

IDENTIFYING THOUGHTS

Instructions

The cognitive model suggests that the interpretation of a situation (rather than the situation itself), expressed in automatic thoughts or images, influences one's emotion, behavior and physiological response. It's important to help clients respond to their unhelpful or inaccurate thoughts. But first, they must learn to identify their thoughts. The following worksheet can help clients ask the most important question to identify their thoughts: What was just going through my mind? This worksheet is helpful for clients who are either just beginning to learn to identify their automatic thoughts or who have trouble remembering what they were thinking after the fact.

IDENTIFYING THOUGHTS WORKSHEET

PART 1:

REMEMBER: JUST BECAUSE I THINK SOMETHING, DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN IT'S TRUE. WHEN I CHANGE MY UNHELPFUL OR INACCURATE THOUGHTS, I'LL LIKELY FEEL BETTER.

Instructions: When my mood gets worse or I'm engaging in unhelpful behavior, ask myself: ***"What was just going through my mind?"*** Write down my thoughts below.

PART 2:

REMEMBER: IT'S IMPORTANT TO CATCH MYSELF THINKING IN A HELPFUL WAY.

Instructions: When I'm engaging in helpful behavior, ask myself, ***"What was I thinking that allowed me to do this?"*** Write down my thoughts below.

QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

Instructions

Sometimes clients just don't know how to answer the question "What was just going through my mind?" If clients get stuck on this question, the following worksheet has additional strategies clients can use, including:

- Supplying thoughts that are probably the opposite of what they're thinking
- Asking for the meaning of the situation
- Determining if they are predicting something that may happen in the future, or remembering something that happened in the past

QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS WORKSHEET

REMEMBER: JUST BECAUSE I THINK SOMETHING, DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN IT'S TRUE. WHEN I CHANGE MY UNHELPFUL OR INACCURATE THOUGHTS, I'LL LIKELY FEEL BETTER.

1. WHAT'S GOING THROUGH MY MIND? OR "WHAT AM I THINKING?"

2. WHAT AM I DEFINITELY NOT THINKING? (IDENTIFYING AN OPPOSITE THOUGHT CAN HELP PROMPT YOU TO IDENTIFY THE ACTUAL THOUGHT.)

3. WHAT DOES THE SITUATION MEAN TO ME?

4. AM I MAKING A PREDICTION? OR REMEMBERING SOMETHING?

THOUGHT RECORDS

Instructions

Thought Records provide a structured format for clients to monitor their thoughts and emotions, evaluate their thinking and respond in an adaptive way. They should be introduced after clients firmly grasp that their thinking in specific situations affects their mood and behavior and that at times their thinking is distorted. Otherwise it doesn't make sense to clients to use such a form. Also, the worksheet is inappropriate for clients who would find it too confusing or who have an aversion to worksheets.

You should introduce just the first four columns initially and make sure clients understand the differences among situations, automatic thoughts, and emotions and can successfully record them in session. Then, you can collaboratively set an assignment to complete these columns at home when clients notice their mood changing. Advise clients to identify the worst part of an experience. Was it before, during or after a given situation? Then they should note their thoughts during that time.

When clients demonstrate good ability with the first part of the Thought Record (TR), explain the final two columns. Ensure that clients understand how to use the questions at the bottom of the TR to develop an alternative response and can remeasure the intensity of their belief in the automatic thought and of their emotion in session before they try to do so at home.

You should alert clients that TRs may appear deceptively simple but may be more difficult than they appear in session. Any problems, however, can be solved at the subsequent session.

THOUGHT RECORD SIDE ONE: WORKSHEET

Remember, thoughts may be 100% true, 0% true or somewhere in the middle.

JUST BECAUSE YOU THINK SOMETHING, DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN IT'S TRUE.

Spend just 5-10 minutes to complete the Thought Record. Note that not all questions will apply to every automatic thought. Here's what to do:

1. When you notice your mood getting worse, or you find yourself engaging in unhelpful behavior, ask yourself, **"What's going through my mind right now?"** and as soon as possible, jot down the thought or mental image in the Automatic Thought(s) column.
2. The situation may be external (something that just happened or something you just did) or internal (an intense emotion, a painful sensation, an image, daydream, flashback or stream of thoughts—e.g., thinking about your future)
3. Then fill in the rest of the columns. You can try to identify cognitive distortions from the list below. More than one distortion may apply. Make sure to use the questions at the bottom of the worksheet to compose the adaptive response.
4. Spelling, handwriting and grammar don't count.
5. It was worth doing this worksheet if your mood improves by 10% or more.

Cognitive Distortions

| | |
|---|---|
| All-or-nothing thinking | Example: "If I'm not a total success, I'm a failure." |
| Catastrophizing (fortune telling) | Example: "I'll be so upset, I won't be able to function at all." |
| Disqualifying or discounting the positive | Example: "I did that project well, but that doesn't mean I'm competent; I just got lucky." |
| Emotional reasoning | Example: "I know I do a lot of things okay at work, but I still feel like I'm a failure." |
| Labeling | Examples: "I'm a loser." "He's no good." |
| Magnification/minimization | Example: "Getting a mediocre evaluation proves how inadequate I am. Getting high marks doesn't mean I'm smart." |
| Mental filter (selective abstraction) | Example: "Because I got one low rating on my evaluation [which also contained several high ratings], it means I'm doing a lousy job." |
| Mind reading | Example: "He's thinking that I don't know the first thing about this project." |
| Overgeneralization | Example: "Because I felt uncomfortable at the get-together, I don't have what it takes to make friends." |
| Personalization | Example: "The repairman was curt to me because I did something wrong." |
| "Should" and "must" statements | Example: "It's terrible that I made a mistake. I should always do my best." |
| Tunnel vision | "My son's teacher can't do anything right. He's critical and insensitive and lousy at teaching." |

THOUGHT RECORD: SIDE TWO EXAMPLE

| Date/time | Situation | Automatic Thought(s) | Emotion(s) | Adaptive Response | Outcome |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| 6/23 | 1. What event (external or internal) is associated with the unpleasant emotion? Or what unhelpful behavior did you engage in? | 1. What thought(s) and/or image(s) went through your mind (before, during or after the event or unhelpful behavior)? 2. How much did you believe the thought(s)? | 1. What emotion(s) (sad/ anxious/ angry/ etc.) did you feel (before, during or after the event or unhelpful behavior)? 2. How intense (0–100%) was the emotion? | 1. (optional) What cognitive distortion did you make? 2. Use questions below to compose a response to the automatic thought(s). Indicate how much you believe each response. | 1. How much do you now believe each automatic thought? 2. What emotion(s) do you feel now? How intense (0–100%) is the emotion? 3. What would be good to do? |
| | 1. Thinking about the job interview | 1. I'll be so nervous, I won't know what to say, and then I won't get the job. 2. 80% | 1. Anxious 2. 75% | 1. Fortune telling 2. I'm nervous now but I can practice more with [my therapist]. When I was nervous in the past, like when I got a new boss, I didn't have trouble talking. (80%) If I don't get the job, I can apply for other ones. The best outcome would be that the interviewer will offer me the job on the spot. The most realistic outcome is that I'll have to apply for several jobs before I get one. (90%) Thinking I won't get the job just keeps me anxious. Realizing that it's not the end of the world if I don't get it makes me feel better. (100%) I'd tell Gabe that it isn't the end of the world if he's nervous and doesn't get the job. But the more he practices, probably the less nervous he'll be. (100%) I should practice what I want to say and then act as if I'm not nervous. (100%) | 1. 50% 2. Anxious (50%) 3. Practice |
| <p>Questions to help compose an alternative response: (1) What is the evidence that the automatic thought is true? Not true? (2) Is there an alternative explanation? (3) If the worst happened, how could I cope? What's the best that could happen? What's the most realistic outcome? (4) What's the effect of my believing the automatic thought? What could be the effect of my changing my thinking? (5) If [person's name] was in this situation and had this thought, what would I tell them? (6) What would be good to do?</p> | | | | | |

THOUGHT RECORD: SIDE TWO WORKSHEET

| Date/time | Situation | Automatic Thought(s) | Emotion(s) | Adaptive Response | Outcome |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| | 1. What event (external or internal) is associated with the unpleasant emotion? Or what unhelpful behavior did you engage in? | 1. What thought(s) and/or image(s) went through your mind (before, during or after the event or unhelpful behavior)? 2. How much did you believe the thought(s)? | 1. What emotion(s) (sad/ anxious/ angry/ etc.) did you feel (before, during or after the event or unhelpful behavior)? 2. How intense (0–100%) was the emotion? | 1. (optional) What cognitive distortion did you make? 2. Use questions below to compose a response to the automatic thought(s). Indicate how much you believe each response. | 1. How much do you now believe each automatic thought? 2. What emotion(s) do you feel now? How intense (0–100%) is the emotion? 3. What would be good to do? |
| <p>Questions to help compose an alternative response: (1) What is the evidence that the automatic thought is true? Not true? (2) Is there an alternative explanation? (3) If the worst happened, how could I cope? What's the best that could happen? What's the most realistic outcome? (4) What's the effect of my believing the automatic thought? What could be the effect of my changing my thinking? (5) If [person's name] was in this situation and had this thought, what would I tell them? (6) What would be good to do?</p> | | | | | |

TESTING YOUR THOUGHTS

Instructions

The Testing Your Thoughts Worksheet is similar to the Thought Record, but the questions are worded more simply and it's easier to record responses. This worksheet also provides a structured format for clients to monitor their thoughts and emotions, evaluate their thinking and respond in an adaptive way. It should be introduced after clients firmly grasp that their thinking in specific situations affects their mood and behavior and that at times their thinking is distorted. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense to clients to use such a form. As with all worksheets, make sure clients can complete it in session with you before suggesting it as a self-help item on their Action Plan.

This worksheet is inappropriate for clients who would find it too confusing or have an aversion to worksheets. Alert clients that the worksheet can be difficult. If they do run into any problems, they should bring it back to the next session so you can help them with it.

TESTING YOUR THOUGHTS: SIDE ONE WORKSHEET

Remember, thoughts may be 100% true, 0% true or somewhere in the middle.

JUST BECAUSE YOU THINK SOMETHING, DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN IT'S TRUE.

1. When you notice your mood getting worse, or you find yourself engaging in unhelpful behavior, ask yourself the questions on the reverse side of this worksheet and write down the answers. It will probably take about 5-10 minutes.
2. Not all questions apply to all automatic thoughts.
3. If you'd like, you can use the list below to identify cognitive distortions. You may find that more than one distortion applies.
4. Spelling, handwriting and grammar don't count.
5. It was worth doing this worksheet if your mood improves by 10% or more.

Cognitive Distortions

| | |
|---|---|
| All-or-nothing thinking | Example: "If I'm not a total success, I'm a failure." |
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| Emotional reasoning | Example: "I know I do a lot of things okay at work, but I still feel like I'm a failure." |
| Labeling | Examples: "I'm a loser." "He's no good." |
| Magnification/minimization | Example: "Getting a mediocre evaluation proves how inadequate I am. Getting high marks doesn't mean I'm smart." |
| Mental filter (selective abstraction) | Example: "Because I got one low rating on my evaluation [which also contained several high ratings], it means I'm doing a lousy job." |
| Mind reading | Example: "He's thinking that I don't know the first thing about this project." |
| Overgeneralization | Example: "Because I felt uncomfortable at the get-together, I don't have what it takes to make friends." |
| Personalization | Example: "The repairman was curt to me because I did something wrong." |
| "Should" and "must" statements | Example: "It's terrible that I made a mistake. I should always do my best." |
| Tunnel vision | "My son's teacher can't do anything right. He's critical and insensitive and lousy at teaching." |

TESTING YOUR THOUGHTS: SIDE TWO EXAMPLE

1. What is the situation? You might be having thoughts about something that just happened in the environment or something that happened inside of you (e.g., an intense emotion, a painful sensation, an image, a daydream, a flashback or a stream of thoughts, such as thinking about my future). *I got a parking ticket.*
2. What am I thinking or imagining? *I'm so stupid.*
3. What is the cognitive distortion? (optional) *Labeling, overgeneralizing*
4. What makes me think the thought is true? *I shouldn't have lost track of time.*
5. What makes me think the thought is not true or not completely true? *Other people get parking tickets. It doesn't necessarily mean they're stupid.*
6. What's another way to look at this? *I just made a mistake.*
7. If the worst happens, what could I do then? *Just keep paying parking tickets, but it would be better to set an alarm on my phone so it doesn't happen again.*
8. What's the best that could happen? *I'll never get a parking ticket again.*
9. What will probably happen? *I could get another ticket but I'll probably remember what happened this time and make sure I don't.*
10. What will happen if I keep telling myself the same thought? *I'll keep being upset with myself.*
11. What could happen if I changed my thinking? *I'd feel better.*
12. What would I tell my friend or family member [think of a specific person] *Gabe* if this happened to him or her? *It's not that big a deal. So you forgot and made a mistake. You know how to avoid doing this in the future.*
13. What would be good to do now? *Get my mind off of this. Go for a walk.*

TESTING YOUR THOUGHTS: SIDE TWO WORKSHEET

1. What is the situation? You might be having thoughts about something that just happened in the environment or something that happened inside of you (e.g., an intense emotion, a painful sensation, an image, a daydream, a flashback or a stream of thoughts, such as thinking about my future).
2. What am I thinking or imagining?
3. What is the cognitive distortion? (optional)
4. What makes me think the thought is true?
5. What makes me think the thought is not true or not completely true?
6. What's another way to look at this?
7. If the worst happens, what could I do then?
8. What's the best that could happen?
9. What will probably happen?
10. What will happen if I keep telling myself the same thought?
11. What could happen if I changed my thinking?
12. What would I tell my friend or family member [think of a specific person] _____ if this happened to him or her?
13. What would be good to do now?

CORE BELIEFS ABOUT THE SELF

Beginning in childhood, people develop certain ideas about themselves, other people and their world. These “core beliefs” are so fundamental and deep that many do not articulate them, even to themselves. Individuals regard these ideas as absolute truths—just the way things “are.” Many individuals primarily hold realistically positive beliefs much of the time. But we all have latent negative beliefs that can become partially or fully activated in the presence of thematically-related vulnerabilities or stressors.

ADAPTIVE (POSITIVE) CORE BELIEFS ABOUT THE SELF

EFFECTIVE CORE BELIEFS

I am reasonably competent, effective, in control, successful, useful.
I can reasonably do most things, protect myself, take care of myself.
I have strengths and weaknesses (in terms of effectiveness, productivity, achievement).
I have relative freedom.
I mostly measure up to other people.

LOVABLE CORE BELIEFS

I am reasonably lovable, likeable, desirable, attractive, wanted, cared for.
I am okay and my differences don't impair my relationships.
I am good enough to be loved by others.
I am unlikely to be abandoned or rejected or end up alone.

WORTHY CORE BELIEFS

I am reasonably worthwhile, acceptable, moral, good, benign.

UNHELPFUL (NEGATIVE) CORE BELIEFS ABOUT THE SELF

HELPLESS CORE BELIEFS

I am ineffective in getting things done.

I'm incompetent, ineffective, helpless, useless, needy; I can't cope.

I am ineffective in protecting myself.

I am powerless, weak, vulnerable, trapped, out of control, likely to get hurt.

I am ineffective compared to others.

I am inferior, a failure, a loser, defective, useless.

I'm not good enough (in terms of achievement); I don't measure up.

UNLOVABLE CORE BELIEFS

I am unlovable, unlikeable, undesirable, unattractive, boring, unimportant, unwanted.

I won't be accepted or loved by others because I am different, a nerd, bad, defective, not good enough, have nothing to offer, there's something wrong with me.

I am bound to be rejected, abandoned, alone.

WORTHLESS CORE BELIEFS

I am immoral, morally bad, a sinner, worthless, unacceptable.

I am dangerous, toxic, crazy, evil.

I don't deserve to live.

BELIEF CHANGE

Instructions

The Belief Change Worksheet is designed for clients to use once they begin evaluating and modifying a core belief, so that they can do so in a continual, consistent manner. First, help clients identify their most central core beliefs and hypothesize that they quickly process negative data consistent with the core belief but disregard or discount positive data inconsistent with it.

Work together with clients to measure the strength of the old unhelpful belief and of the new, more functional belief at the beginning of each session. Throughout the session and throughout the week, clients should monitor their interpretations of events to fill out the worksheet.

BELIEF CHANGE EXAMPLE

EVENT/EXPERIENCE THAT SUPPORTS MY NEW BELIEF "I AM COMPETENT."

WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT ME?

- Figured out how to work [son's] drone which shows I'm competent.
- Fixed bookshelf for daughter which my son-in-law couldn't—evidence of competence.
- Balanced checkbook—most people can do this but it's still a sign of competence.
- Helped put up drywall for Charlie—I was competent.

EVENT/EXPERIENCE WITH REFRAMES OF MY OLD BELIEF "I AM INCOMPETENT."

- Had trouble understanding article on economic trends but most people probably would.
- Couldn't figure out how to fix the brakes in my car but I'm not a trained mechanic.
- Got a parking ticket but the sign was ambiguous.
- Dinner I made tasted terrible but that means I'm incompetent at cooking that meal, not that I'm incompetent as a person.

BELIEF CHANGE WORKSHEET

**EVENT/EXPERIENCE THAT SUPPORTS MY
NEW BELIEF "I AM COMPETENT."**

**EVENT/EXPERIENCE WITH REFRAMES OF
MY OLD BELIEF "I AM INCOMPETENT."**

WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT ME?