

## Thought Monitoring

If you are depressed right now, it may seem as though your mood is constantly low. But it isn't. It rises and falls. It may never rise as much as you'd like, but it does rise. If you think of your mood on a 0-100 scale, sometimes your mood is 20/100 (lousy) and sometimes it's 5/100 (downright awful).

In Thought Monitoring, we try to identify the thoughts associated with changes in your mood – especially downward changes. In order to work with this thinking, we have to know what it is.

Here's the exercise:

For one week, carry around a pen and paper. Whenever you notice your mood take a dip, even a slight one, ask yourself one important question:

*"What was going through my mind just then?"*

Write down the situation you were in when your mood declined, and write down what you were thinking. Here's an example:

*Stuart was taking a sign language course at night school. A fellow student managed to sign an entire sentence properly and for a moment he felt a slight, mysterious slide in his mood. At first he didn't know what had caused it. As he strained to catch his thoughts, he realized he'd been comparing himself to her. The thought went something like "I'll never sign that well no matter how hard I practice."*

At first you may find this exercise frustrating. Your automatic thoughts are just that: automatic. You usually aren't aware of them. When you ask yourself what you were thinking, your immediate reply might be *"Nothing!"* You may find yourself guessing at first. *"Maybe I was worried the dog would bite me."* Fine, write down your guesses. *Keep listening.* Eventually you will develop an ear for your automatic thoughts.

You may start to notice that you are writing down the same thoughts over and over again. *"This one again!"* Wonderful. This tells you that you have identified some of your primary negative automatic thoughts. If writing them down becomes tiring, just place a checkmark beside the thought each time it happens. As your rows of checkmarks grow, you'll see which thoughts are particularly important in shaping your mood.