AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS/SELF TALK

You are constantly describing the world to yourself, giving each event or experience some label. You make interpretations of yourself, of what you see and hear, you judge events as good or bad, painful or pleasurable, and you predict whether they will bring you danger or relative safety. These labels and judgments are fashioned from the unending dialogue which you have with yourself. This is called "self-talk" by rational emotive therapist Albert Ellis, and "automatic thoughts" by cognitive theorist, Aaron Beck.

Automatic thoughts usually have the following characteristics, they:

1.   Are specific, discrete messages

2.   Often appear in shorthand

3.   Are believable/plausible

4.   Are experienced as spontaneous, "coming from nowhere"

5.   Often include "shoulds", "oughts", or "musts"

6.   Often contain an element of 'awfulising'

7.   Are different for each person

8.   Are often hard to turn off

9.   Are constant and rarely noticed

10.   Are learned as a result of our experiences, e.g. parental messages, school teachers, other figures of importance and society at large.

Examples might be:

1.   "I can't cope with these feelings"

2.   "No one cares about me"

3.   "I must be strong".