

Introduction to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Workbook Part 1

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What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a form of short-term psychotherapy that has been shown to be effective for depression and anxiety, as well as a number of other mental health-related conditions. Cognitive Behavior Therapy deals with the relationship between our thoughts, behaviors, and emotions.

How does CBT Work?

CBT works by at looking how our style of thinking and our behavior may be affecting our emotions. First we will focus on the relationship between our thoughts and our emotions. While we cannot always choose what happens to us, we can choose how we respond, and a large part of that response is the thoughts that we have about it. The steps of basic CBT are as follows:

1. First you will learn to recognize what you are thinking at the moments when you are most upset.
2. Next you will learn to analyze your own thoughts to make sure that they are not one of the **Unhelpful Thinking Styles** that have been shown to cause (or exaggerate) depression and anxiety.

3. Once you can identify unhelpful thoughts, you will work towards being able to construct more logical and beneficial thoughts. These thoughts will not merely be “wishful thinking.” They will be realistic thoughts that are based on sound reason and logic.
4. By practicing these skills, the negative thoughts will come to have much less of a hold on you, and your mood should improve.
5. Even after your therapy ends, you will have learned how to apply these skills for yourself. In effect you will know how to be your own CBT therapist.

How long does CBT Take?

CBT is a short-term treatment. Many people experience a benefit after only 12 sessions. However, in order to make this kind of rapid progress you must be willing to work outside the session to complete worksheets and try out what you have learned.

Part One: Looking at your own thoughts

The overall method we will use in this workbook is based on traditional Cognitive Behavioral Psychotherapy, and I will refer to the technique we will use as **Notice, Label, and Replace**. In this section we will focus on the first part of this: Noticing.

Noticing. In the first step to dealing with these thoughts, we simply acknowledge them and look at them. Sometimes this is itself a challenge because the thought may have passed so

quickly that it escaped our awareness—all we may know is that we suddenly feel terrible. The negative emotion could be feeling anxious, tearful, sad, or unmotivated. This change in emotion is like a signal that an unhelpful thought has occurred. At these times ask yourself, “What did I just think?”

Negative thoughts are not just factual statements.

The following thoughts are NOT the kind of thoughts we are looking for.

“My car is on empty.”

“I have a test tomorrow.”

“It’s been a month since my boyfriend broke up with me.”

“The dentist says I have a cavity.”

“I have \$15 in my checking account.”

These thoughts represent an awareness of reality. Being aware of reality may not always be joyful, but it is not the problem. The problem is what we tell ourselves about these facts—how we evaluate them. Let’s write an evaluation thought for each of these that IS the kind of negative thought we want to identify.

“My car is on empty. I can’t handle even the most basic tasks of life.”

“I have a test tomorrow. I am totally going to fail.”

“It’s been a month since my boyfriend broke up with me. I am never going to be able to find someone.”

“The dentist says I have a cavity. At this rate all of my teeth are going to fall out.”

“I have \$15 in my checking account. I am such a loser.”

Notice that the second part of the statement is not factual or helpful. There is something logically wrong with each of these thoughts. They are also the kinds of thoughts that affect our mood. In your sessions you CBT therapist will help you improve upon these types of thoughts. But for that to happen you will need to provide a record of these types of thoughts.

Recording your thoughts.

The first part of our task is to notice these thoughts and record them somehow. Usually this means writing them down. You can think of this like a scientist taking a sample of the type of thing she wants to study. Once we have a sample, we can examine and learn something we didn’t know before. When you notice a thought, there are a few questions we can ask ourselves about it.

What to notice about your Unhelpful Thoughts

1. What triggered the thought?
2. What was the unhelpful thought itself?
3. How much do you believe the thought?
4. How did you feel after you had the thought?
5. How intense was the feeling?
6. What did you do afterwards?

Let's talk about these concepts in more detail.

The Trigger.

The Trigger is the thing that happened just before the thought. It could be something that happened to you, something someone else said, a memory you thought of, a thought that popped into your head, or something you did. In some cases there may seem to be no trigger at all.

Examples of Triggers

1. A memory of saying something awkward pops into your mind.
2. The phone rings.
3. You are sitting quietly.
4. Your spouse says they need to talk to you later.
5. You get in your car.
6. You get a test back and receive a score of 73.
7. You win a \$1000 prize.

You may notice that these examples are extremely broad. This is because anything (even positive events) could be followed by unhelpful thinking and a negative emotion.

Virtually anything can be a trigger.

The Thought Itself

Usually thoughts occur as sentences we say to our self. Try to record the thought in the exact words in which it occurred to you. This is no time to censure yourself. Cursing and rudeness are OK for this purpose.

How much do you believe your thoughts?

Just because a thought occurs to you, doesn't mean that we believe it to be true. Some thoughts may have no validity whatsoever—we know they just don't correspond to reality. Other thoughts are so powerful that we feel virtually certain that they are true. Give your thought a rating between 1 and 100 based on how true you believe it to be, with 100% being absolutely certain that it is true.

Examples:

1. My wife says she loves me but I don't believe that she does (25%).
2. I am going to lose my job (90%).
3. Nobody at school likes me (10%).

The Feeling.

In our everyday language we tend to use the words "think" and "feel" interchangeably. In Cognitive Behavioral Therapy however, thoughts and feelings are very different from each other. A thought is a verbal statement, a sentence that we say to our self comprised of words. A feeling, by contrast is one of the major emotions: Sadness, anger, anxiety, frustration, disappointment, surprise, disgust. Note that some thoughts may evoke more than one feeling at the same time.

Rating the Intensity of a Feeling

Give the feeling a rating of between 1 and 10, with 10 representing the strongest version of the feeling that you have ever felt.

Examples:

1. Frustrated (2/10)
2. Sad (9/10)
3. Angry (6/10)
4. Sad (1/10) and Angry (3/10)

Recording Emotions

One way to think about emotions is to see them as having degrees. There are many different ways to organize emotions and many different names for their varying degrees. The following table represents only one possible way to outline emotions, but it offers a balance of complexity and simplicity.

Table of Emotional Degrees

Mild	Medium	Intense	Severe
Disappointed or unhappy	Sad or Sorrowful	Depressed	Distraught or Hopeless or Grief Stricken
Concerned	Nervous or Worried	Anxious or Afraid	Panic or Terror
Frustrated	Annoyed or Agitated	Angry	Rage or Hate or Loathing
Content	Serene	Joyful	Ecstatic

The key point here is to notice that there are different levels to emotions. As we will see, treating an emotion as an all or nothing event will tend to make us feel worse. One of

the ways that Cognitive Therapy helps us improve is by helping us differentiate milder forms of the negative emotions from the more severe ones. Keep in mind that you can use whatever system makes sense to you as long as you can distinguish between different levels of emotion.

Recording behavior and how you felt afterwards.

It may also be helpful to note down what you did after the thought. How did you respond to this thought and emotion? What happened as a result of this behavior? Did you feel better? You might also describe how you felt after this activity. For example, perhaps you felt Angry 10/10 and went for a long walk, and afterwards only felt Angry 6/10.

If you feel like you have a lot to say about this behavior it might even make sense to treat this behavior as a new trigger and fill out another record of how you responded to it.

What follows is an example of how to record a problematic thought called a Record form. I have included an example, a practice task and a blank copy of a record form.

If you would rather use any other way to record your thoughts do so—maybe you prefer to use an app on your phone, a notebook, a journal or whatever. The key thing is to record what happened, what you thought, and how you felt. Then bring that to your next session.

Sample Record of Problematic Thoughts

<i>Trigger</i>	<i>Thought</i>	<i>Percent Believed</i>	<i>Emotion and Rating</i>	<i>Behavior</i>
<i>What happened just before the thought? This could be an event, a thought, a memory.</i>	<i>Try to record the thought in the exact words in which it occurred to you.</i>	<i>Give your thought a rating between 1 and 100 based on how true you believe it to be, with 100% being absolutely certain that it is true.</i>	<i>Note which of the emotions you felt after the thought and give it a rating between 1 and 10 with 10 being the most intense version of the emotion.</i>	<i>Note what you did afterwards and whether or not this helped. You may want to give a new emotion and rating.</i>
My boss called me into the office and pointed out some errors in the work I have done.	Oh no! This is horrible! I am going to get fired!	95%	Anxious 8/10	Spent the rest of the day worrying and got very little work done. Did not help!
I ate an entire pizza when I am supposed to be on a diet.	You have no will power whatsoever! You are never going to be able to get down to a healthy weight. All of that exercise you did was for nothing!	65%	Disappointed 10/10	Took a long walk. Felt better! Disappointed (5/10)
I joined an online dating service.	These things may work for other people but it won't work for me. The only people interested in me are freaks!	45%	Sad 8/10	Filled out my dating profile anyway. Felt better (Sad 6/10)

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Let's Practice!

Read the following description of an event and practice filling in a thought record based on the situation.

Gina got off the phone with her best friend Marcy and realized she was feeling very upset. She was quite sad and even a little angry. When she thought back over the phone call she realized that it all started when Marcy mentioned that she had been asked to go to a mutual friend's bachelorette party. Gina felt really bad that she hadn't been invited. She began to think, 'Nobody likes me! I never get invited anywhere! Why do I have no friends?' After the phone call she took her dog for a walk. She felt slightly better but found that she kept thinking over this situation for the rest of the day, and each time the thought came up she felt the same mixture of sadness and anger.

Record of Problematic Thoughts

<i>Trigger</i>	<i>Thought</i>	<i>Percent Believed</i>	<i>Emotion and Rating</i>	<i>Behavior</i>
<i>What happened just before the thought? This could be an event, a thought, a memory.</i>	<i>Try to record the thought in the exact words in which it occurred to you.</i>	<i>Give your thought a rating between 1 and 100 based on how true you believe it to be, with 100% being absolutely certain that it is true.</i>	<i>Note which of the emotions you felt after the thought and give it a rating between 1 and 10 with 10 being the most intense version of the emotion.</i>	<i>Note what you did afterwards and whether or not this helped. You may want to give a new emotion and rating.</i>

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Record of Problematic Thoughts

Date : _____

<i>Trigger</i>	<i>Thought</i>	<i>Percent Believed</i>	<i>Emotion and Rating</i>	<i>Behavior</i>
<i>What happened just before the thought? This could be an event, a thought, a memory.</i>	<i>Try to record the thought in the exact words in which it occurred to you.</i>	<i>Give your thought a rating between 1 and 100 with 100% being believed completely.</i>	<i>Note which of the emotions you felt and rate it between 1 and 10 with 10 being the most.</i>	<i>Note what you did afterwards and give a new emotion and rating.</i>

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