

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

ALL-OR-NOTHING / BLACK-OR WHITE / PERFECTIONISTIC THINKING: You see things in black and white categories. There are no gray areas in between. If something is less than perfect, you see it as terrible or as a failure.

OVERGENERALIZING: You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern, or representing a character defect.

MENTAL FILTERING: When something is a mixture of negative and positive aspects, you dwell overwhelmingly on the negative details. Your view of the whole thing becomes negative as a result.

DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE: You reject or belittle positive experience by insisting that it doesn't count for some reason.

MIND READING: You jump to the conclusion that someone is thinking or feeling negatively toward you. You're probably projecting your negative thoughts about yourself onto someone else.

FORTUNE TELLING: You jump to the conclusion that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.

MAGNIFYING & MINIMIZING: You exaggerate the importance of some things (eg. your deficiencies or someone else's achievements), and you shrink other things down until they appear unimportant (eg. your desirable qualities or someone else's imperfections).

CATASTROPHIZING: You attribute extreme and horrible consequences to the outcomes of events.

EMOTIONAL REASONING: You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are in the external world. For example, you feel embarrassed or ashamed, so you assume you behaved poorly.

SHOULD / MUSTS: You have a strong and inflexible sense of the way that things should / must / have to / ought to be.

LABELING: Instead of describing a situation or behavior you don't like, you attach an all-encompassing and negative label to a whole person. For example: "I'm a loser;" or "He's selfish."

PERSONALIZING: You see negative events as indicative of something wrong with you, or as somehow your responsibility.

SELF-DEFEATING THINKING: Any thought that causes you needless pain or turmoil, or which makes it harder for you to get what you want. Such thoughts often lead to vicious cycles and self-fulfilling prophecies.

CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

- → What's the *objective, concrete* evidence supporting or refuting my hot thoughts?
- → How likely is it that this bad thing would come to pass? How would I cope with it or overcome it if were to happen?
- → What's the WORST that could happen? What's the BEST that could happen? What's MOST LIKELY to happen?
- What would an impartial, independent observer think of this situation?
- What would I say to a friend who is thinking and feeling the way I am? What would a good friend say to me?
- What aspects of this situation are simply not in my control, no matter how much I worry about it? What are the advantages of *accepting* that these things are not in my control?
- Instead of simply worrying, what action steps can I take now to prevent or cope with problem that concerns me?
- What's the worst that could happen? How awful would that be compared to the worst thing I ever experienced?
- What are the advantages vs. disadvantages for me to believe or worry about this?
- What alternative explanation or possibility is there? What's the evidence for that alternative?
- How important is my concern? To what extent does my future really reside on this?
- How much will this matter to me one week / one month / six months / one year from now? Why will this change over time?
- If I were in his / her shoes, what are the possible reasons why I would have acted that way?
- Does _____'s opinion reflect that of everyone else? Could other people feel differently?
- Is an old button of mine is being pushed in this situation? How is that affecting my response to the present situation?
- What would be a more helpful way for me to think about this?

COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

How to Do It Effectively

- 1. Make sure that you have all your feelings down.** Feelings are either emotions or physical sensations. Self-talk, even if it includes the word "feel," belongs under the next section: Hot Thoughts. Rate how intensely you experience each feeling when you are in this situation: 0-100%
- 2. Make sure all your feelings are explained by your hot thoughts.** Try to limit your list to the 1-4 *hottest thoughts*: those that make you feel most upset or distressed. Include any disturbing predictions you may have. If you write down 5 or more thoughts, go back and put a star by the 1-4 hottest (most distressing) thoughts. Rate how much you believe each thought: 0-100%. If you can't remember your thoughts, then try this formula: "I was feeling this way because I was concerned that...." Complete the sentence and write down your answer.
- 3. Translate rhetorical questions into statements.** If one of your thoughts is in the form of a rhetorical question (eg. "What if I screw up?"), write it down instead as a statement (eg. "It would be horrible if I screwed up!").
- 4. Write down primary as well as secondary thoughts.** Sometimes the thoughts we're most aware of are "secondary:" ie. what we are thinking about the fact that we are already feeling badly or avoiding something. Make sure you also include the *primary* thoughts: ie. *the concerns that caused you to feel badly or avoid something in the first place*. If you don't know your primary thoughts, try the formula in #2.
- 5. Include your predictions**, especially if you are completing the worksheet *before* an experiment or some other difficult situation. Be as specific and concrete as possible as to how you think things will turn out for you.
- 6. Identify your safety-seeking behaviors:** what you do or avoid to try to cope with this situation, including how you focus your attention (eg. focusing on your symptoms, critiquing your "performance," scripting what to say next.)
- 7. Find the cognitive distortions** that you can see in each of your hot thoughts and predictions. Choose from the list.
- 8. Choose a few challenging questions** to help you debate your hot thoughts. Pick a few questions from the list that you believe best challenge your thoughts, and write them down in this section. Definitely consider the first three (with arrows), but consider using one or two of the others, as well. Don't write down the *answers* to challenging questions here. Instead, incorporate the answers to the challenging questions in your Constructive Attitude.
- 9. Make sure all your hot thoughts are countered by your Constructive Attitude (CA).** If you have many thoughts, focus on countering the 1-4 hottest thoughts you starred. If there is a negative aspect to the situation that is not distorted, then acknowledge this in your CA and state how you can effectively cope with or overcome that problem.
- 10. Optional structure for CA:** Until you develop your own style, you may want to try this optional structure when writing your CA: "IT'S TRUE THAT [followed by brief summary of any negative evidence supporting elements of your hot thoughts]. HOWEVER [followed by a more detailed summary of evidence refuting your hot thoughts]. THEREFORE [followed by a conclusion that is truer, compassionate and helpful]."
- 11. Try to make your CA compassionate and positively worded.** Avoid the tendency to use double negatives or to be on the defensive or self-critical in your CA. Try to be compassionate to yourself (supportive, caring, understanding) in your CA, like a loving parent or friend would be.
- 12. Make sure your CA is believable to you.** This is *not* the "power of positive thinking." A positive CA that you don't particularly believe is not likely to help. But be willing to stretch yourself a little. Something that you think is at least 60% believable (ie. you think it's *probably* true, but aren't sure) is a good start.
- 13. Include several positive motivators** in your CA. Positive motivators are specific ways you hope to benefit by doing the experiment or the action steps that you identify in the next row. Include both immediate and long-range benefits.
- 14. Add a short version of your CA.** This should be no more than a single phrase or a very short sentence that encapsulates the heart of your longer version. It is intended as an easily memorized reminder to yourself that you can use in the midst of an experiment or a difficult moment.
- 15. Under Behavioral Goals & Action Steps, write down specific and helpful alternatives to your safety-seeking behaviors**, as well as any additional specific steps you may wish to take to better handle the situation.
- 16. Rerate the intensity of your feelings** upon completion of this worksheet (in the Feelings row). Effective cognitive restructuring will usually decrease the intensity of your negative feelings significantly. If not, check to see that you have all your hot thoughts recorded, and that you've countered them in a way you find believable and helpful.

COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING WORKSHEET

Name _____

SITUATION & DATE Event, circumstance or experiment (past, present or future) when you feel distressed or avoid
5/11: going to a party where I know few people

FEELINGS (intensity 0-100% before & after completing CRW) Emotions and physical sensations

- nervous: 90% → 60%
- embarrassed: 50% → 35%
- jittery: 50% → 25%
- tense: 75% → 50%
- self-conscious: 100% → 50%

HOT THOUGHTS (belief 0-100%) Your most distressing ideas, concerns, images, predictions &/or core beliefs

- I won't know what to say, or I might say something stupid. 75%
- I'll appear tense & nervous. 80%
- I've got to find a way out of this. 75%
- People will think poorly of me, and won't enjoy talking to me. 100%

SAFETY-SEEKING BEHAVIORS Things you do or avoid to try to cope, including how you focus your attention

- don't initiate conversations
- stay off by sidelines
- withdraw, say very little
- try to script what to say next
- focus on myself to try to appear less nervous

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS in your hot thoughts

- perfectionistic thinking
- magnifying & minimizing
- fortune telling
- self-defeating thinking

CHALLENGING QUESTIONS to debate your hot thoughts

- What's the objective evidence?
- How likely is it that this would happen, and how could I handle it if it did?
- What good things might I experience?

CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDE (belief 0-100%) A truer, compassionate & helpful alternative to your hot thoughts, predictions &/or core beliefs (including answers to your challenging questions)

While mingling in other settings, I've found that the conversation is more likely to go well if I focus mindfully in the moment, and not on my feelings and how I think I'm coming across. If one conversation doesn't go so well, I can feel proud that I was being friendly and took a risk. Then I'll simply move on and talk to someone else. Some people have told me I don't appear as anxious as I think I do. In the rare event that someone is so rude as to say I appear nervous or that I said something stupid, I can simply acknowledge it non-defensively and point out that everyone has this experience at times. Some people will enjoy talking to me and I'll enjoy talking to some people, despite some initial awkwardness. But no one is liked by everyone, so I don't have to be afraid of being disliked by a stranger at a party. 65%

Positive motivators Ways you expect to benefit (short- & long-term) by doing the experiment or action steps

This is good practice at meeting people and making small talk. I'll feel proud of myself for trying and for being friendly, no matter how it goes. I'll probably enjoy some of the conversations. I might meet someone I like. In the long run, this will help me make friends and get a date. 80%

Short version *Focus on enjoying the conversation.*

BEHAVIORAL GOALS & ACTION STEPS A more helpful alternative to your safety-seeking behaviors

- attend party & stay 2+ hours
- focus mindfully on the conversation
- greet 5+ new people
- try to keep the conversations going for at least 15 minutes each
- start 2 conversations

COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING WORKSHEET

Name _____

SITUATION & DATE Event, circumstance or experiment (past, present or future) when you feel distressed or avoid

FEELINGS (intensity 0-100% before & after completing CRW) Emotions and physical sensations

HOT THOUGHTS (belief 0-100%) Your most distressing ideas, concerns, images, predictions &/or core beliefs

SAFETY-SEEKING BEHAVIORS Things you do or avoid to try to cope, including how you focus your attention

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS in your hot thoughts

CHALLENGING QUESTIONS to debate your hot thoughts

CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDE (belief 0-100%) A truer, compassionate & helpful alternative to your hot thoughts, predictions &/or core beliefs (including answers to your challenging questions)

Positive motivators Ways you expect to benefit (short- & long-term) by doing the experiment or action steps

Short version

BEHAVIORAL GOALS & ACTION STEPS A more helpful alternative to your safety-seeking behaviors
