unhelpful thinking styles
"shoulding" & "musting"

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 "shoulding and musting".

"shoulding" & "musting"

It is quite common in everyday language to hear people use "I should", and "I must" statements. Sometimes it's not necessarily unhelpful to think, "I should get my work in on time" and it can even be quite important to think "I should not get drunk and then drive home". However, these types of statements become unhelpful when you use "should" and "must" statements to put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself.

We might say
"I should get things right", or
"I must never get upset with my partner", or
"I should always cook exquisite meals."

Using "should" and "must" in this way often leads to unrealistic expectations.

How do you think someone would feel after making these kinds of statements over and over again – consistently setting the bar too high to reach? Chances are, they'll feel guilty or disappointed in themselves.

We may also use these types of statements when we are talking about other people
"She should know better than that",
"People should always keep their promises",
"I can't believe they just cut in front of my car! They shouldn't drive like that!".

You might have guessed that these kinds of statements leave us feeling frustrated or angry and disappointed in others.

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?