

Cognitive Restructuring Exercise Worksheet

Introduction

Cognitive restructuring is a powerful tool to help you identify, challenge, and change negative thought patterns that may be holding you back. This worksheet will guide you through the process step-by-step. Take your time to complete each section thoroughly.

1. Identify the Trigger

Instructions:

Describe the situation that led to your negative emotions or thoughts.

- **What happened?** (Be specific about the event or situation.)
- **Where were you? Who was involved?**
- **How did you feel in the moment?**

Example:

- **Trigger:** My manager gave me critical feedback during a team meeting.
- **Feelings:** Embarrassed, anxious, and upset.

Your Response:

- **Trigger:** _____
 - **Feelings:** _____
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2. Record Your Automatic Thoughts

Instructions:

Write down the immediate thoughts that came to mind when the situation occurred. These are often negative, irrational, or distorted.

- **What were you thinking?**
- **What meaning did you attach to the situation?**

Example:

- "I'm terrible at my job."
- "Everyone thinks I'm incompetent."

Your Response:

- Automatic Thought(s): _____
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3. Identify Cognitive Distortions

Instructions:

Review your automatic thoughts and identify any cognitive distortions. These are common patterns of faulty thinking.

Common Cognitive Distortions:

- **All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Viewing situations in black-and-white terms.
- **Overgeneralization:** Assuming a single negative event will repeat endlessly.
- **Catastrophizing:** Expecting the worst possible outcome.
- **Personalization:** Blaming yourself for events outside your control.
- **Mind Reading:** Assuming you know what others are thinking.
- **Labeling:** Assigning a negative label to yourself.

Example:

- Automatic Thought: "I'm terrible at my job."
- Cognitive Distortion(s): Labeling, All-or-Nothing Thinking.

Your Response:

- Cognitive Distortion(s): _____
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4. Examine the Evidence

Instructions:

Challenge your automatic thoughts by examining the evidence for and against them. Be as objective as possible.

Prompts:

- What facts support this thought?
- What facts contradict this thought?
- Am I basing this thought on feelings or facts?

Example:

- Automatic Thought: "I'm terrible at my job."
- Evidence For: "I made a mistake on the project last week."
- Evidence Against: "I've received positive feedback in the past, and my last project was a success."

Your Response:

- Evidence For: _____
 - Evidence Against: _____
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5. Reframe the Thought

Instructions:

Develop a new, balanced, and constructive thought to replace your automatic negative thought. Focus on facts and a growth-oriented perspective.

Example:

- Original Thought: "I'm terrible at my job."
- Reframed Thought: "I made a mistake, but I've done well in the past. I can learn from this and improve."

Your Response:

- Reframed Thought: _____
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6. Plan a Response or Action

Instructions:

Decide on a specific action you can take to address the situation or reinforce your new thought. Focus on productive and realistic steps.

Prompts:

- **What can I do to improve or handle the situation better?**
- **How can I test this new thought in real life?**

Example:

- Action Plan: "I will ask my manager for feedback on how to improve and focus on doing my best in the next project."

Your Response:

- Action Plan: _____
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7. Reflect on the Process

Instructions:

Reflect on how completing this exercise has impacted your thoughts and feelings about the situation.

Prompts:

- **How do you feel now compared to when you started?**
- **What have you learned from this process?**
- **How can you use cognitive restructuring in the future?**

Example:

- Reflection: "I feel more in control and less anxious. I learned that my initial thoughts were exaggerated and not entirely true. I can use this process to stay grounded in future situations."

Your Response:

- Reflection: _____
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Additional Tools and Resources

Affirmations:

Create a list of affirmations or positive statements to reinforce your new, balanced thoughts.

Example:

- "I am capable of learning and improving."
- "Mistakes are opportunities for growth."

Journaling:

Keep a daily journal to track your thoughts, emotions, and progress in managing cognitive distortions.

Practice Exercises:

- Repeat this worksheet for different situations to strengthen your cognitive restructuring skills.
- Review your past entries periodically to notice patterns and growth.

By using this worksheet regularly, you can build resilience, develop healthier thought patterns, and empower yourself to handle challenging situations more effectively.