

## Behavioural Experiments

Underlying assumptions are sometimes the most important level of thought to identify and test. When we are anxious, many of our hottest thoughts are "If . . . then . . ." assumptions, such as these examples:

"If I talk, then I'll make a fool of myself"

"If my heart beats fast, then it means I am having a heart attack"

"If something bad happens, then I can't cope."

Identifying our underlying assumptions provides a deeper understanding of the roots of our behaviours and our automatic thoughts. Identifying our assumptions allows us the opportunity to evaluate whether they are helpful or unhelpful, and gives us a chance to look at the possibility of constructing new assumptions that may work better in our lives.

Underlying assumptions can be identified and tested. The ideal way to test an underlying assumption is to do a series of behavioural experiments. Behavioural experiments are active tests to see if the "If . . . then . . ." rule predicts accurately what happens. There are many types of behavioural experiments, here are three common ones:

1. Does "then " always follow "if "?
2. Observing others and see if your "If . . . Then . . ." rule applies to them.
3. Trying out a new behaviour to find out what happens. For example doing the opposite and seeing what happens

### 1. Does "then " always follow "if "?

**Assumption Tested:** "If I say something then I will look stupid and people will make fun of me or say something negative

**Experiment:** Talk about my weekend plans with three store clerks

### 2. Observing others and see if your "If . . . Then . . ." rule applies to them.

**Assumption Tested:** "If what I do is not perfect, then I'm a failure. If something is not perfect then it's worthless. If something is not perfect, then it is worthless, and the person doing it is a failure"

**Experiment:** Observe other waitresses at the restaurant making mistakes or errors.

### 3. Trying out a new behaviour to find out what happens. For example doing the opposite and seeing what happens

**Assumption Tested:** "If I worry, then I can anticipate bad things and protect my children. If I don't worry then my children will be more vulnerable. If I don't worry, then I'm not being a good mother"

**Experiment:** Instead of worrying while my daughter is out with her friends, I'm going to enjoy myself at a game night party with other children and neighbours.