



Red thoughts and Green thoughts

Once a child is aware of their thoughts (such as through self-talk) they can differentiate between thoughts that are unhelpful and thoughts that are helpful and encouraging. These can be referred to as red thoughts and green thoughts.

Red thoughts are things that you say to yourself in your head that will make you feel unhappy feelings and can stop you doing things. Everyone has them (and it's ok to have them) but sometimes they can become too strong and unhelpful. For example:

- I can't do this.
- I'm going to have a bad day.
- Reading is too hard.
- I'll look silly if I have to do that.
- Nobody likes me.

Green thoughts are things that you say to yourself in your head that are helpful and will make you feel better. They can help you cope and think in a more balanced way. It is important however that they are also realistic. For example:

- I can do it. I'll give it a try.
- I am brave.
- I'll try this game, it might be fun.
- I'll do my best; it doesn't matter if I make a mistake.
- I might not get full marks for everything, but that's ok. I just have to try my best.

You can support children to recognise the difference by asking them to sort statements into red and green thoughts, such as these.

I am brave.	I can try my best.
I'm good at lots of things.	It will be ok. I will try my best.
There are some things about school that I do enjoy.	I can't do this.
I'm no good at this.	No-one will play with me.
I might not get on with everyone at school, but I do have some nice friends to play with.	I might find some things hard but I can always try. There are lots of things I can do well.
I don't want to go to school. It is hard.	I will try to have a good day. I don't like everything about school but I enjoy seeing my friends and maths.
Everyone makes mistakes, it is ok. If I make a mistake someone will help me.	People will laugh at me.

As an ELSA you can also support children to identify their own red and green thoughts about different situations and help them to challenge their red thinking into green thinking.

Red thoughts about.....	Green thoughts about.....
E.g. Spelling tests I won't be able to do any of the spelling and people will laugh at me.	 I can learn the spellings as best as I can. I might not get them all right but I will try my best.
Asking for help	
Going swimming with the school	
Wanting to win	

You can also use visual prompts to support their understanding in moving from red thoughts to green thoughts. Try using red and green hats or red and green glasses.

