

This technique is useful for unearthing and exploring hidden assumptions behind your thoughts. Start with a thought and try and follow it back into your psyche finding what is behind each thought. Pose some of the following questions. What would be so bad about that? What might happen? What would that mean? Why?

The example below is a true example of a woman who had a lift phobia for 20 years but had never unravelled her thoughts to find what she was really scared of. She was actually quite surprised at what she found, and recognised that her fantasy at the end of her chain of thoughts was completely irrational.

Thought	Rational challenge
Going into a lift would be absolutely awful.	It would make me really anxious.
<p>↓</p> <p>Why would it be upsetting? I don't know. I can't bear even to think about it.</p>	Close your eyes. Think what might happen – these are only my thoughts.
<p>↓</p> <p>What might happen? I'd press the wrong button and the lift would jam between floors.</p>	It's possible but I'd estimate chances of that happening as one in five thousand.
<p>↓</p> <p>What would be so bad about that? Well that would be the end – I'd go crazy.</p>	It wouldn't be the end. I'd get panicky but people can't go mad from being frightened.
<p>↓</p> <p>Why? Because I'd be stuck in the lift, unable to get out.</p>	It's a glass-fronted lift in a busy store; they'd notice me and get me out.
<p>↓</p> <p>How long might you be stuck? Well, maybe a couple of days.</p>	That's an over-estimation – maybe 30 minutes at most.
<p>↓</p> <p>What would be so bad about that? I wouldn't have any food or water.</p>	They would have got me out. If not, I wouldn't want food, or they would pass it to me.
<p>↓</p> <p>What would that mean? I'd starve – by the time they found me I'd be a withered skeleton, huddled in the corner.</p>	Nobody starves in two days – I would not be a skeleton.