The Problem List

This exercise helps you clearly articulate the specific problem that you want to work on using CBT.

The problem list will help you identify the causes behind the distress you're feeling. The problem is not your difficult feelings, but the factors that trigger the difficult feelings.

Start by identifying the problem and then identify unhelpful thinking patterns, behaviors, or knowledge or skill gaps that are causing this problem.

The problem	Unhelpful thinking patterns, behaviors, or knowledge or skill gaps
e.g., Low self-esteem	Passive behavior at work and in my relationship Harshly criticizing myself Unfavorably comparing myself with other people Valuing other people's needs over my own

The problem	Unhelpful thinking patterns, behaviors, or knowledge or skill gaps

SMART Goals

Goals help track progress through the CBT process.

It is best to express goals as "Start" rather than "Stop" goals.

- "Stop" goals focus on avoiding or controlling what you don't want (e.g., to be less anxious).

- "Start" goals focus on what you want (e.g., to become more emotionally resilient).

The latter can cause a rebound effect and shift your focus to worrying about failure rather than noticing your progress.

It is also helpful to express goals using SMART acronym:

- Specific: Expressed in concrete terms.

- Measurable: quantifiable.

- Attainable: Proportionate and achievable.

- Relevant: Consistent with your personal values (who you are and how you want to act)

- Timebound: Clear deadline a frequency measure.

Identify three specific goals you want to achieve, small practical steps to achieve the goal, and identify any new skills to support the changes that you want to make.

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Goals	Small Steps To Achieve the Goal	New Skills To Support The Changes
e.g., Strengthen my relationship with my family members.	• Contact family members by email. • Call family members twice a week. • Organize dinners on the weekends.	• Understand what triggers my negative feelings. • Challenge my negative beliefs.

Goals	Small Steps To Achieve the Goal	New Skills To Support The Changes

Costs and Benefits of Change

A great way to commit to change is to get clear on the costs and benefits of the changes you want to make.

On the cost side, include short-term difficulties, avoidance behaviors you need to let go of, personal challenges you need to tolerate, etc.

On the benefits side, include the opportunities and advantages the new change will provide.

It is also helpful to score items on each list on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being not the meaningful and 5 being really meaningful.

Costs	Score	Benefits	Score
Total		**Total**	

Personal Strengths

Your personal strengths are a great resource to help you achieve change.

Think about qualities or skills you recognize in yourself and ones that people see in you.

Qualities and Skills I Recognize In Myself	Qualities and Skills People Recognize In Me

Personal Values

While our goals provide the "What," our values provide the "Why."

Identifying our values will help guide us toward the things that are most important to us and help us live more authentically.

Read through the following list of values and check the ones that are important to you.

You may also add ones of your own to the list.

Values	Highly important	Moderately important	Less important	Values	Highly important	Moderately important	Less important
Acceptance				Innovation			
Achievement				Inspiring			
Accountability				Integrity			
Adaptability				Intelligence			
Alertness				Intensity			
Altruism				Intuitive			
Ambition				Irreverent			
Amusement				Joy			
Assertiveness				Justice			
Attentive				Kindness			
Awareness				Knowledge			
Balance				Lawful			
Beauty				Leadership			

Boldness				Learning			
Bravery				Liberty			
Brilliance				Logic			
Calm				Love			
Certainty				Loyalty			
Challenge				Mastery			
Charity				Maturity			
Cleanliness				Meaning			
Clever				Moderation			
Commitment				Motivation			
Communication				Openness			
Community				Optimism			
Compassion				Order			
Competence				Organization			
Concentration				Originality			
Confidence				Passion			
Connection				Patience			
Consciousness				Peace			
Contentment				Persistence			
Contribution				Playfulness			
Control				Potential			
Conviction				Power			
Cooperation				Productivity			

Courage				Professionalism			
Courtesy				Prosperity			
Creation				Purpose			
Creativity				Quality			
Credibility				Realistic			
Curiosity				Recognition			
Decisiveness				Recreation			
Dedication				Reflective			
Dependability				Respect			
Determination				Responsibility			
Devotion				Results-oriented Reverence			
Dignity				Rigor			
Discipline				Risk			
Discovery				Satisfaction			
Drive				Security			
Effectiveness				Self-reliance			
Efficiency				Selfless			
Empathy				Service			
Empower				Sharing			
Endurance				Significance			
Energy				Silence			
Enjoyment				Simplicity			
Enthusiasm							

Equality				Sincerity			
Ethical				Skill			
Excellence				Smart			
Experience				Solitude			
Exploration				Spirituality			
Expressive				Spontaneous			
Fairness				Stability			
Family				Status			
Famous				Stewardship			
Fearless				Strength			
Feelings				Structure			
Focus				Success			
Freedom				Support			
Friendship				Surprise			
Fun				Sustainability			
Generosity				Talent			
Genius				Teamwork			
Giving				Thoughtful			
Goodness				Timeliness			
Grace				Tolerance			
Gratitude				Toughness			
Greatness				Traditional			
Growth				Tranquility			

Happiness				Trust			
Hard work				Truth			
Harmony				Understanding			
Health				Unity			
Honesty				Victory			
Honor				Vigor			
Hope				Vision			
Humility				Vitality			
Imagination				Wealth			
Improvement				Winning			
Independence				Wisdom			
Individuality				Wonder			

The CBT Junction Model

The CBT Junction Model will help you make choices that are helpful and in line with your purpose, values, and goals.

Use the left side to identify unhelpful thoughts and behaviors that you struggle with and use the right side to identify action that is consistent with your purpose, values, and goals for the change you want to make.

Action That Is Inconsistent With Your Purpose, Values, And Goals (Unhelpful thoughts, emotions I struggle with, counter-productive behaviors and patterns of avoidance.)	Action That Is Consistent With Your Purpose, Values, And Goals (Helpful things I can do to improve my situation.)

Cross-sectional CBT Model

The goal here is to understand how changing your thoughts and behaviors can alter your emotional and physiological response to a certain trigger.

1. Identify the Trigger: This could be a situation, a person, something someone says or does, an old memory, an internal feeling or pain or discomfort. In CBT the trigger itself is not the problem, it's how we think and react to the trigger that causes our distress.

2. Identify negative or unrealistic thoughts in response to the trigger (e.g., "I can't handle this," or, "They're going to think I'm stupid.")

3. Identify physical sensations: Unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings in the body (e.g., muscle tension, shaking, blushing, pain, fatigue, rapid heartbeat, chest tightness, etc.)

4. Identify feelings in response to negative thoughts (e.g., anxiety, shame, sadness, resentment, anger, hurt, etc.)

5. Identify behaviors linked to the negative thoughts and feelings. Behaviors can be external (e.g., avoiding, arguing, withdrawing, reassurance seeking, etc.) or internal (e.g., ruminating, worrying, overanalyzing, etc.).

Trigger

Bodily Sensations

Feelings
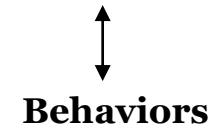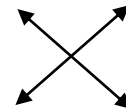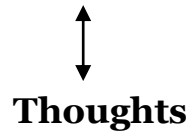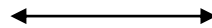
Thoughts

Behaviors

Layers of Cognition

Negative thoughts, also called cognitions, can be described on four levels:

1. Negative Core Beliefs,

2. Rigid Rules,

3. Conditional Assumptions, and
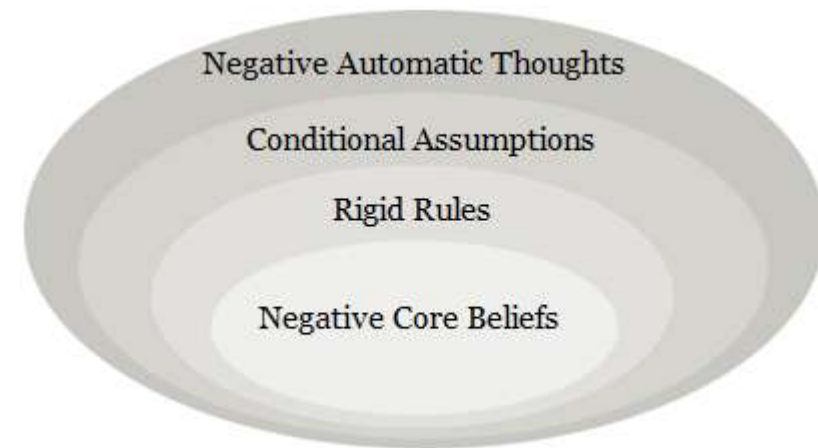
4. Negative Automatic Thoughts.

Negative thoughts influence our perceptions, feelings, and behavior. Challenging and changing our negative thoughts (cognitive restructuring) can profoundly shape the way we feel and behave.

1. Negative Automatic Thoughts

Negative Automatic Thoughts form the internal monologue and fleeting thoughts that can negatively influence how we automatically feel, interpret situations, and react.

The following are some common examples of negative automatic thoughts, check the ones you relate to and add ones of your own:

- ☐ I can't cope.
- ☐ They don't like me.
- ☐ I look stupid.
- ☐ I hate it.

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☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

2. Conditional Assumptions

Conditional assumptions are dysfunctional and engrained thinking reflexes. They are often expressed as conditional "if then" statements.

The following are some common examples of conditional assumptions, check the ones you relate to and add ones of your own:

☐ If I am not in control, then something awful will happen.

☐ If I am criticized, then I am no good.

☐ If I don't get attention, then I am unworthy.

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

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3. Rigid Rules

Rigid rules are irrational rules that we automatically apply in daily life and rarely challenge. They are often expressed in terms of "musts" and "should."

The following are some common examples of rigid rules, check the ones you relate to and add ones of your own:

- ☐ I should not be anxious.
- ☐ I must always be strong.
- ☐ People can't be trusted.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

4. Negative Core Beliefs

Negative core beliefs are fundamental, generalized beliefs that we hold about ourselves, other people, and the world. They usually develop in response to early life experiences.

The following are some common examples of negative core beliefs, check the ones you relate to and add ones of your own:

- ☐ I am undesirable,

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- [ ] I have nothing to offer.

- [ ] I am weak,

- [ ] I am flawed, weird, not normal.

- [ ] I am incompetent,

- [ ] I am inferior,

- [ ] I am worthless,

- [ ] I deserve punishment, pain, suffering.

- [ ] _____

- [ ] _____

- [ ] _____

- [ ] _____

- [ ] _____

- [ ] _____

- [ ] _____

- [ ] _____

- [ ] _____

Cognitive Distortions

We tend to experience distorted thoughts (cognitions) that are unreasonably negative especially after an upsetting event. These distortions can occur so rapidly that we hardly notice them let alone challenge their logic. Yet they affect our mood and sense of worth so profoundly.

The following is a list of 12 Cognitive Distortions categories. Check the ones you tend to engage in often:

1	**Catastrophizing:** Automatically assuming the worst possible outcome.		7	**Dwelling on the Negative:** Focusing on the negative aspects of a situation, while ignoring the positive ones.	
2	**Shoulds (Musts/Oughts):** Rigid demands and expectations we set for ourselves.		8	**Rejecting the Positive:** While dwelling on the negative overlooks the positive, to reject the positive is to actually negate it.	
3	**The Fairy-Tale Fantasy:** Demanding and expecting the ideal from life.		9	**Unfavorable Comparisons:** Magnifying our faults and/or the strengths of others and minimizing our strengths and/or the faults of others.	
4	**Polarized Thinking:** (also called all-or-nothing, or black and white thinking) Thinking in extremes.		10	**Personalization:** Blaming ourselves for circumstances that are not really our fault or that are beyond our control.	
5	**Overgeneralizing:** Deciding that a negative experience describes our life completely.		11	**Blaming:** While personalizing puts all the responsibility on yourself, blaming puts it all on something outside of yourself.	
6	**Labeling:** Giving ourselves a label, or name, as though a single word can describe us completely.		12	**Emotional Reasoning:** This is when we turn feelings into facts. (e.g, "I feel worthless. I must be worthless.")	

The CBT Thought Record

This is a great tool to become aware of and challenge your negative thoughts.

Situation/Trigger (event/person/memory/feeling)	Emotions (feelings and physical sensations) Rate intensity 0-10	Negative Thoughts	Supporting Evidence What evidence supports negative thought?	opposing Evidence What evidence opposes negative thought?	Alternative Thought What is more realistic way of thinking?

The ABC Form

The ABC Model is a tool that will help you examine behaviors you want to change, the triggers behind those behaviors, and the impact of those behaviors on negative or maladaptive patterns.

"A" refers to the antecedent, or the event or activity that immediately precedes a problem behavior. The "B" refers to observed behavior, and "C" refers to the consequence, or the event that immediately follows a response.

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence (What are the positives/negatives)
	Unhelpful Behavior (what I want to change)	
	Helpful Behavior	

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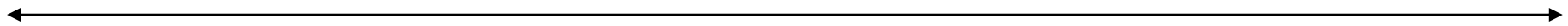
The Self Perception Continuum

This is a great tool to help you view yourself in a more realistic way.

How do you value yourself?

Totally worthless   Totally worthwhile

⟵───⟶

0%   100%

Arrogant	Humble
Cruel	Empathetic
Dishonest	Honest
Disloyal	Loyal
Resentful	Forgiving
Selfish	Helpful
Disrespectful	Respectful
Greedy	Generous
Ungrateful	Appreciative
Unreliable	Reliable
Vindictive	Compassionate
Hostile	Friendly
Irresponsible	Responsible
Abusive	Caring
Callous	Genuine

Worry – Thinking Time

Many of us believe that by worrying we're attending to the problem, however, research shows that worry doesn't change the outcome and overtime increases intolerance of uncertainty.

Research also revealed that 85% of the things we worry about never actually happen, and the remaining 15%, 11% happen in a much less severe manner than predicted, and for the remaining 4% worrying won't change the outcome.

Worry-thinking time is a great tool to interrupt worry in a gradual manner.

Set a regular daily time aside as a dedicated worry-thinking time. Make sure it's not before bedtime.

When you find yourself worrying throughout the day, use the first table to suspend worrying, and use the second table to manage worrying.

Worry suspension (outside of worry-thinking time)

What am I worried about specifically?	
What outcomes am I predicting?	
How does this make me feel? (Rate 0-10)	
What time am I dedicating for later consideration of this worry?	

Worry management (worry-thinking time)

What evidence supports my predicted worry?	
What evidence opposes my predicted worry?	
What is the worst that could happen?	
What is the best that could happen?	
What are the consequences of worrying about this?	
What is an alternative way of thinking about this? What would I tell a friend in the same situation?	
What is most helpful course of action?	
How distressing is the issue now? (Re-rate 0-10)	

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Linking Feelings and Appraisals

Appraisals (meaning we give situations) influence the way we feel. By changing appraisals, we can change our feelings.

Situation	Meaning	Feeling	Alternative Meaning	New Feeling
e.g., I made an error at work	I'm incompetent	shame	Everyone makes mistakes occasionally	compassion

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