

Challenging Thoughts

Begin by filling in the table below

- 1) *Situation*: Record the situation (plus the day & time)
- 2) *Feeling*: Write down how you were feeling. Often you may be feeling a number of emotions, so it is important to write each of these feelings down. Once you have written all the feelings, rate the intensity of the feeling from 0 to 100% (where 100% is the most intense, and 0% is the least intense)
- 3) *Thought*: Ask yourself, 'Why am I feeling [insert feeling]?' For example, 'Why am I feeling depressed?' might give you the answer: 'I am feeling depressed, because I can't do anything right'. Similar to feelings, you may have a number of thoughts going through your mind, so record all the ones that are distressing you. Rate how strongly you believe the thought from 0-100% (where 0% means not believing it at all and 100% means believing it very strongly or completely).

Once you have completed these columns, you can begin to challenge the thought. If you recorded a number of thoughts, look back at the thoughts column and choose one thought to challenge. It is normally a good idea to choose the most distressing or upsetting thought to challenge as this is most likely to result in the greatest reduction of your distress.

Situation	Thought (& rate the strength of belief in thought from 0- 100%)	Feeling (& rate the intensity of feeling from 0-100%)	Behaviour

If you are struggling to identify any thoughts the following questions may help:

- What was going through my mind just before I started to feel this way?
- What does this say about me if it is true?
- What does this mean about me, my life, my future?
- What am I afraid might happen?
- What is the worst thing that could happen if it is true?
- What does this mean about how the other person(s) feel(s) / think(s) about me?
- What does this mean about the other person(s) or people in general?
- What images or memories do I have in this situation?

Cognitive Distortions

Next, review the list of cognitive distortions (also called thinking errors) and ask yourself if you are using any of these thinking styles.

All or nothing thinking (seeing things in black and white categories)

Overgeneralisation (seeing a single negative event as an ongoing pattern of defeat)

Mental filter (pick out a single negative event and dwell on it exclusively)

Disqualifying the positive (You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for some reason or other)

Jumping to conclusions (You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts e.g mind reading or the fortune teller error)

Magnification (or minimisation) (You exaggerate the importance of things e.g. your own mistake or someone else’s achievement; or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny e.g. your own desirable qualities or the other person’s imperfections)

Emotional reasoning (You assume that your negative emotions reflect a fact e.g. “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”)

Should statements (You try to motivate yourself with shoulds and shouldn’ts and often feel guilty as a result of this)

Labelling and mis-labelling (Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself, “I’m a loser.” Or “I’m a failure” Mislabelling involves describing an event with language that is highly coloured and emotionally loaded.)

Personalisation (You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you are not primarily responsible for.)

The Cognitive Distortion I am using is:

If I wasn’t using this distortion I might think:

Someone else might have a different thought such as:

Evidence for and against the thought

Draw up two columns (FOR and AGAINST columns) and generate evidence in both of these columns

Evidence for the thought (What is the evidence to suggest that this thought is true?)	Evidence against the thought (What is the evidence to suggest that this thought is NOT true?)

Questions that might help you include:

- Could this be opinion, rather than fact? Is there another way of looking at it?
- What would others say if they knew I was thinking this? What would I say if a friend or loved one had this thought?
- Have I had any experiences that show that this is not completely true all the time?
- Are there any small things that contradict my thoughts that I might be discounting as not important?

After both columns have been completed, look again at the 'FOR' column again and ask yourself for each piece of evidence: 'Is this really true?'. If you think of anything about this that is not true, write it next to the original evidence.

How helpful is the thought?

Draw up two columns (Advantages and Disadvantage columns) and generate the advantages of thinking this way and the disadvantages of thinking this way.

Advantages (What are the advantages of thinking this way?)	Disadvantages (What are the disadvantages of thinking this way?)

After both columns have been completed, look again at the 'Advantages' column and ask yourself: 'Is this really an advantage?'. If you think of anything about this advantage that is not in fact helpful or advantageous, write it next to the original advantage.

Finding an alternative, balanced thought

Look back at the original thought that you decided to challenge and then look at all the information you have generated in the questions above. Put this all together to create an alternative, balanced thought to the original thought you had. This should take into account the evidence for and against the original thought.

Alternative Thought:

- 1) Rate how much you believe the alternative thought. It is really important that you believe it 100%. If you don't believe your alternative thought 100%, delete the part of your response that is preventing you from believing it completely, or, change the response slightly so that you can believe it completely.
- 2) Re-rate how much you now believe the original thought
- 3) Re-rate the intensity in the emotions from the original thought

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- ✓ TIP: Once you have generated an alternative thought, it is often helpful to write this on a small piece of paper or on your phone, and keep it somewhere close to you. You will then be able to read your alternative thought when you have this thought and are feeling distressed.