

3.5 Thinking Traps: Set

In this activity...

Children identify nine common thinking traps and use personal examples to understand how these thinking traps appear in their everyday life.



By a show of hands, ask your children if they have heard about thinking traps before. Before sharing the formal definition, give children the opportunity to make educated guesses about what a thinking trap might be. Then, explain that thinking traps are patterns or habits of thought that are inaccurate and keep you stuck in negativity, anxiety, and distress. Let children know that thinking traps can also be called cognitive distortions or thought holes. For simplicity sake, and to avoid confusion, try to choose one term and stick with it. Mention that there are nine common thinking traps that people frequently get stuck in, and which children will learn about today.

If you are working with a large group, divide them into nine smaller groups and assign each group one of the nine common thinking traps. Give each group a card that has the name of the thinking trap as well as a simple definition and example of that trap. You will need to print and cut out these cards in advance of the lesson.

The Thinking Trap Cards are available in the Download Section of this page.

In their groups, students will have five minutes to define the thinking trap in their own words and give a real-life example of someone who's stuck in the trap. Once each group has had a chance to understand their thinking trap, they will share their definition and example with the other children. This should take about 10 minutes. Try to discuss each trap in the order that they appear on the slides. For each trap, show the corresponding, explanatory slide after the group presents, to make sure that their definitions and examples are accurate.

If you are doing this lesson independently or if you are working with a small group of children, read through and talk about each thinking trap together.

After working through each of the common thinking traps, wrap-up the activity by asking children the following questions:

- Now that you have a better idea of what thinking traps are and the most common traps, do you recognize any of these in your own thinking? If so, which ones?
- Do you have any "go-to" things that you tell yourself in a negative situation? If so, does that phrase align with any of the thinking traps we discussed? Which one?



- Are you conscious or aware of your thinking traps in the moment? Is it easier to assess the accuracy of your thinking in hindsight?
- Think about an experience where you were stuck in a thinking trap. How might this thinking trap have affected the way you felt? The way you behaved? The outcome of the situation? Did the thinking trap get in the way of what you wanted to accomplish or how you wanted to show up?

To conclude, give children the “Thinking Traps” handout, which briefly explains each of the nine common thinking traps and offers a relevant example of the trap.

The Thinking Traps handout is available in the Download Section of this page.

