

## 41. An Introduction to Thought Work



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With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

**Period Power** with Maisie Hill

## 41. An Introduction to Thought Work

If you are in the horrors with menstrual cycle issues or you want to learn how to harness your hormones then you are in the right place.

Welcome to the *Period Power* podcast. I'm your host Maisie Hill menstrual health expert, acupuncturist, certified life coach and author of *Period Power*. I'm on a mission to help you get your cycle working for you so that you can use it to get what you want out of life. Are you ready? Let's go.

Welcome to episode 41 of the *Period Power* podcast. So today I want to talk to you about thought work. Because although I mention it a lot on the podcast I've never broken it down in any detail for you. So that's what we're going to do today. And in The Flow Collective I teach a thought work protocol. And you might be wondering what the hell a thought work protocol is. So I'm going to break it down for you. It's just a process that comes from cognitive behavioural therapy which you might have heard of as CBT. And it essentially acknowledges that there's a think, feel, do cycle.

So you think a thought, which leads you to feel a certain emotion, and that leads you to do particular actions, particular behaviours. And when we look at our experience of life through this lens and using the specific framework that I teach, we can really see the impact that our thoughts have on our lives. This is radically different to how most of us go through life. And it's why we experience such radical shifts and such radical results by using the thought work protocol. There's a reason I bang on about it all the time, because for most of life we're not in the habit of questioning our thoughts.

We're not even aware that our thoughts are thoughts because we're just so busy accepting them as fact and getting on with our lives. We're not observing our brains. So think about the impact of that, of you just believing every single thought that your brain offers up to you regardless of how ridiculous it is or not. So think about the voice in your head that's your inner critic. It might show up at particular times in your cycle. I'm sure it's familiar to all of you.

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It's the voice in your head that has all the put downs and all the trash talk. It's the voice that tells you what an awful human you are and how you'll never amount to anything, that you're useless, that you're unlovable, and surely you're just going to die alone because of all of this, blah, blah, blah. Now, if you don't recognise that they are only thoughts, thoughts that we can certainly question, you'll just believe what your brain is telling you.

And you know what happens next, the thoughts create emotions like shame, and hopelessness, and hurt. They leave you feeling lonely, pathetic, pessimistic about life. So, so far we've established that your thoughts lead to your emotions, your feelings. And then they impact what you do. So your emotions then drive your behaviour in your day-to-day life in terms of what's going on in your internal world and also the behaviour that you take in the external world.

And these thoughts have been running the show for a very long time, a lifetime in fact for most of them. And they probably emerged in your family of origin and the environments in which you grew up in. They might have been thoughts that were said directly to you like sentences, phrases that were said to you by your parents, or other caregivers, your extended family, your siblings, teachers, your peers, your mates. Or they may have been phrases that were used around you.

And as a parent it's been really fascinating to observe my kid saying things like, "I'm stupid. I'm clumsy. I'm pathetic." Because we've never said these things to him. We made a very deliberate decision that we weren't going to call him names. And yet they've emerged from somewhere which I think is just normal. But before observing this in him, I had just assumed that all the internal thoughts that we have as humans have come from being told these things explicitly by our parents.

But that's not necessarily the case. They might be phrases and sentences that you were just exposed to in the environment that you grew up in even if they weren't said directly to you. And each time you had one of those thoughts, and each time you've had one of these thoughts it's deepened

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that neural pathway. And neural pathways are the basis of your habits of thinking. And every thought and feeling you have strengthens the circuitry in your brain, the neural pathway.

And as the saying goes, neurones that fire together, wire together. And so your nerves cells, these neural pathways are always forming, strengthening, and deepening. That's the kind of science version. I'm going to give you another way of understanding this. So imagine you're walking through a forest. And when we walk through our forest what our brain's doing without much effort is searching for the easiest route for us to take, the path of least resistance. And that's how with very little awareness or effort we can detect even the slightest of pathways through the undergrowth.

We follow the trail that's been walked before. Or in terms of our thoughts we follow the path that's been thought before. And each time we follow that pathway what it does is it solidifies it, and it becomes more defined, it deepens. So the thing about our brains is that they like to conserve energy and go down the path of least resistance, so we just follow the neural pathway that's already established because it's easier and it saves energy to do that, rather than go to the bother of creating a new pathway.

But we can create new pathways. It's not all doom and gloom here. There's this thing called neuroplasticity. Well, we can create new pathways, but we just need to put in a bit of effort and think new thoughts. But before that we have to become aware of the thoughts that we already have, which is what I teach you how to do in The Flow Collective. But if you want to get started with this now, all you need to do is start to separate out what's going on in the world with your thoughts about what's going on in the world.

And that will set you up perfectly for doing the course that you get access to as a member when you do join. So I'm going to give you an example of how this works. Last year in the run up to the winter holiday season here in the UK we weren't entirely sure whether people would get to see family and friends at Christmas. And initially the government had said that we would

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be able to, and then they said that we couldn't. So that was just the situation, the thing that happened in our lives. The government said, "You can't travel to be with loved ones, you have to stay in your bubble."

And some people were devastated by that. They've been in lockdown, hadn't seen family for ages. And in preparation for seeing them they'd self-isolated to reduce the likelihood of the virus spreading to their loved ones, maybe those who were elderly and vulnerable. Some people had taken their kids out of school before the end of term so that they could self-isolate, just so that they could spend a couple of holidays with their families.

So when the government made this announcement, those people were probably thinking things like, I'm so sad I'm not going to see my family. I can't believe I'm to going to see them. Maybe they were also thinking, how dare the government do this. What are they playing at? So of course it makes sense that they would then be experiencing emotions such as feeling sad, angry, disappointed, and grieving. Because each of those thoughts and ones along those lines will have created a specific emotion or feeling, all very understandable.

But some people will have had a different reaction. So I'm thinking of the people who feel obligated to go to their family at Christmas when they'd rather not. And all the couples who rotate between each set of parents when what they really want to do is stay at home in their own homes and establish their own traditions. Those people who maybe being in lockdown wasn't ideal because they would have chosen to go away to a tropical location somewhere. Maybe they were really quite happy to have the opportunity to chill at home.

So this set of people would be having thoughts like, what a relief. I'm so glad we get to stay put. This is going to make Christmas much easier. And those thoughts will have left them feeling glad, relieved, relaxed, calm, etc. And I just want to clarify here, there's no right or wrong way of thinking, or of feeling. All of these things are valid but they're different sets of thoughts

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and feelings. So all of these thoughts have led to different emotions and experiences.

But I give this as an example just to show you how there are the circumstances of life, i.e. what the government announced, and then there are the thoughts that you have about the circumstances. There's a difference. And it's your thoughts that will create how you feel, which in turns drives your behaviour. Most of us just go through life believing that our thoughts about a situation are true, and that they're factual and objective.

So what I'm inviting you to do today is to just start watching your brain and to notice your thoughts. To just to start separating them out from what's going on around you. And I know that this can be a lot to wrap your head around which is why I teach you exactly how to do this step-by-step in The Flow Collective. But let me give you some quick fire examples just to bring this to life for you. Again, I just want to point out there's no right thought to have. This is just about noticing how you think about a situation and how it will determine how you feel and act. It's the think, feel, do cycle.

So let's say you send your friend a text, or maybe send a text to a romantic partner, or someone that you've just started dating. So you send them a text and they don't send you a text back within the timeframe that you would like them to. So that's just how we could describe the situation, you haven't received a text. But then there's your thought about that situation. So you could be thinking, I've upset them somehow. And that will lead to a particular emotion like worry.

An alternative thought you could have could be, they're probably really busy or maybe they're having so much fun they're just not looking at their phone right now. And thoughts like that would create a different emotion for you. So maybe you'd feel calm, or trusting, or detached because it's just like whatever, they just haven't looked at their phone.

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Or as another example, you receive a text message from someone. And maybe your response to that text message appearing on your phone is, I wonder what they want. Versus, I wonder what they want. You see how one creates dread or annoyance, and one creates curiosity and interest. And this is a good example of how you can actually have the same thought, but it can have a very different tone to it and that will create a different emotion. And each will lead to a different set of actions and a different experience.

Another example, this one might get you all going as you contemplate this happening in your life. So maybe your boss schedules a meeting with you. And how you think about them arranging that meeting and your perceived reasons for them doing that is going to impact how you feel about that meeting. So if your go to thought is, I've messed something up, I've done something wrong. Then that would lead to an emotion like panic, or anxiety, or dread.

As an alternative you could be thinking, this is a great opportunity for us to discuss the projects that I'm working on and to talk about my role within the team. You would see it as an opportunity. And if you're thinking that you'll have a very different emotional experience. It will lead to maybe you feel centred, or dynamic, or embracing of the opportunity. So your thought about that meeting creates how you feel which in turn affects what you do, and ultimately how you show up to that meeting.

So another thing to point out here is that each of these thoughts that we have is more likely to happen just according to your particular patterns of thinking, the habits that your brain has acquired throughout your lifetime. Because, as I've mentioned, your brain will go down the well-trodden neural pathway. So the thought work protocol is an opportunity to bring awareness to how you're thinking. To see how your thoughts create your emotions and how your emotions impact your behaviour.

So think that we will agree that if you're feeling sad then you do very different things than if you're feeling happy. And yes, before you ask me,

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there are other aspects that come into play, like how your nervous system responds to what's going on around you, and the messages that it's receiving. And we always want to recognise and respect that. And yes, your hormones influence the release of neurotransmitters and that will impact how you feel. But there's also all the thoughts you then have on top of those things.

And when we bring awareness to the think, feel, do cycle, of separating out your thoughts from what's going on in the world, it is life changing. It gives you space in observing your thoughts because you get some distance from them. And you get to see how they're showing up in your life. And then you can decide if you want to keep running this thought, this neural pathway. Or do you want to walk down a new route and create a new neural pathway so that you end up in a different destination? And in doing so you create a different experience of your life, and a different set of results.

There is so much power in this, and it all starts with just noticing your thoughts, recognising that they are only thoughts, they're not facts, you don't have to jump on board with them. Then you can explore where they came from. And ultimately you can decide if they're helpful, and if they're kind, and if you want to keep them. And if not, then we can get to work on changing them, but this is a skill. Sometimes I still struggle to tease things apart, and I've been doing this for years, personally and professionally, which is why having help is so important.

It's why I teach you how to do this in The Flow Collective, and why there's the opportunity in the community and through our group coaching calls to share your thought work so that you can get that all important feedback and support as you build this skill. We recently did a workshop all about the framework that I teach as a bonus for the current members. And it was really fun. They submitted examples of their thought work for me to use as teaching examples. And I think it's fair to say their minds were blown with what I showed them.



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And yes, you do get access to the recording when you join, so don't worry it will be there for you when you join. And if you are already a member you will find the recording in the Harness Your Hormones programme in the bonus section. I highly recommend watching it. There are people who have been doing the thought work protocol for a while and they still got so much out of watching it. So whether you joined us fairly recently or you've been around for a while, definitely check it out.

But even without watching it if all you do, if all you take from this episode is getting in the habit of observing your thoughts, of noticing the thoughts that you have and seeing that they are simply an interpretation of what's going on in your life, things will start to shift for you. It's this practice that has changed so much of my own life and that of my clients. And it will change yours as well, I promise.

Right, that is it for today. Have a cracking week and I'll catch you next time.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of the *Period Power* podcast. If you enjoyed learning how to make your cycle work for you, head over to [maisiehill.com](http://maisiehill.com) for more.