

Cognitive Therapy Skills for Depression

"The ancestor of every action is a thought."
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

In this module, we explore our **thoughts** and explain how they are closely linked to our emotions. We discuss how to identify, understand, and respond to our thoughts as a way to help us feel better.



We will help you **identify** the thoughts that are troubling to you and understand them as well as possible. We then discuss the basic techniques that we use to begin to respond to and modify these thoughts. Like a detective, we respond to thoughts by gathering facts, or "**evidence**," to see a situation as realistically and in as detailed a way as possible.

Join us as we learn to change our relationship with our thoughts with Cognitive Therapy Skills!

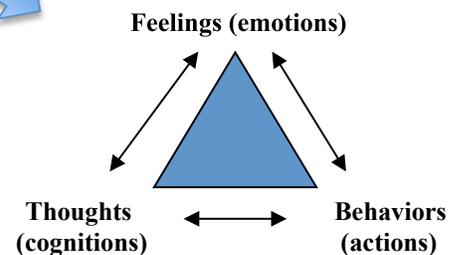


What are Cognitive Therapy Skills?

You may remember from earlier that thoughts, behaviors, and emotions influence one another.

Cognitive is a technical word used to describe anything related to *thoughts*. In this module, we explore how it is that our thoughts can lead to negative emotions, and what we can do about it.

Cognitive Therapy Skills involve responding to and modifying the **content** of thoughts—to help us cope better in our daily lives and feel less depressed.



How do Cognitive Therapy Skills work?

The main goal of cognitive skills is to **gather evidence**. Like a detective, we look to uncover **facts** about ourselves, the world, and our futures.

By examining our thoughts, beliefs, and basic assumptions in detail, we can learn to make informed choices about issues that impact us. For example, we may find that **a thought is not completely true**; this helps us decrease our efforts to fix things and makes us less likely to become depressed. Another option is to take these facts and do something with them—to **problem solve**. Finally, these facts may help us understand that nothing can be done to change a situation; we work to **accept** this and let go of our efforts to control. In order to choose one of these options we use cognitive skills to understand thoughts and situations as well as possible.



Examining the Evidence

Scientists and detectives are good at asking the right questions to better understand a situation. With cognitive skills we learn which questions to ask to best understand ourselves, the world, and our futures. For example:

1. *What is the likelihood that this thought is absolutely true?*
2. *If a negative event were to happen, how bad would it be? Would it be tragic?*
3. *What would I do if something bad happened? How would I handle it?*
4. *Is there any other explanation to account for what has happened?*
5. *Do I know all of the facts about this situation?*



Put on your “happy face?” 😊

Cognitive Therapy Skills are not just about “thinking positively.” While being aware of positives is a part of CBT, we want to gather all evidence, good and bad, to understand best how to cope with a situation.



For example, we know that driving on the highway has some risks associated with it. However, for most of us driving on the highway is a necessary part of everyday life. We are willing to take this risk because if we didn't our lives would be limited. A **positive** aspect of driving on the highway is that it helps us achieve our goals. A **negative** one is that under some circumstances it can be dangerous. When we examine the evidence, we find it's true that there are “two sides to every coin.”



Practice makes... the brain change?

When we modify thoughts, we actually change the brain! Practicing different types of thought patterns over and over actually rewires our brain so that new, more realistic and helpful patterns of thought can become more natural. This does not mean that our brains are permanently changed by thinking something new just once. It takes consistent practice to keep the brain functioning well, just like it takes consistent exercise to keep the body healthy. Cognitive skills can help us keep our brains healthy, if we are willing to stay well-practiced at it.





Depression "Fuel"

Thoughts, just like behaviors, can act as "fuel" for our depression. When negative thoughts and problematic behaviors mix, a snowball effect begins to happen with our mood.

Sam recently lost her job. She would like to get a new job and maybe even change career paths, but she is often bombarded by her own negative thoughts. These thoughts stop her from applying for jobs and investigating things further.

"I'm not very good at anything; if I was, I wouldn't have lost my job."

"I'm terrible at interviews."

"I'm probably not even capable of learning something new."

"No one will want to hire me."

"My resume looks stupid"



Most of us can relate to Sam's dilemma; negative thoughts worsen her mood and make her want to avoid applying for jobs altogether.

When we look at our thoughts realistically and in a detailed way, we "throw water on our depression fire." Responding to and modifying these negative thoughts so they are more realistic can help to keep us from making the depression "snowball" bigger. Most importantly, *they can help to keep us from avoiding things that are important to us.* For example, the longer Sam waits to apply for jobs, the higher chances of financial hardship and bigger gaps in her resume.

When should I use Cognitive Therapy Skills?



Cognitive skills can help us with changing our mood. They work best when...

... we can identify negative thoughts that make us feel worse in certain situations.

...depressive episodes are triggered by negative thoughts about the future and/or negative thoughts about ourselves.

Unifying Our Forces...

Working with thoughts is just one tool in our defense against depression; learning to think differently can be very helpful. However, we can't underestimate the importance of behavior in maintaining depression. For example, if we continue to *avoid* important things in our lives such as taking care of sleep, attending to relationships, self-care, and pleasure, we will still likely be depressed regardless of how we've changed our thinking. Thus, we work to "unify our forces:" combining our cognitive work with behavioral techniques to manage depression.

Take home points:

Cognitive skills are one set of skills used in CBT. Our goal is to examine the evidence and uncover the facts, both positive and negative, about a situation or a thought. By understanding a situation better, we can learn to think realistically about it and often times improve our mood.

Negative Automatic Thoughts

“I might lose my job and my home.”

“One day I am just going to ‘snap.’”

“I am an idiot.”

“If I have a panic attack it could lead to a heart attack!”

“If I look nervous they won’t like me.”

“If am not anxious I may be more at risk for something bad to happen.”

“If that happened I would not be able to tolerate it.”

We all have them. Sometimes they pop into our heads uninvited. Sometimes they stick in our heads for hours. **Negative automatic thoughts** are negative thoughts that come automatically to us when we are feeling depressed, anxious, angry, or frustrated; they can come any time we have a negative emotion.

There are different types of negative automatic thoughts. They usually take the form of repetitive intrusions about ourselves, the world (and other people), and our futures.

Worry is related to fear that something bad might happen in the future. Most troubles with anxiety have some sort of worry attached. For example, the thought in the upper left corner of this page is a worry about what might happen if this person loses his or her job. **Rumination** means to “chew” on a thought over and over, such as repetitively reviewing a past failure.

Another type of negative automatic thought is a negative statement about ourselves, other people, or the world at large. “I am an idiot” is a good example. It is not a worry, but rather a declarative statement; but it sure can make us feel bad! Often people with depression have these types of thoughts. Cognitive skills can work on these thoughts, too. In this manual, though, we’ll be focusing primarily on the *anxiety*-related thoughts and worries.



Why do I have all of these negative thoughts?

You may ask “Why do I think so many negative thoughts when I am depressed or anxious? When I am feeling relaxed I don’t have these thoughts much at all.”

When we are depressed and anxious, the brain wants us to think about potentially dangerous things in our environment, in order to keep us safe. We want our “radar” to be sensitive if there is actual danger out there. When we are depressed and isolative, these thoughts actually are about protection; we’ve learned when we’ve tried something over and over again that it is best not to get our hopes up. Sometimes we beat others to the punch (for example, “I’m just a loser”), so that it would be less painful if someone really thought that. While it could soften the blow a little bit, it often turns into a pattern of thinking that beats us down more and more.



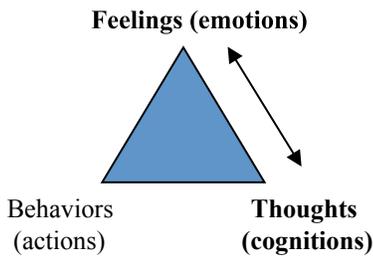
Imagine what would happen if we did not have negative thoughts when bad things happened or we were in danger. We probably wouldn’t try to protect ourselves! If we really are in danger, it is helpful to have negative thoughts because we are more likely to try to stay safe if we think something is dangerous. The trouble is, sometimes we know that things are not dangerous, yet we have these thoughts anyway. Or the thoughts are not helpful to us. That is why we use cognitive skills to help our brains get a more balanced view of ourselves, the world, and our future.

Types of Negative Automatic Thoughts

Depression and anxiety cause people to assume the worst. There are many different types of anxiety producing thoughts, and it is helpful to be aware of some of the kinds of thoughts that people with depression experience.

- 1. Overestimating the likelihood of negative events happening:** One of the most common tendencies when we are anxious or depressed is to predict that dangerous things will happen in the future. We often imagine that something may happen, even when logically we know that it is not likely to happen. For example, Bill may predict that “everyone will think I am stupid if I make one mistake during my presentation.”
- 2. Catastrophizing:** This is a fancy way of saying that we predict things would be “horrible” or “awful” if something bad actually were to happen. We may predict that we would not be able to cope, and we may try to find ways to prevent it from happening to avoid catastrophe.
- 3. Beliefs that emotions are dangerous:** We often have negative thoughts about the emotions themselves. We may predict that we will “go crazy,” “lose control,” or not be able to function when emotions get extreme.
- 4. Belief that one cannot tolerate discomfort, pain, or negative events:** We question our ability to cope with future events: “If I can’t tolerate this, what will happen if something really bad happens?” We tell ourselves “I cannot take this” when we experience discomfort and/or pain.
- 5. Positive beliefs about worry and rumination:** Anxiety and worry often seem to have a protective function. We may say to ourselves “If I don’t worry about this it may actually happen.” Sometimes anxiety helps us get things done that we might otherwise avoid; we rely on it for motivation, even if it is uncomfortable at the same time.
- 6. Negative thoughts about ourselves, the world, and the future:** We make negative assumptions and blanket statements such as “I am a loser,” “Nobody will ever like me,” or “The world is a dangerous place.” These types of statements can make us feel more depressed and anxious.

Thoughts and Emotions



An important step in moving out of depression is learning to recognize and experience what we are feeling and the thoughts or interpretations of events that led us to those feelings. Thoughts and feelings are related, but are very different.

Sometimes it is hard to know the difference between thoughts and emotions. Here's how to tell:

Thoughts: can often be fact-checked; generally require more than one word to articulate.

Examples: "I'm a loser," "I'll never feel better"

Emotions: are often experienced in the mind and the body, and can typically be described in one word. We can't argue with a feeling!

Examples: "sad," "disappointed," "frustrated"

Note: In the English language, we often say "I feel" when we are describing a thought or interpretation. For instance, "I feel unappreciated" is really a thought about how someone else is reacting. A person who says that may actually be feeling sad or angry.



Emotions are helpful?

There is no such thing as a "bad" feeling! We might like certain emotions a lot less than others, but our emotions carry a lot of information that we can use. For example:

- Emotions can be motivating
- Emotions can help us communicate with and influence others
- Emotions alert us of real danger or real problems
- Emotions help us understand how we are interpreting events



Emotions	Types of Thoughts that Lead to this Emotion	Example
Sadness	Thoughts of a loss, rejection, or failure	"They don't like me." "I'll never be good enough."
Guilt; Shame	Thoughts that you have failed to live up to certain standards: yours, someone else's, or your culture's. Guilt results from self-condemnation, and shame fears the reaction of others.	"I shouldn't have done that." "I should have studied more." "I'm not what my family wants."
Anger; Irritation; Annoyance	You believe that someone is treating you unfairly or trying to take advantage of you. You make assumptions about the intentions of others.	"The shouldn't do that!" "Nobody has any manners."
Frustration	Thoughts that life is not meeting your expectations and should be different.	"Why does traffic always slow down when I'm in a hurry?" "He should have been on time." "I shouldn't have done that."
Anxiety; Worry; Fear; Panic	Thoughts that you are in danger because something bad is going to happen.	"What if my mind goes blank when I give this presentation?" "They're not going to like me." "What if I'm sick?"
Inferiority; Inadequacy	Thinking about how you compare to someone else	"There's nothing special about me." "All the guys like her and nobody likes me."
Hopelessness; Discouragement	Thoughts that your problems are indefinite and things will never be better	"I'll never find a good job." "I'll be alone forever."

Identifying Negative Automatic Thoughts

The first step to begin “restructuring” or responding to negative thoughts is to identify the thoughts that give us trouble. It’s as if we are putting a magnifying glass to our minds to learn more about how we think. Use the following tips to identify the thoughts you’ll start working on using cognitive skills. Once you have identified a thought, write these thoughts down using the **Daily Thought Record Worksheet**.



How to Identify Negative Automatic Thoughts

1. In the course of daily life, write down thoughts that come up when you are feeling depressed or anxious.
2. Sit quietly and try to imagine going into a stressful situation: what thoughts come up?
3. Recall an event from the past that was difficult. What thoughts were going through your mind?
4. Role play an difficult event with a friend, family member, or therapist. Write down thoughts that come up during this exercise.

When Identifying Thoughts...

...phrase the thoughts in **the form of a statement**, and avoid “what if’s” and questions. For example, if the thought is “What if I lose my job?” it would be better to phrase it “I will lose my job.”

...**be specific**. It is better to break more general thoughts up into more manageable pieces. If the thought is “I feel like something bad is going to happen,” make a list of the specific things that you worry might happen. Write down the first negative automatic thoughts that come into your head.

...**notice the thoughts that seem to come up often** or are more impairing than others. You may want to begin with these when you start working on the thoughts.

The Downward Arrow Technique

The downward arrow technique is a way to “drill down” to try to identify and better understand some of our worst fears and silent, underlying assumptions or beliefs.

How: “Buy into” the negative thought to see where it leads you!

1. Identify the negative thought that is upsetting you.

2. Write down the thought and draw an arrow underneath. The arrow represents asking yourself the question: “If this thought were true, why would it be upsetting to me? What would it mean to me?”



3. Write the second negative thought that answers that question.

4. Repeat several times.

5. After several thoughts have been generated (as many as you can), review what you’ve written and ask yourself the following questions:

What do these negative thoughts tell me about my value system?

What are my basic assumptions about the basis of my worth, lovability, adequacy, or helplessness?

6. Once the silent assumption (core belief) is identified, use a tool to help understand the helpfulness and reality of this belief. We’ll go into more detail on these later.

Cost benefit analysis: is it to my advantage to believe this?

Thought Record: is this belief grounded in reality? What is the evidence?

Life Goals Analysis: how does this belief affect the parts of my life that are most important to me?

On the next page we’ll show you an example of the Downward Arrow Technique in action!



“Downward Arrow Technique” Example

Automatic Thought:

“If I don’t study harder, I’m going to blow this exam.”



If this were true, what would it mean to me? Why would it be upsetting?

“If I blow this exam, I may fail the course.”



And if I failed, why would that be upsetting to me? So what?

“That would mean I was a failure and people would think less of me.”



And if it were true that I was a “failure” and if people really did think less of me, what then? Why would that be upsetting?

“Then I’d feel terrible, because I need people’s approval to feel happy and to be worthwhile.”

"Downward Arrow Technique" Worksheet

Automatic Thought:



If this were true, what would it mean to me? Why would it be upsetting?



And if this were true, why would that be upsetting to me? So what? What would that say about me/ other people/the world?



And if that were true, what then? Why would that be upsetting?

Cognitive Distortions

Have you ever seen one of those “fun-house” mirrors? While we know how we really look, what we see in the mirror looks different than what is real.

When we are depressed, the facts of a situation can become distorted, too. **Cognitive distortions** are patterns of thinking that are heavily influenced by our emotions. As you will see when you review the list of cognitive distortions on the next page, these distortions tend to follow certain patterns, and many of them overlap with others. Here are some “fun facts” about cognitive distortions:



1. Cognitive distortions tend to be extreme: there is often a “black-and-white” or “all-or-nothing” quality to these thoughts.
2. They tend to emphasize negatives at the expense of positives. As we mentioned earlier, we are programmed to think of negatives first when we feel strong emotions, because our bodies are trying to protect us.
3. They tend to be general instead of specific.

Why is it important to understand cognitive distortions?



Understanding cognitive distortions is an important part of understanding our thoughts and preparing to work on them using cognitive therapy skills. By understanding some **common patterns of thinking**, it is easier for us to notice our own patterns during the course of our daily lives. The more we notice these patterns, the more likely we are to be able to modify these thoughts and start feeling better.

What do I do when my negative automatic thoughts do not seem to be distorted?



Sometimes depressive thoughts are not completely distorted. In fact, there is some truth to almost all of our thoughts. The worry “I am going to lose my job” may have some truth: it is always possible that one could lose their job. If one has determined that it is, in fact, likely that they will lose their job, we would say that this thought is *not* distorted.

But depressive thoughts are often black-and-white thoughts about who we are (“I am an idiot”), how the world is (“No one likes me” or “All people are mean”, or our futures (“Nothing is ever going to change”). While these thoughts may have some truth in them, the black-and-white nature of them pushes it to the extreme; it seems as if there is absolutely nothing positive in the world at all. At least it is worth looking at a situation to see if the situation has any “gray zone” at all.

So, when we are trying to understand our thought patterns, it is helpful to try to see the **possible** distortion for each thought, even if you are convinced that the thought is not distorted.

So here they are!
Read through the list of cognitive distortions on the next page, and circle the numbers of those that you suspect may apply to you.



Examples of Cognitive Distortions



1. **Black-and-White Thinking**: We see things, events, and people as perfect or terrible, all good or all bad. We say “always” or “never” often, not seeing the “gray zone” that is almost always there.
2. **Catastrophizing**: We react to a disappointment or failure as though it means the end of the world.
3. **Jumping to Conclusions**: We assume the worst without checking the evidence. We decide that someone dislikes us, but we don't check it out; or we predict that terrible things will happen even when there is no evidence for this.
4. **Ignoring the Positives**: We don't pay attention to positive experiences, or we reject them or say they somehow “don't count.”
5. **“My Fault!”**: We take blame or responsibility for things outside of our control, or are not our job.
6. **Should's**: We criticize ourselves or other people with ideas about what absolutely “should” be done without considering where we get this idea. We ignore the reasons we might have done what we did, or think we could have had knowledge we couldn't have actually had. “Should's” sometimes leave us feeling inadequate despite our attempts to be self-motivating.
7. **Magnifying and minimizing**: We define ourselves by our shortcomings and minimize our strengths.
8. **Labels**: Instead of focusing on peoples' behaviors, we make blanket statements: “I am such an idiot” or “He's just a jerk.”
9. **Perfectionism**: We believe that all mistakes are bad and to be avoided. Because of this, we don't take the necessary risks to be successful. We may also try to control all circumstances and make them fit what we think is right.
10. **Reasoning from our emotions**: We believe that because we feel a certain way, that indicates the truth about a situation, and we may act accordingly even if it hurts us in the long run.

Thought Record "Plus"

Use the following worksheet to record thoughts and the situations, emotions, and potential distortions related to them.

<u>Situation</u> (what were you doing? What was happening? What were you thinking about?)	<u>Emotions</u> (rate 1-10 by intensity, 1 being very low, 10 being the most intense)	<u>Thoughts</u> (What went through your mind? What were you thinking about the situation?)	<u>Distortions</u> (Was my thought distorted? Which distortion?)
Got test back, got a bad grade	Anxious (9) Sad (6) Angry (10)	I should have studied more I am a bad student I'll never get a good job	"should" statements Labeling Fortune telling

Examining the Evidence

“Restructuring” negative automatic thoughts



Imagine you are a scientist studying the causes of pollution in a local river. How would you approach this? What types of questions would you ask to uncover the truth? You might look at local industry, plant populations, or invasive species as potential causes. You might look closely at samples of the water to determine what types of pollutants are in the water. You’d want to get as much information as you could to be sure you were right about what you find.

Scientists know that there are many possible explanations for an event or phenomenon. They spend countless hours trying to prove or disprove their hypotheses about what is happening and why it happens. To do this, they set up experiments; ultimately the goal is to find the best possible explanation for something. They might ask questions like: “What are all the possible explanations for this event? Are there any other possibilities?”

Now imagine this scenario: you are walking down the street or hallway and you see someone you know fairly well. You look at them to say hello and they look away and say nothing in return. What types of interpretations might you have about this event? Perhaps you might think “They must not like me-- if they did they would have said hello to me,” or “They must be mad at me.”

What if we replaced these knee-jerk reactions with a more scientific approach? We could look for other explanations, just like the scientist. What are some other explanations to why this person did not look at you and say hello? List some here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What you just did is a simple example of **examining the evidence**, the most important element of **cognitive restructuring**, a common cognitive therapy skill. “Restructuring” a thought means gathering evidence to see a situation more completely and realistically, which can help us feel better.

On the next page are some questions you can ask to better understand the truth behind your thoughts.



Examining the Evidence

Questions to Develop Alternative Responses

Identify some of your negative automatic thoughts; then ask some of these questions to better understand them.



- What is the evidence that the automatic thought is true? Not true?
- Are there any other possible explanations? Any other way of looking at the situation?
- Are my judgments based on how I felt rather than what I did or what really happened?
- Am I forgetting any relevant facts or focusing too much on facts that are irrelevant?
- Is thinking this way helpful to me?
- What is the effect of believing this thought? What might be the effect of changing my thought?

- Am I being judgmental or overly critical?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking this way?
- What's the worst that could happen? Could I live through it? How? What would I do?
- Do I know for sure that the bad consequence will happen?
- What is the best that could happen?
- What is the most likely/realistic outcome? Am I confusing a low probability event with one of high probability?



- If _____(friend's name) was in the situation and had this thought, what would I tell him/her?
- How would someone else think about the situation?
- Am I setting for myself an unrealistic or unobtainable standard?
- Is this thought distorted? Am I over-generalizing? Am I thinking in all/nothing terms?
- Am I overestimating how much control and responsibility I have in this situation?
- How will this situation look or seem months from now? Years from now?
- Is what happened really so important that my entire future resides with its outcome?



- Am I choosing to stay miserable instead of letting go?
- Is there something I can do about this situation? Can I change it? Can I accept it?
- How much money would I bet that this feared event will happen?
- How many time have I predicted this would happen? How many times have I been correct?
- Where would this event fall on the catastrophe scale?
- What's the effect of my believing the automatic thought? What could be the effect of changing my thinking?
- Is there anything I can do about this?



Examining the Evidence: Written Methods

Once we know which questions about our thoughts to ask, we must start to **record our evidence** to build a strong, realistic argument. When we are beginning to use cognitive restructuring, it is helpful to **write down** our thoughts, distortions, and evidence until we get the hang of it. Here is one method we use to do this is.

You will notice in the example below that this approach uses the skills of identifying thoughts and thought distortions that we practiced on previous pages. We add the “rational response” in the third column. The evidence we gather there is what we will use to remind ourselves of the truth about the situation when we are feeling anxious.



Get out that pen and paper!

Research shows that people who write things down as part of CBT practice do better than those that try to do it all in their heads. While it does involve more work (and may seem like going back to school), we hope you will give it a try at first, until the skills become more natural.

Thought	Possible Distortion	Rational Response
↓ Take thoughts identified and write them here.	↓ Use what you learned from the section on “Cognitive Distortions” to identify any of those.	↓ Gather evidence for and against your negative automatic thoughts using the questions on the previous pages.
<i>She didn't say much of a hello. She must hate me.</i>	<i>Mind reading</i>	<i>It is possible he was thinking about other things and does not hate me. In fact he did ask me to lunch last week... etc.</i>
<i>I have no friends. No one likes me.</i>	<i>All or nothing thinking</i>	<i>Not true! Jim is my friend. John and Joe talk to me a lot, they seem to like me. I could join the company team and make more friends, etc.</i>
<i>I'll never find a wife. I'll always be alone.</i>	<i>Fortune telling All-or-nothing thinking</i>	<i>Wait! I am not alone now; I have some friends. I would like more dates; maybe I could join a dating service, etc.</i>
<i>I better not ask her out because she will say no.</i>	<i>Mind reading</i>	<i>True, she may say no but she may say yes. I will miss out for sure if I do not try, etc.</i>
<i>If she says no it will be awful!!</i>	<i>Magnification</i>	<i>Sure, it would hurt but probably not forever. If I practice getting rejected it may help me worry less about it, etc.</i>



Important: Gather lots of evidence!



You may have noticed the “etc.” after each rational response in the examples above. What we are trying to communicate is the importance of gathering as *much detailed evidence as possible*. For each negative automatic thought, we may have as many as 7 to 10 facts listed. We use multiple lines of evidence to do this. Each “**line of evidence**” aims to help us illuminate a certain aspect of a situation. For example, one common line of evidence is one’s own personal experience, examined in detail. Another might be the perspective of friends and family.

Examining Thoughts Worksheet

Take one thought identified using the Daily Thought Record Worksheet and write it here.

Use what you learned about "Cognitive Distortions" to identify any possible patterns in your thinking.

Gather evidence about your negative automatic thoughts and write it here.

↓ Thought	↓ Possible Distortion(s)	↓ Rational Responses
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9.

Thought	Possible Distortion(s)	Rational Responses
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9.

Tips:

- Remember to phrase each thought in the form of a statement.
- You should have between 7 and 10 facts in the "rational response" column for each thought.
- Copy this page to use for other thoughts (some extra pages are included at the end of the manual).
- Carry it with you and bring it out each time you have the thought, to remind yourself of the facts.

Examining the Evidence:

A More Detailed Method

These two pages describe an even more detailed version of the Cognitive Restructuring methods on the last two pages. In this case, we include a detailed account of situations, feelings, thoughts, and evidence. Use the following directions to practice filling out the worksheet on the next page. 

1. Identify the situation or trigger. Briefly describe the situation that led to your unpleasant feelings. What were you doing? What were you thinking about?

For example, "a work presentation".

2. Feelings: What do you feel? How intensely? Use a 1-10 scale, if 10 is the most intense you've ever felt this emotion, and 1 the least.

For example, "Anxiety (8), guilt (5), doubt (4), fear (7)."

3. Unhelpful thoughts/images: Identify the negative thinking behind your feelings. What went through your mind?

For example, "My presentation is going to go horrible and my boss is going to think that I'm bad at my job. I'm a failure and will get fired."

4. Look at the facts that support the thought or that led you to your initial conclusion.

For example, "My boss has told me in the past that she wants me to improve oh my presentation skills." and "I spent Saturday with friends instead of preparing."

5. Look at facts that don't support the thought or provide evidence against your unhelpful thought.

For example, "I have worked on my presentation skills since my poor review and I have improved." and "I'm not a failure and I'm doing my best." and "Everyone has bad days at work."

6. Develop an alternative thought. Now that you've considered the facts, write down a more balanced way of thinking that takes into account the whole picture. Are there any actions you can take to improve the situation now or in the future?

For example, "While I have struggled with presentations before, I've practiced and prepared for this presentation and have no proof that this will not go well."

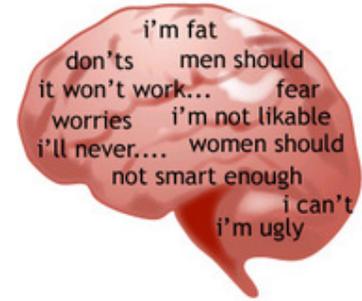
7. Re-rate how you feel now.

"anxious (3)" "calm (5)" "reassured (6)"

Situation (observable facts)					
Emotions (what was I feeling? How intensely?) 1-10					
Automatic Negative Thoughts					
Evidence for Thoughts					
Evidence Against Thoughts					
Balanced Thought (what considers the evidence?)					
Re-Rate Emotion					

Core Beliefs

A schema, or core belief, is a general way of viewing ourselves, other people, the world in general, or the future. These beliefs are often silent assumptions that dictate our thought patterns and decisions. Some schemas are healthy and helpful; others get in the way. These beliefs usually develop in the context of our family dynamics, culture, religion, and life experiences, both good and bad.



Instructions: Use this checklist to identify possible underlying beliefs you might have.

This list is not exhaustive! You might have variations of some of the beliefs here, or your beliefs might be completely different. Use this list to guide you as you think about your own beliefs.

Healthy Beliefs

- If you work hard enough you can do anything
- I'm doing the best I can
- People are worth caring about
- I can ask for what I want
- I have worth no matter what
- I can figure things out
- Mistakes are how we learn and grow
- Everybody makes mistakes
- I'm a good person/parent/ child/ friend/partner/etc.
- The world is a beautiful place
- Everyone deserves to be happy
- I am likable
- I am in charge of my own happiness
- I have the right to say no
- I am not responsible for the behavior of other adults
- Everyone is unique

Unhealthy Beliefs

- People can't be trusted
- I have to be perfect to be accepted
- I'm only worthwhile if I can contribute financially
- My worth is conditional
- I'm unlovable
- I'm damaged/broken
- I am alone
- The world is a bad place
- Do something right or not at all.
- I don't matter
- I should always try to please others.
- I'm a failure
- Real men don't show emotion.
- People should be able to take care of themselves.
- I'm worthless
- Other's opinions of me define me

Core beliefs are different than “negative automatic thoughts.” Core beliefs (also called “core schemas”) are general rules about ourselves or the world that can influence how we interpret events.

For example, if I have the core belief “All people are untrustworthy,” I may be more likely to notice the particulars of a situation that reflects this. If a person were to say “I’m going to be late,” our minds may interpret this as a statement about whether or not they can be trusted at large.

Negative core beliefs have different types. One type is a “core belief” about ourselves, others, or the world. Early in life, we develop the sense of who we are and how we fit in with others. Research has shown that these usually fit into three general themes: “helplessness,” “unlovability,” and “worthlessness.”

There are also rules, attitudes, and assumptions about “how things work” in the world. Researchers that study core beliefs call these “intermediate beliefs.”

“That’s just the way it is...”

One thing that may be hard to accept at first is that core beliefs are “thoughts” or “ideas,” but not “truth.” We may take for granted these thoughts or assumptions about ourselves or the world because they have been there for so long. We may not even remember how we learned them. When we do “core belief” work in CBT, we step back and question some of these beliefs. Why? Because 1) They may be assumptions that made sense a one time but no longer apply or 2) They may not be working for us!

Examples of both are illustrated below.

Core beliefs

(global ideas about oneself, others, or the world)

Helplessness:

- “I am incompetent.”
- “I am ineffective.”
- “I can’t do anything right.”
- “I am needy.”
- “I am trapped.”

Unlovability:

- “I am unlikeable.”
- “I am not good enough (to be loved by others).”
- “I am bound to be alone.”

Worthlessness:

- “I am unacceptable.”
- “I am bad.”
- “I am a waste of space.”
- “I am worthless.”
- I don’t deserve to live.”

Intermediate beliefs

(rules, attitudes, or assumptions)

- “It’s terrible to be incompetent.”
- “The most important thing in life is to work hard.”
- “Asking for help is a sign of weakness.”
- “Anything less than 100% right simply isn’t acceptable.”
- “It is important to please people all you can.”

Identifying Core Beliefs

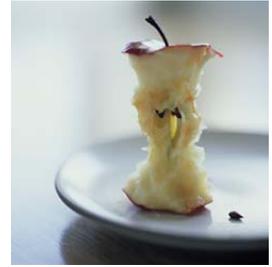


Use the following methods to uncover your own core beliefs.

1. Ask yourself: "Do I have any creeds or slogans that guide my life?"
2. If you were to have someone else describe generally the type of person you are, what would they say? Describe your sense of worth, competence, and likeability.
3. What rules are there about how people should live their lives? Are there any rules or assumptions about how the world works or how people treat each other?
4. Review some of the worksheets from earlier in this chapter in which you wrote down some of your negative automatic thoughts. Are there any beliefs or assumptions about yourself, the world, or your future behind these thoughts?
5. Think about how you would be if you were your "ideal self." How does this compare with how you perceive yourself now? What are the beliefs about yourself as a person?

Challenging Core Beliefs

Core beliefs are the factories that produce our automatic negative thoughts. They have taken a lifetime to develop and, for this reason, they can be difficult to change.



Some strategies to try to challenge these beliefs include:

- Cost/Benefit analysis:** how helpful is my belief
- Life Goals Analysis:** check out how this belief is impacting the things that are most important to me
- Values and Priorities:** thinking about what I really care about and how I want to be remembered by the people I love
- Gathering evidence** that supports or disconfirms the belief

DEVELOPING A NEW BELIEF:



If we find out that our belief is not accurate, is not helping us, or doesn't represent our values, we can develop a new belief that gives us the benefits of our old belief without the painful consequences. Often our new beliefs are more refined and less "black-or-white." When we notice our old belief showing up, we can remind ourselves of our new, healthy belief.

For instance, if my old belief is "I have to be successful to be worthwhile," perhaps my new belief might be "I value hard work and self-improvement, but my professional achievement does not define me as a person."

Core Beliefs: Costs and Benefits

One way to understand our core beliefs is to look neutrally at how that belief helps us or hurts us in our daily lives. Identify one of your core beliefs and practice the exercise below. When creating the “more helpful belief,” think about ways that you can keep some of the benefits of the belief and soften it to prevent some of its disadvantages.

My Core Belief:

Advantages of
maintaining this belief

Disadvantages of
maintaining this belief

My Modified, More Helpful Belief:

Core Belief Record:

Recording Evidence That Contradicts My Old Belief

My old belief: _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

Core Belief Record:

Recording Evidence That Confirms or Suggests My New Belief

My new belief: _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

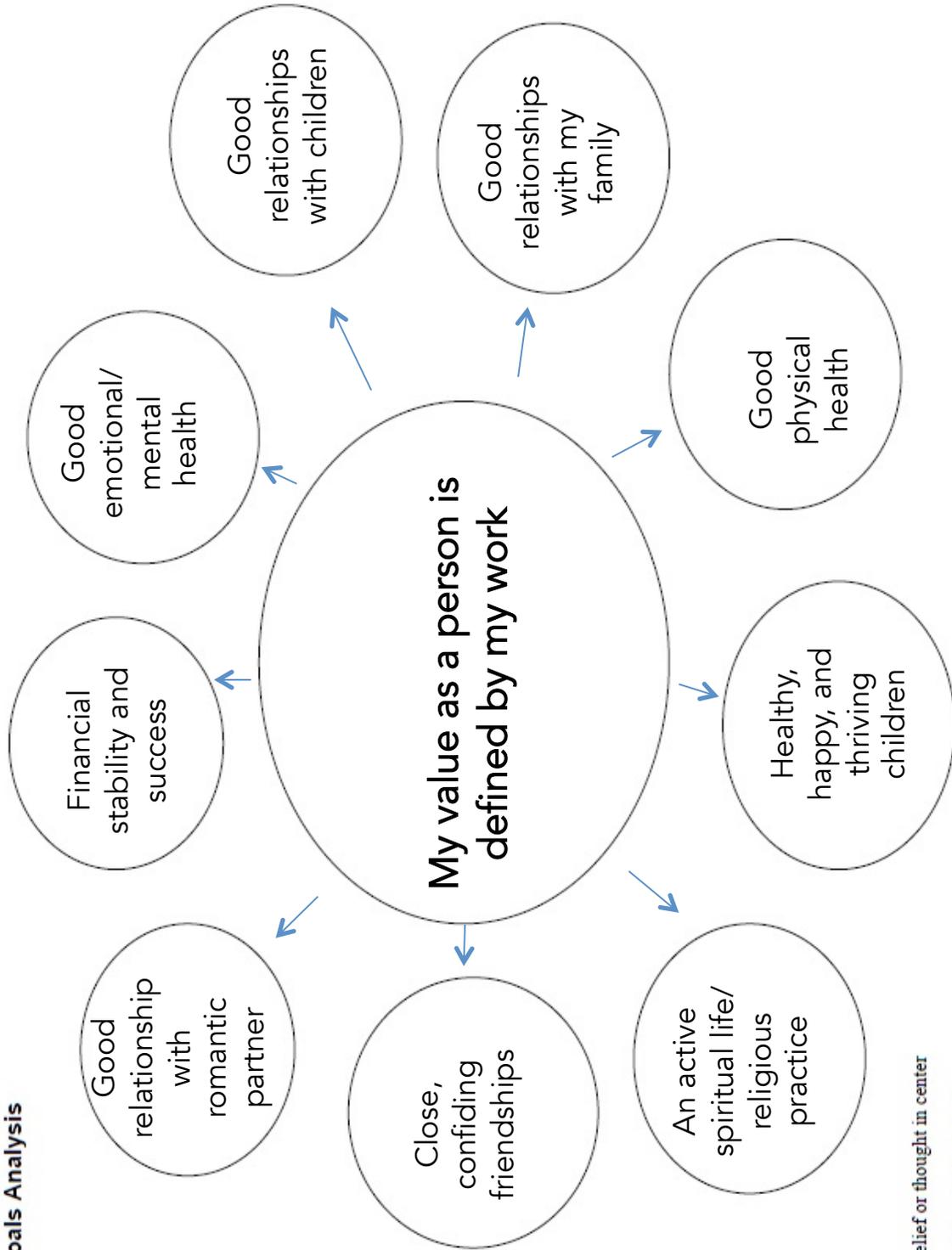
Life Goals Analysis

The Life Goals Analysis is a technique used to evaluate whether your core belief helps or interferes with your ability to reach your life aims. On the next two pages are a Life Goals Analysis example and blank form that you can use to understand your own core beliefs.

How to use the Life Goals Analysis:

1. Identify core beliefs using methods from previous pages.
2. Write down the core belief you want to think about or challenge
3. Identify your life goals and write them in the empty circles
4. Evaluate whether your core belief helps you reach each goal or whether it interferes, then write down "helping" and/or "interfering" along an arrow pointing to each goal. It is possible for your core belief to be both helpful and interfering! However, it might be more one than the other.
5. Review and evaluate overall whether your core belief does more good than harm or more harm than good.
6. If it causes you more harm than good, develop a modified core belief that might help you to better reach your life goals. We can develop this core belief by thinking about a rule that allows us to keep the benefits of our belief, but limits the negative consequences.
7. Work to substitute your old, unhelpful core belief with the new, more helpful core belief when it comes up in your daily life.
8. Write down your new core belief and look for evidence that this is a better, more appropriate belief in your day to day life, and keep this list with you as a reminder.

Life Goals Analysis



-Put core belief or thought in center

-Put life goals in orbiting circles

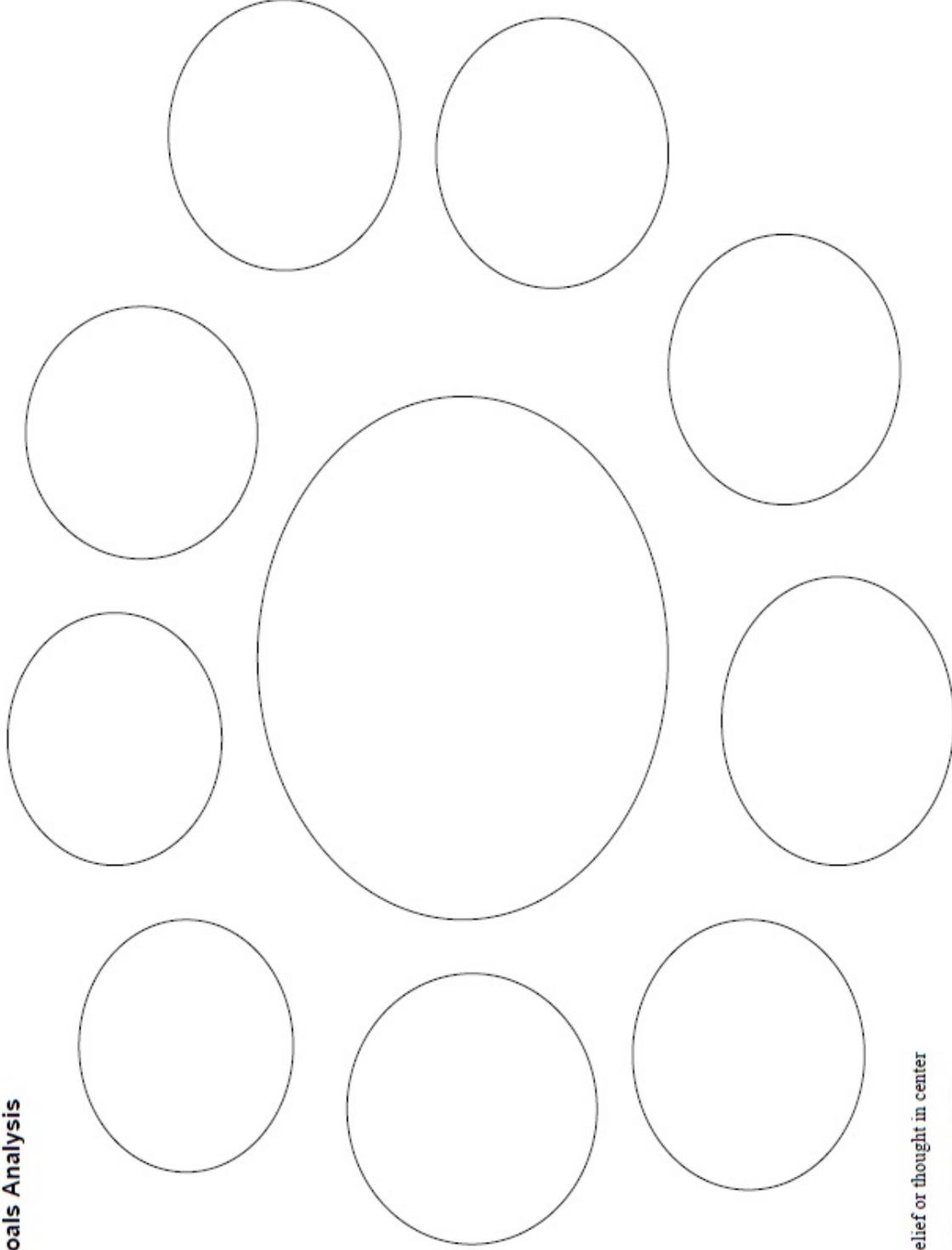
-Code each life goal 1-10 according to importance.

-Notate whether rigid adherence to the core belief or thought assists (A) or interferes (I) with each life goal and by how much (little, moderate, lot)

New modified belief:

My work is important, but other things give my life value too. Making time for important relationships is essential

Life Goals Analysis



- Put core belief or thought in center
- Put life goals in orbiting circles
- Code each life goal 1-10 according to importance.
- Notate whether rigid adherence to the core belief or thought assists (A) or interferes (I) with each life goal and by how much (little, moderate, lot)

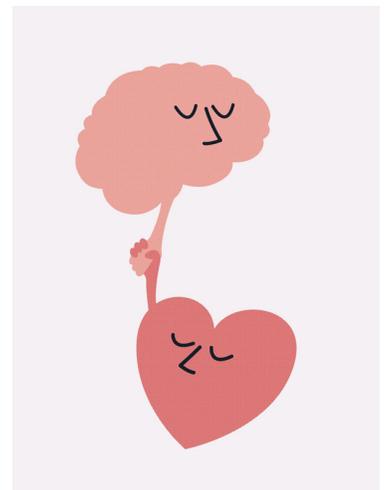
New modified belief:

Self Compassion

Another way to challenge negative thinking is to take a stance of self-compassion.

- **Kindness:** How would you talk to a friend who was talking about themselves that way? Gently, non-judgmentally, patiently.
- **Being present:** Be a friend and companion to yourself. Accompany yourself in your distress. Depression is not an easy thing to go through, and being self-critical only makes things worse.
- **Common humanity:** Recognize and acknowledge that everyone struggles sometimes, even though our struggles may be different. No one is perfect. Embrace your fallibility.

Notes:



Common Thoughts about Depression and its Treatment

The following are common thoughts that many people have about their depression. Some of these thoughts make it hard to move forward to address the problem assertively. Check any of the thoughts below that you may have from time-to-time. If there are others you experience that are not listed below, write them in the provided box below. Part of CBT is looking at these thoughts, so be sure to bring them up to your therapist or group leader as you continue to work on cognitive skills.

Thoughts about depression being outside of one's control

- "My depression just happens, and I have no control over it."
- "I am completely frozen by my depression and can't do anything about it."
- "My depression is different than everyone else's."
- "I can't control my depression."

Pessimistic predictions about treatment

- "This depression will never go away."
- "I haven't gotten better yet, so it won't happen."

Unrealistic expectations about the speed of improvement

- "I want the depression to go away right now. I want a cure."
- "I want this to happen right now."
- "I don't have time to spend on this."

Deficiencies in knowledge

- "I don't understand."
- "I don't even know why it happens."
- "I don't understand how this could be helpful for me."

Emotions are harmful

- "If I start therapy, I'll just end up feeling bad."
- "If I have emotions during treatment I won't be able to handle it."
- "If I open this can of worms, it will never close."
- "It will just be too overwhelming."
- "If I don't control my thoughts and emotions they will take over and never end."
- "If I allow myself to think about my problems it will get out of control."

Positive beliefs about depression

- "At least when I am in bed/isolated/not feeling anything I am safe and not feeling so bad."



Other thoughts about depression or treatment I have, not listed above:

" _____ "

" _____ "

" _____ "

" _____ "

" _____ "

Troubleshooting Cognitive Restructuring



If you still feel just as upset after you have worked through some of your thoughts with cognitive restructuring, ask yourself these questions...

1. Have I correctly identified the upsetting event?

Be as specific as possible! Review the last few days to see if you can identify an event that changed your emotions even slightly.

2. Do I want to change my negative feelings about this situation?

What are the pros and cons of trying to change my feelings? Am I choosing to stay miserable?

3. Have I accurately identified my negative thoughts?

Remember not to put your feelings words or descriptions of the event in the thought column. Automatic negative thoughts are *interpretations* of the facts of a situation, not the situation itself.

4. Are my balanced thoughts convincing and valid statements that consider the whole picture?

We can't lie to ourselves! Rationalizing doesn't make us feel better. Balanced thoughts must be realistic and believable.

5. What are my options in this situation? If I can't change my thoughts, is there something I can do to try to change the situation or solve the problem?

Notes

Notes