



OVERCOMING DEPRESSION – SECTION 5 WORKING WITH OUR THOUGHTS – 2

CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy) is **NOT** about learning to think in a positive manner or about telling you what to think. It is about learning to view our circumstances in as **accurate** manner as possible and about learning **how** to think by not taking our thoughts as facts. The proverbial glass is neither half full nor half empty. The glass has a certain size (e.g., 200 ml) and it holds a certain amount of liquid in it (e.g., 100 ml). Once you know how much water you have and whether you feel thirsty, you can decide what to do. Just imagine being parched but refusing to drink because you believe that it will not be enough anyways or going to the buffet restaurant, paying for it, and emerging hungry because your favorite dish was not on the menu. CBT teaches pragmatism, i.e., learning to do what is needed to take care of things despite our emotional apprehensions. To be pragmatic, you need an accurate view of your circumstances (hence thought records). The hope is that you practice often enough so that asking yourself clarifying questions will become your new way of thinking.

THOUGHTS ABOUT THOUGHT RECORDS

1. Thought records are emotionally difficult because they force you to write down what you might want to avoid. Yet, without writing it down, you might never be able to recognize or face the inner assumptions that guide you.
2. Doing a thought record might feel like doing an exposure exercise: Initially the experience of emotional distress gets higher but if you complete the exercise, the distress will be lower than when you started. Unfortunately, if you initiate the exercise but stop at midpoint, you may leave feeling worse than when you started.
3. Some people end up by just drawing a blank and have very hard time noticing their thoughts. This might be because of strong emotional response that makes it very difficult to go where it hurts or because they are not used to having a look at what is going inside of their minds. To remedy that, it might be worth your while to make time couple of times during the day to just see if you can observe your thoughts. Literally: pause, grab a piece of paper or your phone and just record what you are able to notice inside of your mind. If the only thing that comes to your mind is “%\$#! *This is stupid*” then that is exactly what goes on your thought record. We have a natural tendency to produce thoughts but observing thoughts is something new.
4. You need to do quite a bit of thought records to internalize the habit of asking yourself clarifying questions and getting a balanced view. Again, the idea is not necessarily changing some of the thoughts permanently – thought rigidity is never good whether our thoughts of positive or negative. Our goal is to build a habit of asking clarifying questions whenever we find ourselves feeling unnecessary pain. Life is difficult. There is no need for our mind processes to make it more difficult than it has to be.
5. Sometimes your balanced statement is exactly the same as the initial thought (e.g., “I have been let go from work and now have financial difficulties” or “My partner does not care about me.”). Such statements tend to be less extreme but nevertheless reflect the truth of our situation (“I have financial difficulties’ as opposed to “I am going to starve and die” or “My partner does not care about me” as opposed to “I am unlovable”.) If that is the case, you need to ask yourself what can be done about this situation (and might have to do a thought record if you think that nothing will change no matter what you try). If you remain preoccupied with a certain event, then you need to ask yourself what you hope to accomplish by such preoccupation and how will you know that you have done enough thinking.

6. *“I did a thought record on that issue once, so I won’t have to do it again.”* This is unfortunately false. You might have to do multiple thought records on many different aspects of issues that you’re facing and then work on changing your behaviour habits as well. It gets significantly easier as you move along but one thought record will not be enough to get you untangled.
7. *“I finished all the group assignments, feel better and now I am “free” from thought records”.* Nope. Thought records are little like meds. They work when you’re using them and stop working when you stop. You will need to rely less and less on thought records as you go along because your thinking habits will change. Looking for evidence for and against your conclusions will become automatic. Yet there will still be times when you might feel excessive levels of pain that don’t seem to quite match your circumstances when you might have to use a thought record.

THINKING SHORTCUTS (COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS)

ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING refers to a habit of thinking in extremes and judging things as either good or bad but having hard time finding the middle ground or a range of judgements. This often makes our decisions faster but actually makes us very rigid. Those of use with predisposition towards all-or-nothing thinking also tend to act in an all-or-nothing manner – we either fully engage in a relationship or go totally cold, study for days and nights in a row or give up before trying.

GENERALIZING should actually be referred to as over-generalizing. It is a tendency to see patterns where there are none and make predictions based on prior experiences that might not even be relevant to what we are dealing with in present. Generalizing facilitates learning but we need to be able to differentiate between situations in which old learning applies and situations where it does not. It is simply not advisable to follow Australian rules of the road in Canada or to treat all your significant others in an identical manner.

DISOUNTING THE POSITIVES is part of an attentional process that keeps us aware of dangers at the expense of not being able to focus on good aspects of our circumstances. In other words, what is good is no longer important because we already achieved while what is not good needs fixing. This is closely related to perfectionism. Just imagine giving a presentation to a large audience and noticing that one of the participants leaves the room. It might be unnecessarily upsetting and should not deter you from noticing that there are still a lot of people in the room, some of whom linger to talk to you. They did not stay solely out of politeness while the person who left might have been dealing with an unrelated emergency.

PERSONALIZATION is a tendency to always examine events as if everything was about us or ours to fix. Yet we really have little choice but to personalize as after all we can only see the world through our own eyes. Curbing personalization requires us to look for those aspects of the situation that have very little to do with us and might not be ours to fix. If your significant other is looking upset upon returning from work, you might have done something to hurt their feelings in the morning but then it is also possible that they simply had a lousy day at work. You have to dare to ask.

EMOTIONAL THINKING occurs when we really excessively on our emotions as evidence. Our potential fear of heights does not mean that it is dangerous to work in an office on the 15th floor while our liking and occasional craving for chocolate ice cream does not mean that consuming large quantities of ice cream is a solution to life problems. On the other hand feeling the happiness from holding a newborn or the thrill of an achievement, promising relationship, vacation or dream job does not warrant examination. Otherwise we risk putting a damper on all good experiences in our lives.

THINKING IN IMPERATIVES refers to all of the “should have”, “must have” and “this should not be happening” statements. Using this terminology shifts our thinking into a domain of moral imperatives. In other words saying “*I made a mistake. The way to correct it is.....*” feels very different from “*I should not have made that mistake in the first place*”. Please remember two simple facts about our mind. One: our memory for our mistakes is much better than our memory for our accomplishments. Two: motivation through criticism does not work. The more you criticise yourself, the more uneasy you will feel and actually become more likely to make mistakes. These self-directed imperatives (could haves and should haves) are usually associated with feelings of guilt and shame.

Other-directed imperatives (“*They shouldn’t have done it to me*”, “*This should not have happened*”) are associated with anger. And you are right, people should not cut you off in traffic and a leaky pipe should not have ruined your property. You have the right to be angry. However, is it really useful to be angry?

Try to replace imperatives with statements of preference, such as “*I prefer not to make mistakes*” and “*I prefer for my life to go easy and not be cut off in traffic*”. Such statements still reflect the reality of your situation and thoughts you have about it but reduce feelings of resentment, guilt and shame.

DOUBLE STANDARD is our tendency to have very high expectations of ourselves while having lower expectations of other people and essentially trying to motivate ourselves by excessive criticism. So a good friend who gets 80% on an exam and requires 3 attempts to get their driver’s license is a good student who knows how to persevere while you are someone who cannot even muster an 85% and a total shmuck for having to retake your driving test, something you’d better keep to yourself. They are a great well-adjusted human being while you are a loser. Really?

Keep in mind that there is no need to become excessively vigilant to clean our thinking of all of the thinking shortcuts at all times. Whether you use the short version of the worksheet from last week or this week’s longer version is up to you and often depends on the amount of time you have. It is worth your while to try the long version couple of times as it will force you identify the cognitive distortions that trap you the most often. After that, remembering where your traps are, goes a long way towards avoiding them. The long version offers an initial window into hidden assumptions / schemas that might guide your behaviour even if these assumptions are not fully articulated in your mind.

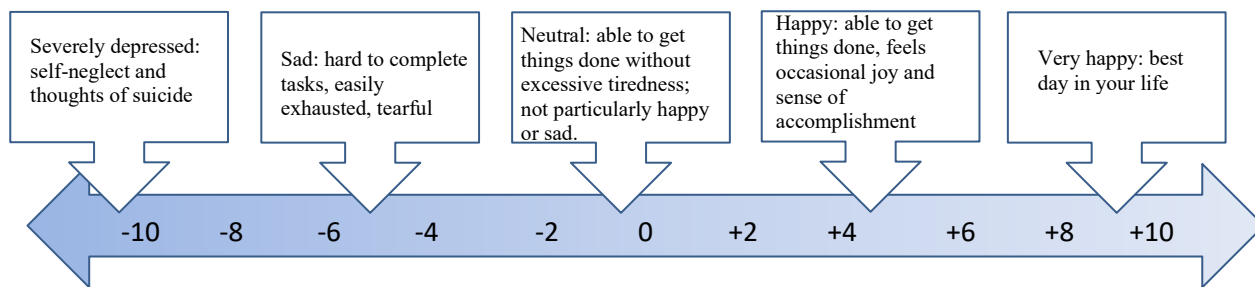
GAINING PERSPECTIVE – EXPANDED VERSION

REACTION	1: Situation Describe the situation in which you have experienced distressful emotions. Where were you? What were you doing?	
	2: Thoughts Write down thoughts that come/came to your mind. Circle the thought that causes the most distress. This is your hot thought that you will be working on. (If your thoughts are all questions (“whys” or “what ifs”), rewrite them as statements. For example, “Why does it happen to me?” becomes “This happens to me” and “What if I lose my job?” becomes “I will be jobless”.)	
	4: Physical Reactions - What physical reactions are you/were you experiencing	5: Emotions - What emotions are you / were you feeling?
	Rate your mood (-10 to +10) and energy (0 to 100)?	
COSTS AND BENEFITS	6: Behaviour urges - What do you feel like doing?	7: Behaviour function - What do you hope to accomplish by doing what you feel like doing?
	8: What are the benefits of focusing on the hurtful thoughts?	9: What are the costs of focusing on the hurtful thoughts?
GAINING PERSPECTIVE	10: What evidence do you have to support your hot thought in this situation?	11: Is there any evidence against your hot thought in this situation?
	12. Write a balanced statement that reflects facts about this situation.	
BUILDING EFFECTIVENESS	13: What are your objectives for this situation?	
	14: Given your objectives and your balanced statement, what can you do to make things closer to what you want? Write a brief action plan.	
	15. Are there any differences between your action plan and your behaviour urges that you have identified in box 7?	Re-rate your mood (-10 to +10) and energy (0 to 100)?

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KEEPING TRACK AND KEEPING HONEST



DATE:							
Rate your overall mood for the day using the scale above and mark it on the graph.	+10						
	+8						
	+6						
	+4						
	+2						
	0						
	-2						
	-4						
	-6						
	-8						
-10							
What challenges / stresses were you faced with today?							
Did you engage in any meaningful activity? If so, what was it?							
What skill have you practiced?	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective
What other things were you able to accomplish?							