Centre for Addiction and Mental Heath

High levels of stress are usually fuelled by how we think. For example, a friend of yours (or you) might be having a catastrophic thought like, "I can't cope, it's too much" or " There's nothing I can do". These thoughts can be so strong that they (or you) believe them to be true. Then they contribute to anxiety and depression. Worse still, they might make you isolate from other people, which can feed the negative processes even more.

But not all our thoughts are true – many are beliefs we get stuck in, even though they FEEL like facts.

How do we know if our thoughts are true or just beliefs we've come to believe are true? Here are some ways to help you or someone else figure it out:

1. Start with catching the thoughts. Actually write them down. What are the recycling thoughts your friend or you are having that are causing distress? There may be more than one. (Hint: the thought might sound something like, "What if..." or "I'm worried that...")

2. Once you've identified the thought, challenge it to test how true it is. Ask them (or yourself):
  !   Is this throught really true?
  !   How do you know it's true?
  !   Is it 100% true and always true?
  !   What's the evidence for the thought?
  !   Has the thing you/I am worried about ever actually happened before? What actually happened?
  !   And how did I cope when it happened? What was the end result?

3. If you find it hard to let go of worrying, ask yourself, "What does worrying do for me? Is worrying actually helping me solve a problem or is it keeping me stuck and feeling anxious?" Ask them (or yourself) how helpful it is to keep thinking this way.

4. After working through these approaches, see if you can come up with a more balanced thought. For example:
"I am elderly, and so many older people are getting extremely ill. I could die from this." could be replaced with,
"I am elderly, but I'm also taking all the recommended precautions, I have a good support network, and I'm taking steps to stay healthy. I am actually likely to get through this and be fine"