COGNITIVE DISTORTION

WORKSHEET

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

Imagine walking into a funhouse at a carnival. The mirrors inside bend and twist your reflection, making you look taller, shorter, wider, or thinner than you really are. Cognitive distortions are like those funhouse mirrors, but instead of distorting your physical appearance, they twist your thoughts and perceptions.

WHAT ARE COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS?

Cognitive distortions are biased ways of thinking about oneself and the world. They are irrational thought patterns that can reinforce negative thinking and emotions. These distortions are like mental shortcuts our brains take when processing information, but instead of leading us down the right path, they often take us on detours that can cause emotional turmoil and stress.

WHY DO THEY HAPPEN?

Cognitive distortions often arise from our attempts to make sense of the world quickly and efficiently. However, this can lead to oversimplifications and errors in judgment. They are shaped by our past experiences, beliefs, and emotional states, and can be more pronounced during times of stress or when we are dealing with challenging situations.

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THE IMPACT ON OUR LIVES

Living with cognitive distortions can be like constantly navigating through that funhouse. It can be exhausting and disorienting. These distorted ways of thinking can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and a generally skewed perception of reality. They can affect our relationships, our work, and our overall quality of life by fostering negative self-talk and pessimistic outlooks.

RECOGNIZING AND CHALLENGING DISTORTIONS

The first step in breaking free from the grip of cognitive distortions is awareness. By recognizing when you are falling into these thinking traps, you can begin to challenge and reframe your thoughts. This process involves questioning the validity of your thoughts, seeking out evidence for and against them, and considering alternative perspectives.

BRINGING CLARITY TO THE MIND

Imagine replacing those funhouse mirrors with clear, accurate reflections. That's the goal when working through cognitive distortions. By aligning our thoughts more closely with reality, we can reduce emotional distress and improve our overall mental well-being. This journey requires patience and practice, but the rewards are well worth the effort.

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KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Cognitive distortions share several common characteristics that can help identify and understand them. Here are the key traits:

1. Automatic

Cognitive distortions often occur automatically and without conscious thought. They are the brain's default way of processing certain types of information, which means they can be difficult to notice without intentional reflection.

2. Irrational

These thought patterns are inherently irrational and inaccurate. They distort reality by exaggerating, minimizing, or completely altering the way we perceive events, ourselves, and others.

2. Habitual

Cognitive distortions are habitual in nature. Once established, they tend to recur frequently and become deeply ingrained in our thought processes, making them challenging to change.

4. Simplistic

Distorted thoughts are typically simplistic and overgeneralized. They rely on black-and-white thinking, where situations are seen in extremes, without recognizing the nuanced middle ground.

5. Negative Bias

There is a strong negative bias in cognitive distortions. They often focus on the negative aspects of situations while ignoring or discounting positive ones, leading to an unbalanced view of reality.

6. Self-Perpetuating

Cognitive distortions can be self-perpetuating. For example, believing that you will fail at something can lead to behaviors that contribute to failure, thereby reinforcing the original distorted belief.

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IMPACT OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Cognitive distortions can significantly impact mental health and overall quality of life. They can lead to:

Anxiety & Depression

Cognitive distortions like catastrophic thinking heighten anxiety and depression by focusing on negative outcomes and worst-case scenarios. This persistent negativity exacerbates emotional distress, creating a cycle of worry and sadness that deteriorates overall mental health.

Poor Decision-Making

Distorted thinking leads to poor judgment and decision-making by relying on irrational assumptions. This can result in avoidance of opportunities and choices driven by fear rather than objective evidence, hindering personal and professional progress.

Strained Relationships

Negative thinking patterns can significantly impact interpersonal relationships. Cognitive distortions such as mind reading or personalization can lead to misunderstandings with others. For instance, assuming that someone's behavior is a reflection of personal inadequacy can create tension and isolation. Over time, these distorted thoughts can damage relationships and contribute to social withdrawal or frequent conflicts.

Low Self-Esteem

Persistent cognitive distortions can erode self-confidence and self-worth. When individuals habitually engage in self-critical thoughts or label themselves negatively, they reinforce feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. This negative self-view can undermine self-esteem, making it difficult for individuals to recognize their strengths and value, and can contribute to a diminished sense of self-worth.

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EXPERTS IN COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

If you dig any deeper into cognitive distortions and their role in depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues, you will find two names over and over again: Aaron Beck and David Burns.

These two psychologists literally wrote the book(s) on depression, cognitive distortions, and the treatment of these problems.

Aaron Beck

Cognitive Distortions: The Birth of a Concept

Aaron Beck, often hailed as the father of cognitive therapy, revolutionized the field of psychology by shifting the focus from behavior to thoughts. Beck's journey into cognitive distortions began in the 1960s when he was working with patients suffering from depression. He observed that these patients often had a pattern of negative thinking that seemed to fuel their depressive symptoms.

Beck identified these patterns as "automatic thoughts" and began to categorize them into specific distortions.These two psychologists literally wrote the book(s) on depression, cognitive distortions, and the treatment of these problems.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

Key Contributions:

- **Identification and Classification:** Beck was the first to systematically identify and classify cognitive distortions. He discovered that patients with depression often engaged in specific types of faulty thinking, such as "all-or-nothing thinking" and "catastrophizing."
- **Cognitive Therapy:** Beck developed cognitive therapy as a method to address these distortions. His approach involves helping patients recognize and challenge their distorted thoughts, replacing them with more realistic and balanced thinking.
- **Empirical Validation:** Beck's work was groundbreaking because he emphasized empirical validation. He conducted rigorous studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of cognitive therapy in treating depression and other mental health disorders.

Unique Approach:

- Beck's method was innovative because it treated thought patterns as the root cause of emotional distress. Instead of focusing solely on behaviors, he targeted the underlying cognitions, paving the way for cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).

David Burns:

From Clinical Practice to Popular Psychology

David Burns, a student of Aaron Beck, played a crucial role in bringing the concept of cognitive distortions to a broader audience. His work built on Beck's foundations and made these ideas accessible to the general public.

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Key Contributions:

- **"Feeling Good":** David Burns authored the best-selling book "Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy," which made the concept of cognitive distortions accessible to a broad audience. The book explained how distorted thinking contributes to emotional issues and provided practical tools for individuals to identify and correct these patterns. By translating complex psychological concepts into relatable language, Burns empowered readers to take control of their mental health.

- **Self-Help Techniques:** Burns developed user-friendly techniques and exercises designed to help individuals recognize and address their cognitive distortions. His methods, including the "Daily Mood Log" and "Thought Records," offered structured approaches for tracking and challenging negative thoughts. These practical tools aimed to facilitate self-awareness and cognitive restructuring, making it easier for people to manage their emotional well-being.

- **Expanding the Scope:** Burns extended the application of cognitive distortions beyond depression to address other psychological issues such as anxiety, anger, and relationship problems. He demonstrated that distorted thinking is a common factor in various forms of psychological distress. By broadening the scope of his work, Burns highlighted the pervasive nature of cognitive distortions and their impact on diverse aspects of mental health.

Unique Approach:

- Burns' approach was unique in its accessibility. He demystified complex psychological concepts and provided tangible, easy-to-follow methods for individuals to help themselves. His engaging writing style and practical advice resonated with a wide audience, making cognitive distortions a household term.

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MOST COMMON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

1. ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING (BLACK-AND-WHITE)

All-or-nothing thinking, also known as black-and-white thinking, is a cognitive distortion where individuals perceive situations in extreme, absolute terms. This pattern of thinking does not acknowledge the nuances and complexities of reality. Instead, everything is viewed as either perfect or a complete disaster, with no room for middle ground or partial success. This binary way of thinking can lead to unrealistic expectations and significant emotional distress.

Example:

- Consider a student who is preparing for an important test. They might think, "If I don't get an A on this test, I'm a complete failure." This thought reflects all-or-nothing thinking because it reduces the outcome to two extreme possibilities: absolute success or utter failure. The student does not recognize the possibility of achieving a good grade that isn't necessarily an A, or the value in learning and improving from their mistakes.

Unique Approach:

- To illustrate the concept and help overcome this cognitive distortion, imagine a painter who only uses black and white paints. The resulting artwork would lack the richness and depth that comes from using a full spectrum of colors. Life, like a canvas, is inherently full of shades, tones, and colors. It's rarely just black and white; there are many grey areas and a multitude of hues that contribute to a more accurate and fulfilling picture.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "FINDING THE GREY"

Task: List situations where you've engaged in all-or-nothing thinking. For each situation, write down at least three "shades of grey" that exist between the extremes.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

2. OVERGENERALIZATION

Overgeneralization is a cognitive distortion where a person makes broad, sweeping conclusions based on a single event or a limited amount of evidence. This pattern of thinking leads to the belief that one negative experience signifies a persistent, unending pattern of failure or misfortune. It often involves using absolute terms such as "always" or "never," which contribute to a distorted and pessimistic view of reality.

Example:

- A classic example of overgeneralization is a person who has failed their driving test and then concludes, "I failed my driving test once; I'll never be able to get my license." This thought process unfairly extrapolates one instance of failure to an inevitable, ongoing inability to succeed in driving, ignoring any potential for improvement, learning, and future success.

Unique Approach:

- To better understand and counteract overgeneralization, envision a tree in its entirety. One leaf falling from the tree doesn't indicate that the entire tree is dying. Similarly, individual negative events should not be taken as definitive evidence that your entire life or future is affected.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "BREAKING THE PATTERN"

Task: Write down recent overgeneralizations. For each, list evidence that disproves the broad conclusion.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

3. MENTAL FILTER

Mental filtering is a cognitive distortion where an individual fixates solely on the negative aspects of a situation, effectively ignoring or dismissing any positive elements. This pattern of thinking distorts reality by creating a disproportionately negative perspective, often leading to feelings of discouragement, sadness, and anxiety. Over time, this can erode self-esteem and hinder one's ability to appreciate positive experiences.

Example:

- An illustrative example of mental filtering is receiving multiple compliments on a project but obsessing over a single piece of critical feedback. Despite the overall positive reception, the individual focuses exclusively on the negative comment, magnifying its significance and overshadowing the positive feedback.

Unique Approach:

- To counteract mental filtering, consider an analogy of using a sieve to pan for gold. In this context, panning for gold involves sifting through a mix of materials, where the goal is to retain the valuable gold particles and discard the dirt. Mental filtering, however, is like keeping only the dirt and discarding the gold. The key to overcoming this distortion is to reverse this approach by consciously focusing on the "gold" (positive details).

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "PANNING FOR POSITIVES"

Task: Describe a recent event where you focused on the negative. List at least five positive aspects you overlooked.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

4. DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVE

Discounting the positive is a cognitive distortion where individuals reject or downplay positive experiences and accomplishments by insisting they don't count. This mental habit prevents people from recognizing and appreciating their successes and strengths, maintaining a negative self-view that contradicts their actual daily experiences. By dismissing positive feedback and attributing successes to external factors like luck or the ease of the task, individuals reinforce a cycle of negative thinking and self-doubt.

Example:

- An example of discounting the positive is when someone performs well on a task but dismisses their achievement by saying, "I just got lucky," or "Anyone could have done it." This mindset negates the effort and skill involved, preventing the individual from internalizing and taking pride in their success.

Unique Approach:

- To overcome this cognitive distortion, think of positive experiences as seeds. Even if they seem small or unimportant, they can grow into something substantial if acknowledged and nurtured. Just like seeds need sunlight, water, and care to flourish, positive experiences need recognition and appreciation to positively impact your self-esteem and overall outlook.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "PLANTING POSITIVES"

Task: Write down compliments or positive feedback you've received recently. Challenge yourself to accept and believe each one, noting why it's valid.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

5. JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

A. Mind Reading

Mind reading is a form of cognitive distortion where an individual assumes they know what others are thinking, often interpreting these presumed thoughts in a negative light. This distortion can lead to unnecessary anxiety, misunderstandings, and strained relationships, as it is based on unverified assumptions rather than factual information.
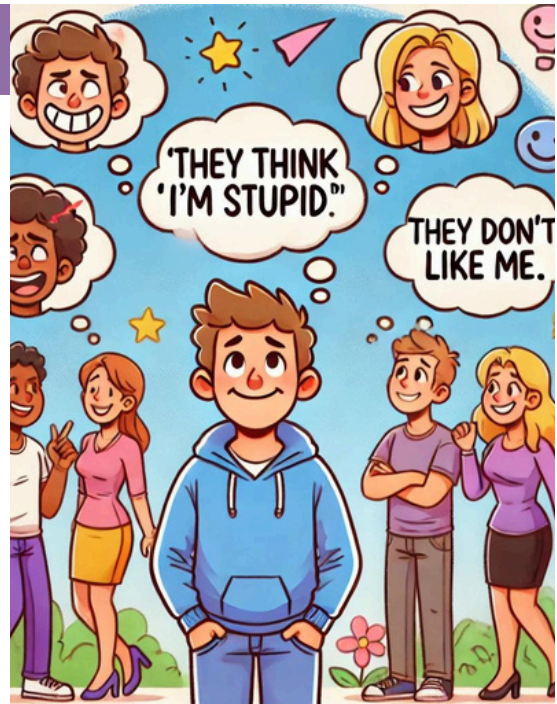
Example:

- A common example of mind reading is when someone thinks, "He didn't reply to my text; he must be mad at me." This assumption ignores other possible explanations, such as the person being busy, not seeing the message, or simply forgetting to reply. By jumping to a negative conclusion, the individual experiences unwarranted stress and may act on these unfounded beliefs, potentially harming the relationship.

Unique Approach:

- To address mind reading, consider adopting the mindset of a detective gathering evidence rather than making assumptions. This approach encourages you to seek out concrete clues before drawing any conclusions. Instead of jumping to negative interpretations, focus on collecting facts and observations that can help you form a accurate understanding. By doing so, you foster better communication, leading to healthy & positive interactions.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

"MIND READER'S CLUES"

Task: Write down assumptions you've made about others' thoughts. List evidence supporting and contradicting these assumptions.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

5. JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

B. Fortune Telling

Fortune telling is a cognitive distortion where individuals predict the future in a negative way, acting as if negative outcomes are already certain to happen. This type of thinking leads to anxiety, pessimism, and often a self-fulfilling prophecy where the negative expectations influence behavior and contribute to the feared outcome.

Example:

- A typical example of fortune telling is when someone thinks, "I know this job interview will be a disaster." This prediction is made without any concrete evidence and assumes failure as an inevitable outcome. Such a mindset can undermine confidence, reduce preparation efforts, and increase stress, thereby negatively impacting performance during the interview.

Unique Approach:

- To counteract fortune telling, consider the analogy of viewing the future through a cloudy crystal ball. This analogy helps illustrate that our negative predictions are often unclear and not based on reality. The key is to "clean the ball" by considering multiple potential outcomes and acknowledging the uncertainty of the future. By exploring various possibilities, both positive and neutral, you can better prepare yourself mentally and emotionally for any situation. This balanced perspective reduces anxiety and helps maintain a more optimistic and realistic outlook.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

"CLEARING THE CRYSTAL BALL"

Task: Write down a negative prediction. List alternative positive or neutral outcomes that could also happen.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

6. CATASTROPHIZING

Magnification (catastrophizing) and minimization are cognitive distortions where an individual either exaggerates the importance of problems (magnification) or downplays the importance of positive events or achievements (minimization). These distortions can lead to heightened anxiety, depression, and a skewed perception of reality. Magnification turns small issues into overwhelming obstacles, while minimization reduces the significance of positive experiences, leaving one feeling inadequate and unfulfilled.

Example:

- A common example of magnification is thinking, "I made a mistake at work; now everyone thinks I'm incompetent." This thought process blows a single mistake out of proportion, assuming it will have a catastrophic impact on one's reputation. On the other hand, minimization might involve receiving praise for a job well done but thinking, "It wasn't a big deal; anyone could have done it."

Unique Approach:

- To address magnification and minimization, imagine using a magnifying glass that can both enlarge and shrink. The key is to practice adjusting the "lens" to see things in their true size and perspective.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "ADJUSTING THE LENS"

Task: Write down worries you've magnified or achievements you've minimized. Re-evaluate them to find a more balanced perspective.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

7. EMOTIONAL REASONING

Emotional reasoning is a cognitive distortion where individuals assume that their negative emotions reflect the true state of affairs. This type of thinking suggests that if you feel a certain way, it must be true, regardless of the evidence to the contrary. Emotional reasoning can lead to a distorted view of oneself and the world, often reinforcing negative beliefs and behaviors. Over time, this can erode self-esteem, fuel anxiety and depression, and create a pervasive sense of hopelessness.

"EMOTIONAL REASSING"

Example:

- A common example of emotional reasoning is thinking, "I feel like a failure, so I must be a failure." This assumption equates a temporary feeling with a permanent state of being, disregarding any evidence of past successes or potential for future achievements.

Unique Approach:

- To counteract emotional reasoning, consider emotions as weather patterns—they're temporary and changeable, not a permanent reflection of reality. Just as the weather can shift from stormy to clear, your feelings can fluctuate and do not define your overall situation or worth. By recognizing the transient nature of emotions, you can develop a more balanced and realistic perspective on your experiences and reactions.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "WEATHERING THE STORM"

Task: Identify recent strong emotions and the thoughts they led to. Challenge these thoughts by considering alternative explanations.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

8. SHOULD STATEMENTS

"Should" statements are a form of cognitive distortion where individuals impose rigid rules or expectations on themselves or others. These statements often create an unrealistic standard, leading to feelings of guilt, frustration, and inadequacy when the expectations are not met. The use of words like "should," "ought to," or "must" implies a sense of obligation and pressure, which can be detrimental to one's mental and emotional well-being.

Example:

- A common example of a "should" statement is, "I should always be productive." This statement sets an unachievable standard that ignores the necessity of rest and relaxation, resulting in guilt and frustration when productivity is not constant.

Unique Approach:

- To address the negative impact of "should" statements, transform them into more flexible and compassionate language. Instead of "should," try using phrases like "it would be helpful if…" This subtle shift in wording promotes a kinder and more realistic perspective, reducing the pressure of unrealistic expectations. By doing so, you create a more supportive inner dialogue.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "REPHRASING SHOULDS"

Task: List "should" statements you frequently use. Rewrite each one using kinder, more flexible language.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

9. LABELING AND MISLABELING

Labeling and mislabeling are cognitive distortions where individuals assign negative and often exaggerated labels to themselves or others based on a single incident or a few pieces of evidence. This practice reduces a person's identity or character to a single negative trait, which can perpetuate feelings of inadequacy, shame, and resentment. Unlike more situational cognitive distortions, labeling makes broad, sweeping judgments that define a person's entire essence based on limited information.

Example:

- A common example of labeling is thinking, "I forgot my keys; I'm such an idiot." This statement takes a single mistake and generalizes it to a person's whole self, ignoring all other aspects of their intelligence and capability. Similarly, labeling others based on isolated actions can lead to unfair and harmful judgments, like calling someone "lazy" because they missed one deadline.

Unique Approach:

- To address the negative impact of labeling and mislabeling, imagine labels as sticky notes that can be removed or changed. This visualization helps reinforce the idea that these negative labels are not permanent and can be replaced with more accurate and constructive descriptions. By actively choosing to reframe and update these labels, you can foster a more positive and realistic self-image.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "RELABELING"

Task: Identify negative labels you've used. Replace each with a more accurate description of the situation.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

10. PERSONALIZATION

Personalization is a cognitive distortion where individuals blame themselves for events outside their control or take responsibility for the negative actions of others. This type of thinking can lead to unnecessary guilt, self-blame, and a distorted sense of responsibility. By taking on more responsibility than is warranted, individuals may overlook other factors that contribute to situations, further perpetuating a negative self-image.

Example:

- A common example of personalization is thinking, "My team lost because I didn't perform well enough." This statement places undue blame on oneself, ignoring the fact that team outcomes are influenced by many factors, including the performance of other team members, the strategy used, and external circumstances.

Unique Approach:

- To counteract personalization, imagine yourself as part of a larger puzzle. Not everything is within your piece; recognize the influence of other pieces. This perspective helps you understand that many factors contribute to an outcome, and it's not solely your responsibility. By acknowledging the contributions and influences of others, you can develop a more balanced and realistic view of situations and reduce unnecessary self-blame.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TITLE: "PUZZLE OF RESPONSIBILITY"

Task: Write down instances of personalization. Identify other factors and individuals that contributed to the situation.

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Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

TECHNIQUES TO COMBAT COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

These distortions, while common and potentially extremely damaging, are not something we must simply resign ourselves to living with.

Beck, Burns, and other researchers in this area have developed numerous ways to identify, challenge, minimize, or erase these distortions from our thinking.

Some of the most effective and evidence-based techniques and resources are listed below.

1. COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS HANDOUT

Before you can effectively challenge cognitive distortions, it's crucial to identify the ones you struggle with. This makes the Cognitive Distortions handout an essential resource. It details various types of cognitive distortions, helping you pinpoint those you might be experiencing.

The distortions listed include:

- All-or-Nothing Thinking;
- Overgeneralizing;
- Discounting the Positive;
- Jumping to Conclusions;
    - Mind Reading;
    - Fortune Telling;
- Magnification (Catastrophizing) and Minimizing;
- Emotional Reasoning;
- Should Statements;
- Labeling and Mislabeling;
- Personalization.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

2. AUTOMATIC THOUGHT RECORD

This worksheet is an excellent tool for identifying and understanding your cognitive distortions. Our automatic, negative thoughts are often related to a distortion that we may or may not realize we have. Completing this exercise can help you to figure out where you are making inaccurate assumptions or jumping to false conclusions.

The worksheet is split into six columns:

- Date/Time
- Situation
- Automatic Thoughts (ATs)
- Emotion/s
- Your Response
- A More Adaptive Response

Unique Approach:

First, you note the date and time of the thought.

In the second column, you will write down the situation. Ask yourself:

- What led to this event?
- What caused the unpleasant feelings I am experiencing

The third component of the worksheet directs you to write down the negative automatic thought, including any images or feelings that accompanied the thought. You will consider the thoughts and images that went through your mind, write them down, and determine how much you believed these thoughts. Additionally, you'll assess the intensity of the emotions you felt at the time and how strongly you identified with the accompanying mental images. This process helps in gaining a clearer understanding of the automatic thoughts and their impact on your emotions.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

After you have identified the thought, the worksheet instructs you to note the emotions that ran through your mind along with the thoughts and images identified. Ask yourself what emotions you felt at the time and how intense the emotions were on a scale from 1 (barely felt it) to 10 (completely overwhelming). This step encourages you to be precise about your emotional response, helping you to understand the strength and impact of these emotions on your overall mental state. By quantifying the intensity, you can better track your progress and recognize patterns over time.

Next, you have an opportunity to develop an adaptive response to those thoughts. This is where the real work happens, as you identify the cognitive distortions that are emerging and actively challenge them. By confronting and reframing these distorted thoughts, you can shift to a more balanced and realistic perspective, thereby reducing their negative impact on your emotions and behaviors. This process is crucial for fostering healthier thinking patterns and improving overall mental well-being.

Ask yourself these questions:
- Which cognitive distortions were you employing?
- What is the evidence that the automatic thought(s) is true, and what evidence is there that it is not true?
- You've thought about the worst that can happen, but what's the best that could happen? What's the most realistic scenario?
- How likely are the best-case and most realistic scenarios?

- Finally, you will consider the outcome of this event. Think about how much you believe the automatic thought now that you've come up with an adaptive response, and rate your belief. Determine what emotion(s) you are feeling now and at what intensity you are experiencing them.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

Intensity of Thought			
A More Adaptive Response			
Your Response			
Emotion(s) You Felt			
Automatic Thought(s) That Occurred			
Situation			
Date/Time			

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

3. DECATASTROPHIZING

This is a particularly good tool for talking yourself out of catastrophizing a situation.

The worksheet begins with a description of cognitive distortions in general and catastrophizing in particular; catastrophizing is when you distort the importance or meaning of a problem to be much worse than it is, or you assume that the worst possible scenario is going to come to pass. It's a reinforcing distortion, as you get more and more anxious the more you think about it, but there are ways to combat it.

First, write down your worry. Identify the issue you are catastrophizing by answering the question, "What are you worried about?" Be specific about the situation or outcome that is causing you anxiety. This step helps you pinpoint exactly what you're fearing, providing clarity on the problem at hand. By articulating your concern, you lay the groundwork for addressing and challenging the irrational thoughts contributing to your anxiety.

Once you have articulated the issue that is worrying you, you can move on to thinking about how this issue will turn out. Consider the potential outcomes and how likely each one is to occur. This step helps you assess whether your fears are grounded in reality or if you're engaging in excessive worry.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

Think about how terrible it would be if the catastrophe actually came to pass. What is the worst-case scenario? Reflect on whether a similar event has occurred in your past and, if so, how often it has happened. Consider the impact and your ability to handle past occurrences. With the frequency and impact of this catastrophe in mind, make an educated guess about how likely the worst-case scenario is to happen. This approach helps you assess the realism of your fears and understand how you have previously managed similar situations, which can provide reassurance and reduce the intensity of your current anxiety.

After this, think about what is most likely to happen–not the best possible outcome, not the worst possible outcome, but the most likely. Consider this scenario in detail and write it down. Note how likely you think this scenario is to happen as well.

Next, think about your chances of surviving in one piece. How likely is it that you'll be okay one week from now if your fear comes true? How likely is it that you'll be okay in one month? How about one year? For all three, write down "Yes" if you think you'd be okay and "No" if you don't think you'd be okay.

Finally, come back to the present and think about how you feel right now. Are you still just as worried, or did the exercise help you think a little more realistically? Write down how you're feeling about it.

This worksheet can be an excellent resource for anyone who is worrying excessively about a potentially negative event.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

1. What 'catastrophe' is bothering you?

Specify what you imagine will occur, avoiding "What if?" statements. Instead, rephrase these as precise predictions, e.g."I won't get job."
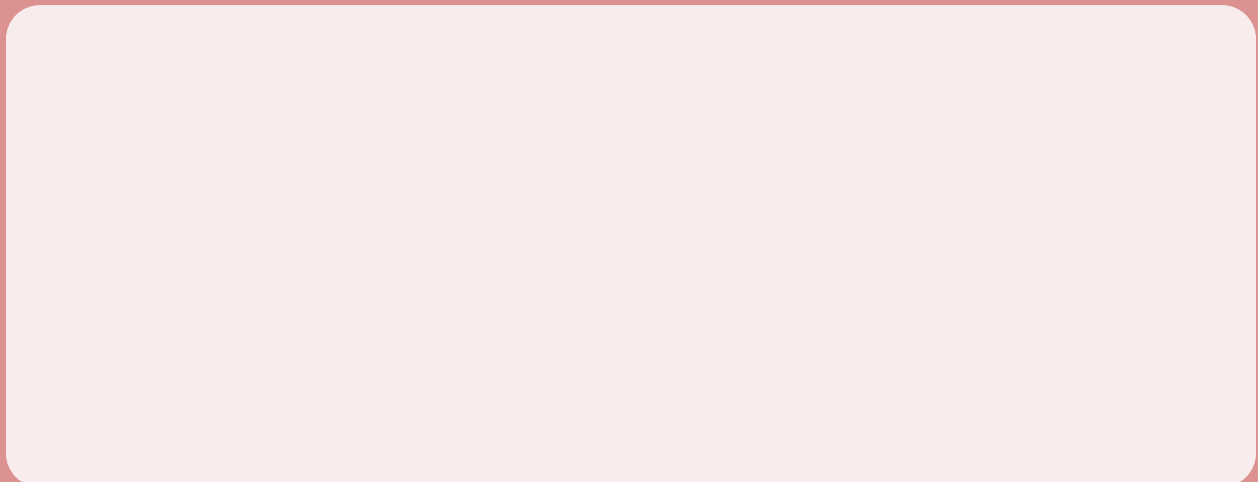
Rate how terrible you believe it would be out of 100%:

2. What is the likelihood of the catastrophe occurring?

In the past, has this ever happened before?

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

How frequently does this occur in real life?

3. How terrible would it be if your catastrophe really occurred?
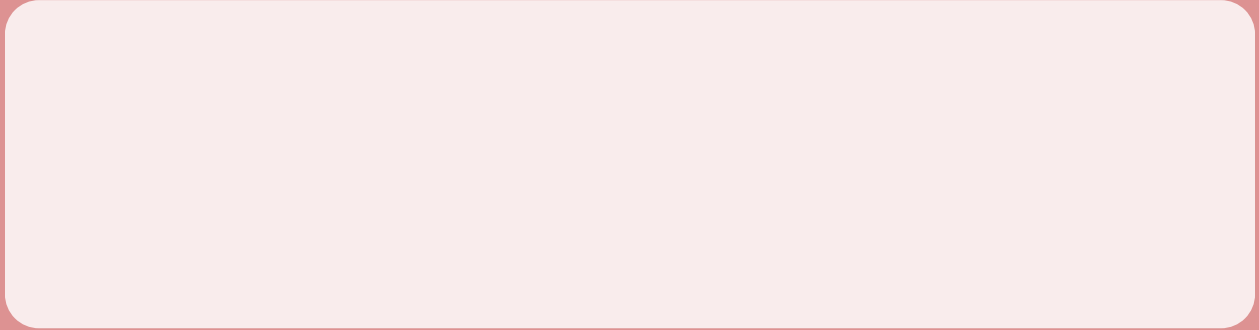
What would the worst possible outcomes look like?

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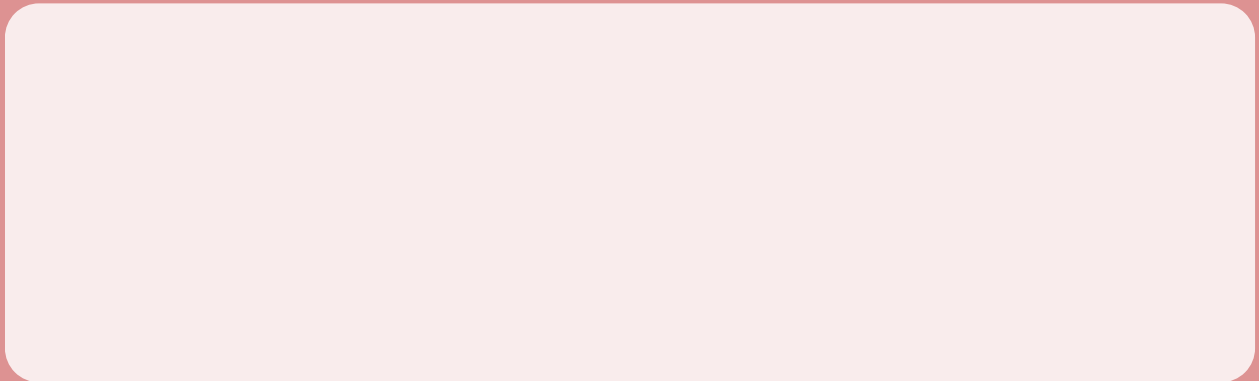
Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

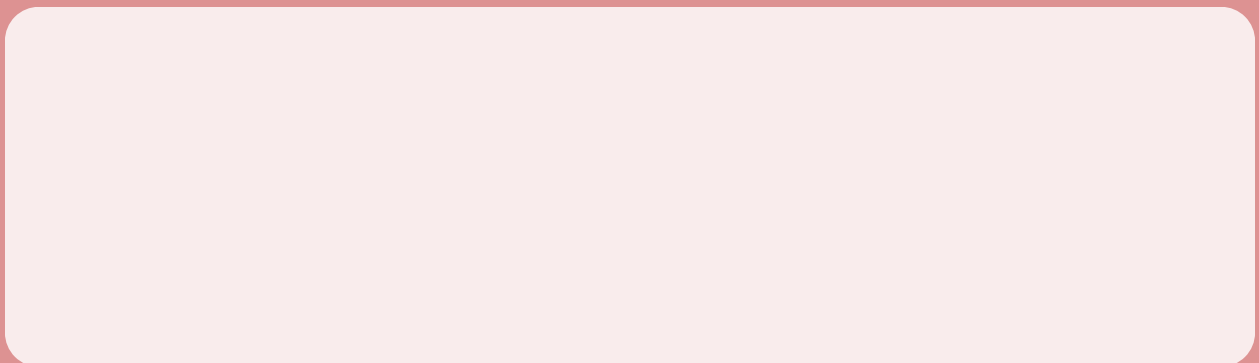What would the worst possible outcomes look like?

4. If the worst possible scenario occurred, how would you cope?
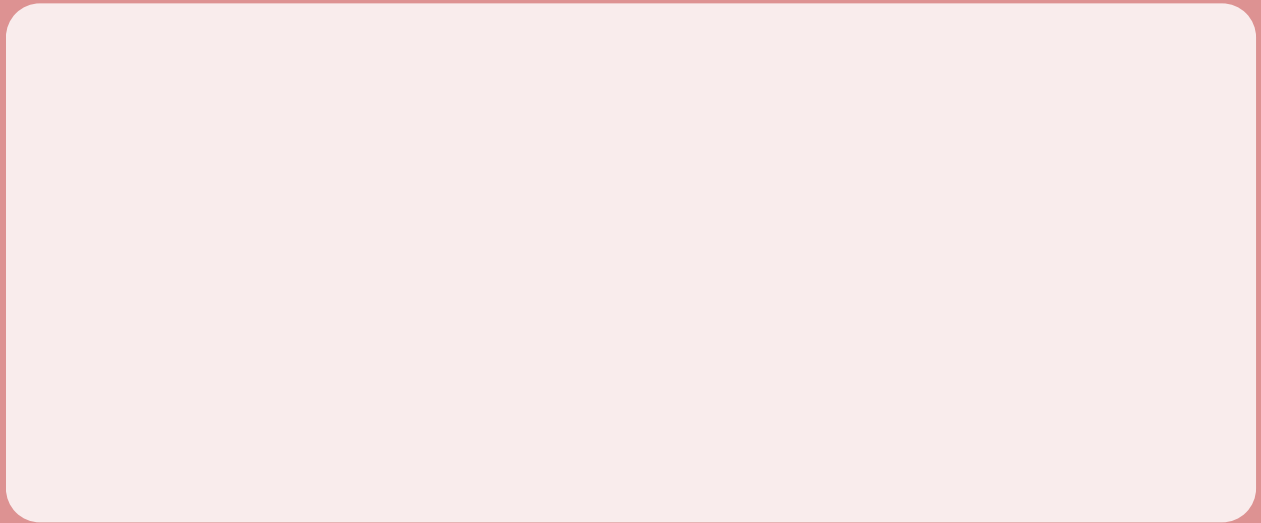
What would the worst possible outcomes look like?

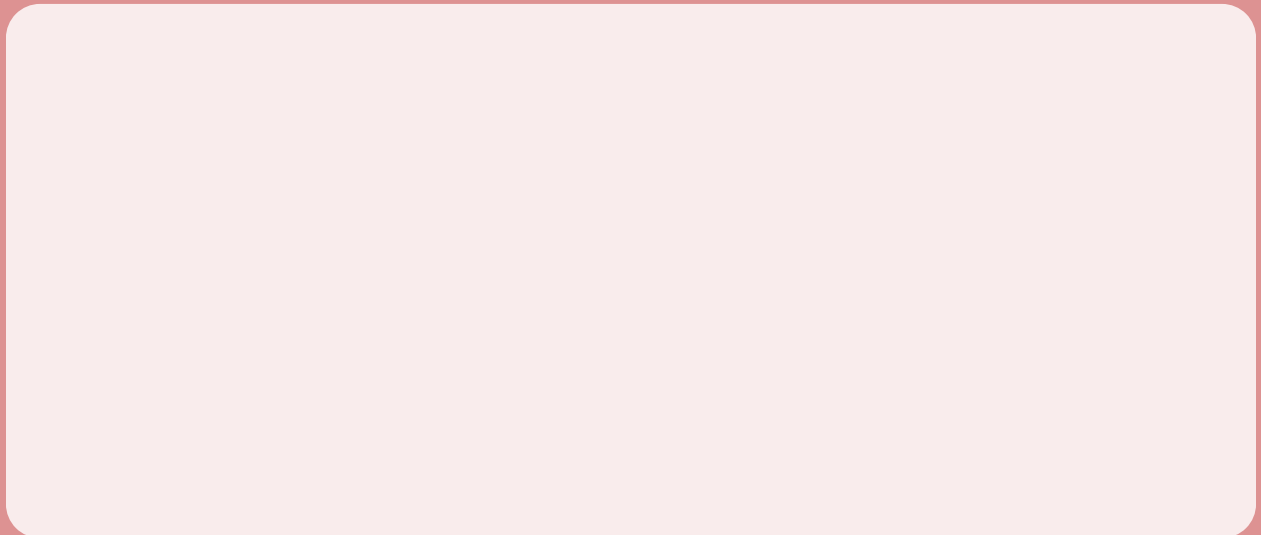What would the worst possible outcomes look like?

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

5. What is the most reassuring or positive thing you would like to hear?

What kind of thing would you like to hear to feel better?

What would put your mind at rest, and how would it sound?

Rate how terrible you believe it would be out of 100%:

# Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

4. CATALOGING YOUR INNER RULES

Cognitive distortions include assumptions and rules that we hold dearly or have decided we must live by. Sometimes these rules or assumptions help us to stick to our values or our moral code, but often they can limit and frustrate us.

This exercise can help you to think more critically about an assumption or rule that may be harmful.

First, think about a recent scenario where you felt bad about your thoughts or behavior afterward. Write down a description of the scenario and the infraction (what you did to break the rule). Be detailed in capturing the context, including who was involved and what specifically occurred. Reflect on the specific actions or thoughts that led to the feeling of guilt or discomfort, and consider how these actions deviated from your personal standards or expectations. This process helps you identify the root of your negative feelings and provides a foundation for analyzing and addressing the underlying issues.
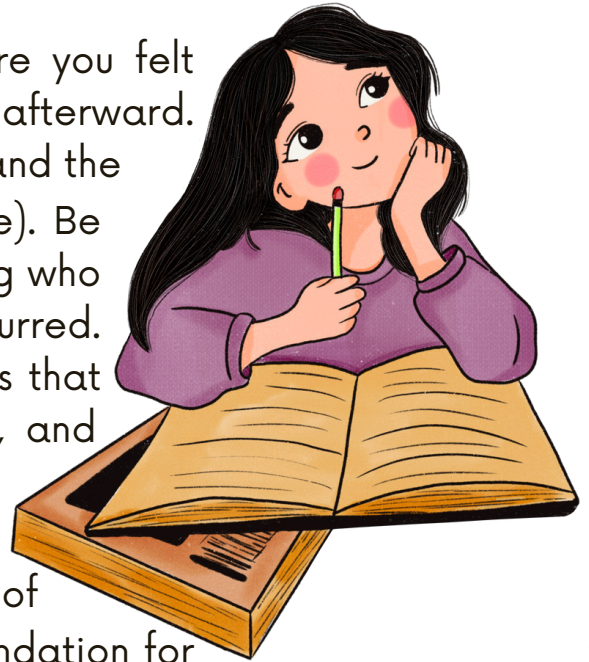
Next, based on your infraction, identify the rule or assumption that was broken. What are the parameters of the rule? How does it compel you to think or act? Consider the specific expectations or standards set by the rule, and how they influence your behavior and thought patterns. Reflect on whether the rule is rigid or flexible, and how strictly you adhere to it. Understanding these aspects helps you see how the rule might contribute to your feelings of guilt or discomfort

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

Once you have described the rule or assumption, think about where it came from. Consider when you acquired this rule, how you learned about it, and what was happening in your life that encouraged you to adopt it. What makes you think it's a good rule to have?

Now that you have outlined a definition of the rule or assumption and its origins and impact on your life, you can move on to comparing its advantages and disadvantages. Every rule or assumption we follow will likely have both advantages and disadvantages.

The presence of one advantage does not mean the rule or assumption is necessarily a good one, just as the presence of one disadvantage does not automatically make the rule or assumption a bad one. This is where you must think critically about how the rule or assumption helps and/or hurts you. Assess both the positive and negative impacts in a broader context, considering how this rule or assumption influences various aspects of your life. Evaluate whether the overall effect is beneficial or detrimental, and weigh its influence on your well-being, relationships, and personal growth. This nuanced analysis helps you make informed decisions about whether to adjust or abandon the rule or assumption based on its true impact.

Finally, you have an opportunity to think about everything you have listed and decide to either accept the rule as it is, throw it out entirely and create a new one, or modify it into a rule that would suit you better. This may be a small change or a big modification.

If you decide to change the rule or assumption, the new version should maximize the advantages of the rule, minimize or limit the disadvantages, or both. Write down this new and improved rule and consider how you can put it into practice in your daily life.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

THE INFRACTION

What did you do that broke one of your internal rules?

THE RULE

What rule did your behavior break? Why did you feel bad after engaging in that behavior?

THE RULE'S ORIGINS

Where did it come from? What makes you think the rule is right, or a good rule?

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

ADVANTAGES

How does this rule help you?

DISADVANTAGES

How does this rule hurt you?

What to Do with This Rule:

Keep It   Trash It   Modify It

THE RULE'S ORIGINS

what is the best possible version of this rule?

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

5. FACTS OR OPINIONS?

One of the foundational lessons in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is understanding the crucial distinction between facts and opinions. While it might seem straightforward, differentiating between the two can often be challenging in everyday life, especially when emotions and subjective experiences blur the lines.

Facts are objective and verifiable pieces of information that are not influenced by personal feelings or interpretations. They are tangible and can be proven true or false through evidence. For example, "The meeting is scheduled for 3 PM" is a fact because it is something that can be confirmed by checking the schedule.
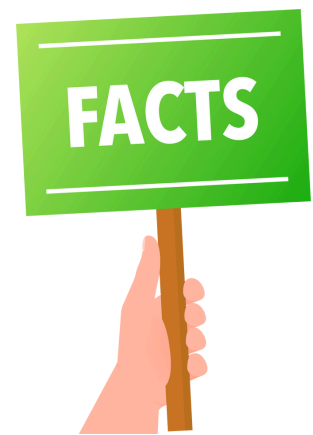
Opinions, on the other hand, are subjective beliefs that reflect personal feelings, or preferences. They are influenced by individual experiences and may vary from person to person. For example, "The meeting is too late in the afternoon" is an opinion because it reflects a personal judgment about the timing rather than an objective truth.

Why Distinguishing Matters:

- **Emotional Impact:** Mislabeling opinions as facts can harm self-esteem; recognizing them as opinions fosters self-compassion.
- **Decision Making:** Differentiating facts from opinions ensures decisions are based on objective evidence.
- **Communication:** Knowing the difference clarifies discussions and reduces misunderstandings.

This exercise can help you learn the difference between fact & opinion, & prepare you to distinguish between your own opinions & facts.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

#	Statements	True or False?	
		True	False
1.	I am a failure.		
2.	I'm uglier than him/her.		
3.	I said "no" to a friend in need.		
4.	A friend in need said "no" to me.		
5.	I suck at everything.		
6.	I yelled at my partner.		
7.	I can't do anything right.		
8.	He said some hurtful things to me.		
9.	She didn't care about hurting me.		
10.	This will be an absolute disaster.		
11.	I'm a bad person.		
12.	I said things I regret.		
13.	I'm shorter than him.		

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

1.	I am not loveable.		
2.	I'm selfish and uncaring.		
3.	Everyone is a way better person than I am.		
4.	Nobody could ever love me.		
5.	I am overweight for my height.		
6.	I ruined the evening.		
7.	I failed my exam.		

Answers:

- False
- False
- True
- True
- False
- True
- False
- True
- False
- False
- False
- True
- True

- False
- False
- False
- False
- True
- False

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

6. PUTTING THOUGHTS ON TRIAL

This exercise uses CBT theory and techniques to help you examine your irrational thoughts. You will act as the defense attorney, prosecutor, and judge all at once, providing evidence for and against the irrational thought and evaluating the merit of the thought based on this evidence.

The worksheet begins with an explanation of the exercise and a description of the roles you will be playing.

The first box to be completed is "The Thought." This is where you write down the irrational thought that is being put on trial. Capture the exact wording of the thought as clearly as possible, including any automatic assumptions or beliefs that come with it. This step helps you identify and articulate the specific thought patterns that may be causing distress. By isolating the thought in this way, you can more effectively analyze and challenge its validity throughout the exercise.

Next, you fill out "The Defense" box with evidence that corroborates or supports the thought. Include any facts, experiences, or feelings that validate the thought's validity. Once you have listed all of the defense's evidence, do the same for "The Prosecution" box. Write down all of the evidence calling the thought into question or instilling doubt in its accuracy, such as counterexamples, contradictions, or alternative perspectives.

When you have listed all of the evidence you can think of, both for and against the thought, evaluate the evidence and write down the results of your evaluation in "The Judge's Verdict" box.

This worksheet is a fun and engaging way to think critically about your negative or irrational thoughts and make good decisions about which thoughts to modify and which to embrace.

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

THE THOUGHT

THE DEFENCE
evidence for the thought

THE PROSECUTION
evidence against the thought

THE JUDGE'S VERDICT

Cognitive Distortion Worksheet

NOTES