'm not into macho games. If she doesn't like me using a rubber, I'll find someone else. There are lots of other girls out there."

We'll take one from the girls' list and then one from the boys' list.

***Have the group brainstorm self-supporting thoughts that could be used instead of all 10 of the self-defeating thoughts.***

That was very good.

What do you think of the substitutes that you came up with?

Also what did you think about the differences in the girls' list and the boys list?

***Discuss.***

How are you feeling now?

***Encourage sharing of feeling thermometer levels.***

Everyone deserves a lot of credit for your work today.

***Distribute some tokens.***

Let's give each other strokes for things group members did that you liked.

***Encourage giving thanks and appreciation.***

I'll bet you can guess the homework.

Catch yourself with a thought that is not helpful.

Yell "Stop!" to yourself and come up with a self-supporting thought.

See if you can do this three different times before we see each other again.

Is that clear?

***Clarify any questions.***

I'll see you next time at \_\_\_\_\_ (time) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).

**END OF SESSION 13**