



Parent Guide, Part 1

Healthy Thinking for a Lifetime

The Bible Tells Us:

- Be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**. (Romans 12:2)
- Take **every thought captive** to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)
- **Think on things that are true**, noble, right... (Philippians 4:8)

The Three Big Ideas for Healthy Thinking Kids

1. **God cares** about what kinds of thoughts we think, and **God gives us principles to obey** that facilitate healthy thinking.
2. **Harmful Thoughts** → harm your thinking, like poison harms your body
Healthy Thoughts → nourish your thinking, like good food nourishes your body
3. You can fight harmful thoughts by doing the four steps of **“The Battle Song,”** called “Move On In The Truth” on the album. The chorus is:

I gotta **SPOT** it,
I gotta **STOP** it,
I gotta put a **NEW THOUGHT** in its place,
I gotta **MOVE ON** in the **TRUTH**.
I gotta **MOVE ON** in the **TRUTH**.

An Opportunity

- **Healthy thinking tools help us grow into the people God has designed us to be.** These tools are not to make a child feel guilty for the temptation of harmful thoughts, nor to feel condemned if they don't successfully fight off harmful thoughts. Everyone needs assurance of God's love, patience, and power while battling harmful thoughts. Just like an acorn takes a long time to grow into a mighty oak tree, it takes time for us all to grow in effectively using these tools.
- **Remind your child of the value** of healthy thinking, and **look for teachable moments** to lead them in healthy thinking habits, with the **goal of life-long healthy thinking habits**.
- Helping your child **feel safe discussing their thoughts with you** can free them to **share their heart**. Practicing healthy thinking habits together can be **an opportunity for you to help your child apply Biblical truth to deep heart issues**.

Ideas for Parents

- In **teachable moments** you can lovingly walk them through the four steps of the “Battle Song.”
- **Healthy thinking is a community project!** We can encourage and help each other as we all work to grow in healthy thinking every day.
- A **harmful thought** can be written on paper and **physically thrown in the trash.**
- A **“new thought” written down** can be meditated on while “moving on in the truth.” A **journal** of new thoughts for healthy thinking could be helpful.
- A succinct phrase such as **“Help Me Jesus”** can be an effective “new thought” to displace a harmful thought. **Discussing truths that displace a specific harmful thought** your child has is also helpful. (For example, if my child is having harmful thoughts of worry, I can discuss God’s trustworthiness or a verse telling us to trust instead of worry.)
- **Displaying “The Battle Song” where your child can see it** can be a helpful reminder.
- Saying or thinking **“STOP!” can interrupt both harmful *thinking* and harmful *actions*.**
- **Saying “STOP!” and the new healthy thought *out loud*** can be more effective than just thinking in our minds.
- **Saying and doing the steps with someone else**, such as a parent, can be extremely helpful.
- **Music rich in truth** can improve our thinking. The “Healthy Thinking Kids” CD and other truth-filled music can give inspiration, courage, and stronger faith to “move on in the truth.”
- **Planning “move on in the truth” options** ahead of time can keep your child from getting stuck. Examples include: finishing a task, singing with healthy music, playing a game together, reading a good book, or playing outside. Anything that changes your focus to something good can be helpful.
- “Move on in the truth” **options that serve someone take the focus off oneself**; for example, drawing a picture or doing a chore for someone.
- The **“move on in the truth” step aims to bring the new, healthy thought into action**, and to avoid the trap of harmful thoughts and the trap of excessive introspection.
- **Remembering this relationship** motivates the hard work of cultivating healthy thinking:
healthy thoughts → healthy choices → healthy consequences, and
harmful thoughts → harmful choices → harmful consequences
- Children may need help seeing that even if ***immediate consequences of a harmful decision are not obvious, the ultimate consequences are harmful*** (such as cavities due to not brushing teeth, or loss of trust due to telling a lie.) The harmful consequences on relationships and missing God’s best may not be evident to a child, but there may be teachable moments to discuss **the long-term cost of harmful thinking patterns.** “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. **A man reaps what he sows.**” Galatians 6:7
- **Parents are priceless encouragers and models to children for practicing healthy thinking.** Children will find it very difficult to stay motivated without help and encouragement.
- **Every victory is worth celebrating!** This is not an easy process. When your child has a victory, an encouraging word or hug shows that working for what is right is a rewarding and worthwhile process!

Two Key Times to Use the “Battle Song” to Replace Harmful Thoughts

- When unwelcome harmful thoughts are difficult to stop
- When we crave harmful thoughts and struggle to say “no” to the temptation

Practice and Time: An Acorn is Not a Tree in a Day

Doing “The Battle Song” four steps takes longer than singing the song. **Each step should be deliberate and repeated as needed.** We can remind our kids it is worth it!

Is a Bad Thought by Itself a Sin?

No. All kinds of thoughts may enter our mind, but they are not sin unless we go the next step of entertaining such thoughts. Consider the following downward spiral, adapted from a sermon by Dr. Charles Stanley:

- (1) A bad thought **ENTERS** my mind – (it is not a sin at this point)
- (2) I choose to **ENTERTAIN** the thought
- (3) I choose to **EXAMINE** the thought
- (4) I choose to **ENJOY** the thought in my heart
- (5) I choose to have an **EXPERIENCE** of what was previously the thought
- (6) I choose to **EXCUSE** the disobedience
- (7) I am **ENGULFED** by the disobedience and its consequences

As pilgrims in this fallen world, we should not be surprised or alarmed when a bad thought enters our mind. Jesus Himself was tested by bad thoughts from Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4). However, we want to practice being on the alert, because an initial bad thought can quickly turn into a hindrance or sin. We are instructed to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” and to fix our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2). The key is to learn to effectively “move on in the truth” rather than going through the downward spiral that begins with entertaining bad thoughts.

Even if we still “hear” repetitive knocking of a harmful thought, it is still possible to not *entertain* the thought.

Focusing on replacing the harmful thought and “moving on in the truth” is more helpful than analyzing whether the thought was a sin.

Harmful vs. Healthy Thought Category Examples:

- (1) Doing Bad vs. Doing Good Thoughts
- (2) Worry and Fear vs. God Cares for Me Thoughts
- (3) Distracting vs. What is Best Thoughts
- (4) False Information vs. True Information Thoughts

Many “doing bad” and “doing good” thoughts are easy for children to identify as harmful or healthy. However, more parental guidance and discernment may be needed for the last three categories. For example, when does a legitimate concern turn into worry? Furthermore, there are certainly things that children should appropriately fear, such as strangers and strange animals. In addition, the level of appropriate concern or fear may be different for different children. Much prayer as well as communication between parent and child is important as a parent guides a child in developing healthy thinking habits.

Regarding the third category of “distractions,” a child may not be intentionally trying to misbehave or be irresponsible. Children (and adults!) can get distracted even when our hearts are seeking what is best. Therefore, catching ourselves when we get distracted and then re-focusing on “what is best” is a valuable lifelong skill to discuss and practice.

“False vs. true information” may not be easily identified by children on their own, but children can learn to value the pursuit of true information. They can be trained to recognize that just as an outdated road map (false information) can lead us to the wrong place, other kinds of false information can be harmful by leading us to wrong, potentially damaging conclusions.