

### TESTING YOUR THOUGHTS (Example)

This worksheet is a version of a Thought Record.

What is the situation? Joanne yelled at me.

What am I thinking or imagining? She'll never call me again.

How much do I believe it? a little medium a lot (or rate 0-100\_\_\_\_)

How does that thought make me feel? angry sad nervous other \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is the feeling? a little strong medium very strong (or rate 0-100\_\_\_\_)

What makes me think the thought is true? She seems pretty mad

What makes me think the thought is not true or not completely true? She's gotten mad at me before but she seems to get over it.

What's another way to look at this? She's got a real temper but she doesn't stay mad.

What's the worst that could happen? Would I still live through it? I'd lose my best friend.

What's the best that could happen? She'll call back right away and apologize.

What will probably happen? She'll act kind of cold for a few days and then I'll call her.

What will happen if I keep telling myself the same thought? I'll keep feeling really upset.

What could happen if I changed my thinking? I could feel better, maybe call her sooner.

What would I tell my friend Emily if this happened to them? Don't worry, just wait two days and call.

What should I do now? Call a different friend.

How much do I believe the negative thought now? a little medium a lot (or rate 0-100\_\_\_\_)

How strong is my negative feeling now? a little strong medium very strong (or rate 0-100\_\_\_\_)

### TESTING YOUR THOUGHTS

What is the situation? \_\_\_\_\_

What am I thinking or imagining? \_\_\_\_\_

How much do I believe it?                      a little                      medium                      a lot                      (or rate 0-100 \_\_\_\_)

How does that thought make me feel?    angry                      sad                      nervous                      other \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is the feeling?                      a little strong                      medium                      very strong                      (or rate 0-100 \_\_\_\_)

What makes me think the thought is true?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What makes me think the thought is not true or not completely true?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What's another way to look at this?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What's the worst that could happen? Would I still live through it?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What's the best that could happen?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What will probably happen?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What will happen if I keep telling myself the same thought?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What could happen if I changed my thinking?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What would I tell my friend \_\_\_\_\_ if this happened to them?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What should I do now?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How much do I believe the negative thought now?    a little                      medium                      a lot                      (or rate 0-100 \_\_\_\_)

How strong is my negative feeling now?    a little strong                      medium                      very strong                      (or rate 0-100 \_\_\_\_)

## **WHAT IS HEALTHY THINKING?**

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People often see their feelings as being determined by events, situations, or other people. This belief is reflected in statements such as "You make me so angry," "Public speaking makes me nervous," or "Not being in a relationship makes me depressed". These types of statements suggest that external factors are directly and entirely responsible for how we feel. However, what we think about these situations or what they mean to us will affect whether a situation will lead to anxiety, anger, or joy.

For example, you are walking down the street and see a friend who does not wave or say hi to you. How would you feel if you thought, "How rude, she can not even take the time to acknowledge me!""? What if you thought, "She must not want to be friends anymore; I'm too boring to be part of that group."? How about if you thought, "She must be in a rush and didn't see me."? You would probably feel very different with these different views on why a friend did not acknowledge you. Our thoughts affect how we feel and how we respond to situations.

### **Automatic Thoughts**

Thoughts can become a habit or automatic, just like biting our nails or eating while watching TV. These thoughts can occur so quickly that we may not even realize that the thought has occurred. When automatic thoughts tend to be mostly negative (e.g., I made a mistake – I'm so stupid), they can cause emotional distress.

### **What is Healthy Thinking?**

Healthy thinking is not just positive thinking. There are often negative situations that occur. It would not be helpful to see only the good in every situation, such as losing your job or failing a test. It is normal and healthy to be upset and to have some negative thoughts when these types of situations happen. Healthy thinking is about seeing the entire situation - the good, the bad, and the neutral - and using all of this information to decide what to do. Healthy thinking is about seeing life in a balanced and complete way, rather than only focusing on the negative or positive parts.

### **Thinking Traps**

Everyone falls into thinking traps sometimes. It's most likely to happen when you feel sad, anxious or angry. Thinking traps are also more likely to happen when you're under stress or not taking good care of yourself, e.g. not enough sleep. Individuals with anxiety and depression tend to fall into thinking traps more often, which can trigger and maintain anxiety and depression.

Thinking Traps	Examples
<p><b>Overgeneralizing</b> Thinking that a negative situation is part of a constant cycle of bad things that happen. People who overgeneralize often use words like “always” or “never”.</p>	<p>I wanted to go to the beach, but now it’s raining. This always happens to me! I never get to do fun things!</p>
<p><b>All or Nothing Thinking</b> (Black and White thinking) Seeing things as only right or wrong, good or bad, perfect or terrible. People who think in black and white terms see a small mistake as a total failure.</p>	<p>I wanted to eat healthier, but I just had a piece of cake. This plan is a total failure! I might as well eat the whole cake!</p>
<p><b>Fortune Telling</b> Predicting that something bad will happen, without any evidence.</p>	<p>I’ve been studying hard, but I know that I’m going to fail my test tomorrow.</p>
<p><b>Emotional Reasoning</b> Believing that bad feelings or emotions reflect the truth of a situation.</p>	<p>I feel anxious when I fly, so airplanes must not be safe.</p>
<p><b>Labeling</b> Saying only negative things about yourself or other people.</p>	<p>I made a mistake at work. I’m stupid! My boss told me that I made a mistake. My boss is a total jerk!</p>
<p><b>‘Should’ Statements</b> Telling yourself how you “should” or “must” act. “Should” statements about ourselves lead to guilt. “Should” statements about others lead to anger and resentment.</p>	<p>I should be able to handle this without getting upset and crying!</p>
<p><b>Mind Reading</b> Jumping to conclusions about what others are thinking, without any evidence.</p>	<p>My friend didn’t stop to say hello. She must not like me very much.</p>
<p><b>Mental Filter</b> Focusing only on the negative parts of a situation and ignoring anything good or positive.</p>	<p>I met a lot of great people at the party, but one guy didn’t talk to me. There must be something wrong with me.</p>
<p><b>Catastrophic Thinking</b> Exaggerating the importance of negative things, believing the worst-case scenario, or thinking something is unbearable or impossible when it isn’t that bad.</p>	<p>I stumbled over my words during the presentation at work, so I’ll probably lose my job.</p>
<p><b>Personalization</b> You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event for which, in fact, you were not primarily responsible.</p>	<p>My husband looks irritable today. I must have done something to upset him.</p>

## **Getting Unstuck from a Thinking Trap**

Below are some strategies to help deal with common thinking traps. It is not usually helpful to tell yourself to stop thinking that way. Often, when we push away thoughts, they are more likely to pop up again (e.g., try not to think about a pink elephant for 30 seconds). It's more helpful to carefully examine a thought to see if it is accurate, or if there is a more balanced way to think about the situation.

### **1. Feeling or Thought?**

It can be easy to confuse thoughts and feelings. In every day conversations we often use the terms interchangeably. For example, we might say "I think I am anxious" or "I feel like everyone is laughing at me." When we are challenging our thinking traps, it's helpful to very clearly separate our thoughts and our feelings.

To do this you can ask yourself:

- What is the situation? What are the "facts" that everyone would agree on if they saw a videotape of the event?
- What are your thoughts? What are you telling yourself about the meaning of the situation?
- What are your emotions? How do you feel (typically one word)?
- What are your behaviours? How are you reacting and what are you doing to cope?

### **2. Find any 'thinking traps'**

Examine your different thoughts and compare them to the list of thinking traps. It is common to fall into more than one trap. Find any that might apply to you.

### **3. Challenge the thinking traps**

Start to examine your thoughts like a scientist or a detective looking for hard evidence. What are the facts?

- Examine the evidence: Is there evidence for or against your thought? Make sure you look at evidence on both sides.
- Double-standard: Ask yourself what you would think if someone else was in this situation?
- Survey method: Ask other people that you trust if they agree with your thoughts. For example, if you think you are a bad parent because your child is acting up you could ask other parents if they have ever had a similar problem.
- Conduct an experiment: Test your beliefs to collect more real-world evidence that could support or refute your thought. For example, if you think your friends don't want to spend time with you, call a few friends to make plans and see if they all say no.