



Bodhi Life Balance

Mental Health Workbooks

THOUGHTS ARE NOT FACTS

Depression Skills Workbook

Workbook purpose

A practical guide for noticing painful thoughts, checking the facts, building balanced thoughts, and choosing one small next step.

For therapy sessions, crisis stabilization, school support, and personal reflection.



Understanding the Thoughts Are Not Facts Method

Depression can make thoughts feel heavy, believable, and final. A thought may show up in your mind with the force of truth, especially when you feel hopeless, tired, ashamed, overwhelmed, or alone. The Thoughts Are Not Facts Method helps you slow down and look at the thought before you obey it.

This workbook does not ask you to pretend everything is fine. It asks you to practice a more balanced skill: notice the thought, name what is happening, check what is true, and choose one small action that supports safety, stability, and self-respect.

A simple reminder

A thought is something your mind says. A fact is something that can be checked. Some thoughts contain useful information. Some thoughts are depression talking. You do not have to believe every thought just because it feels loud.

When to use this workbook

- When you feel stuck in sadness, shame, guilt, loneliness, or hopelessness.
- When your mind says things like, “I always mess up,” “Nobody cares,” or “Nothing will change.”
- When you are having a strong emotional reaction and want to slow down before deciding what to do.
- When you want a structured tool to use in therapy, school counseling, crisis follow-up, or personal journaling.

Safety note

If you are in immediate danger, feel unable to stay safe, or may hurt yourself or someone else, call 911, call or text 988, go to the nearest emergency room, or ask a trusted person to stay with you while you get help.

Why Depression Thoughts Feel So True

Depression often narrows attention. It can make the brain scan for proof that things are bad, ignore signs of progress, and replay painful memories. When this happens, the mind may confuse emotional intensity with evidence.

For example, the thought “I am a failure” may feel true because shame is present. But shame is a feeling, not a complete report about your life. A more accurate statement might be, “I made a mistake, I feel ashamed, and I can still take one repair step.”

The goal is balance, not fake positivity

Balanced thinking is not forcing yourself to say happy things you do not believe. Balanced thinking means building a thought that is more complete, fair, and useful. It should sound realistic enough that your mind can accept it.

Depression thought	Balanced direction
Nothing ever gets better.	Things feel stuck right now. Some small things can still change.
Nobody cares about me.	I feel alone. I can identify one person, service, or support I can reach toward.
I ruined everything.	Something went wrong. I can look at what happened and choose one repair step.
I cannot handle this.	This is hard. I can handle the next five minutes and ask for help if needed.
I am broken.	I am hurting. Being in pain is not the same as being broken.

The Five-Step Method

Use the same five steps each time. Repetition is the practice. You are teaching your brain how to pause, question, and choose a response instead of falling straight into the thought.

1. Notice the thought. Write down the exact words your mind is saying.
2. Name the feeling. Identify what emotion is present and where you feel it in your body.
3. Check the facts. Look for evidence for the thought, evidence against the thought, and missing information.
4. Build a balanced thought. Create a more complete thought that is honest, fair, and believable.
5. Choose one small action. Pick a next step that supports your safety, values, health, or connection.

The key question

Instead of asking, “Is this thought positive?” ask, “Is this thought complete, fair, and helpful enough to guide my next action?”

Common thought traps

Thought trap	What it sounds like	Question to ask
All-or-nothing thinking	If I am not perfect, I failed.	Is there a middle ground?
Mind reading	They think I am pathetic.	Do I know this, or am I guessing?
Fortune telling	This will never work.	What facts do I actually have about the future?
Emotional reasoning	I feel worthless, so I am worthless.	Can a feeling be intense and still not be a fact?
Discounting the positive	That did not count.	What am I refusing to give myself credit for?
Labeling	I am a loser.	What would be a more specific and fair description?

A Simple Example

The example below shows how the method works. The goal is not to win an argument against your mind. The goal is to slow the thought down enough to respond with skill.

Step	Example
1. Notice the thought	"I am useless. I cannot do anything right."
2. Name the feeling	Sad, ashamed, embarrassed, heavy in the chest, low energy.
3. Check the facts	I made a mistake today. I also got out of bed, answered one message, and kept an appointment last week. The thought is too broad.
4. Balanced thought	"I made a mistake and I feel awful. That does not make me useless. I can take one repair step."
5. Small action	Send one message, drink water, take a short walk, or ask for support.

Practice note

A balanced thought may not instantly change your mood. That is normal. The first win is creating a little space between you and the thought.

Fillable Worksheet Section

Use these pages when a painful thought shows up. You can write directly into the document or print the pages and write by hand. Take your time. One completed worksheet is progress.

How to use the worksheets

Start with the Quick Check-In. Then move through the Automatic Thought, Check the Facts, Balanced Thought, and Small Action pages. You do not have to complete every page perfectly. Use what helps you stay grounded and safe.

Before I begin, I can remind myself:

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|--|--|
| ☐ I do not have to believe every thought. | ☐ Feelings are real, but they are not always facts. |
| ☐ I can slow this down. | ☐ I can ask for help. |
| ☐ I can choose one small next step. | ☐ I can return to this worksheet later. |

Today I am using this workbook because:

One thing I want to feel or do by the end of this worksheet is:

Quick Check-In

Start with your body and your current level of distress. Depression thoughts often get louder when basic needs are low.

Area	My answer
Date and time	
Where am I right now?	
What happened before the thought showed up?	
Mood from 0 to 10	
Energy from 0 to 10	
Urge to isolate, give up, use, self-harm, or shut down from 0 to 10	
What does my body feel like right now?	

Basic needs check:

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|---|--|
| ☐ I have eaten today. | ☐ I have had water today. |
| ☐ I slept enough or need rest. | ☐ I have moved my body a little. |
| ☐ I have talked to another person today. | ☐ I may need extra support right now. |

Capture the Automatic Thought

Write the thought exactly as it appears in your mind. Do not clean it up. Do not judge it. Just capture it so you can work with it.

Automatic Thought Record
The situation that triggered this thought:
The exact thought my mind is saying:
The emotion connected to this thought:
What this thought makes me want to do:
What I am afraid might happen:

Tip

If your thought begins with “always,” “never,” “everyone,” or “nothing,” pause. Depression may be turning pain into a total statement.

Name the Thought Trap

Most painful thoughts have a pattern. Naming the pattern can make the thought less powerful.

This thought may include:

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|--|--|
| ☐ All-or-nothing thinking | ☐ Mind reading |
| ☐ Fortune telling | ☐ Catastrophizing |
| ☐ Emotional reasoning | ☐ Labeling myself |
| ☐ Discounting the positive | ☐ Should statements |
| ☐ Blaming myself for everything | ☐ Ignoring possible support |

The thought trap that seems strongest is:

I know this may be a thought trap because:

A kinder way to describe what is happening might be:

Check the Facts

This page helps you separate facts, feelings, guesses, and missing information. Be honest on both sides. The point is not to attack yourself or defend yourself. The point is to see the whole picture.

Question	My notes
What facts support this thought?	
What facts do not support this thought?	
What am I assuming?	
What information might be missing?	
What would I say to a friend who had this thought?	
What is one fact I may be ignoring because I feel depressed?	

Fact check reminder

A feeling can be true as an experience without being true as a conclusion. “I feel unwanted” is an emotion. “I am unwanted by everyone” is a conclusion that needs evidence.

Build a Balanced Thought

A balanced thought should be realistic, believable, and useful. It does not need to be cheerful. It needs to be more complete than the depression thought.

Prompt	My answer
Original thought	
What part of the thought may be understandable?	
What part of the thought may be incomplete or unfair?	
What is a more balanced thought?	
How believable is the balanced thought from 0 to 10?	
What would make it one point more believable?	

Balanced thought formula

"I am feeling ___ because ___. The full truth is ___. My next small step is ___."

Choose One Small Action

Thought work becomes stronger when it leads to action. Choose one small step that supports safety, health, connection, or self-respect.

Possible small actions:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Drink water | ☐ Eat something simple |
| ☐ Take a shower | ☐ Step outside for fresh air |
| ☐ Walk for five minutes | ☐ Text a safe person |
| ☐ Use a grounding skill | ☐ Clean one small area |
| ☐ Ask for help | ☐ Go to a safer place |

The one action I will take in the next 10 minutes is:

The obstacle that may get in my way is:

My backup plan is:

After I take the action, I will check my mood from 0 to 10:

Depression Action Ladder

When depression is heavy, big goals can feel impossible. Use this ladder to create tiny, medium, and stronger steps. Any step counts.

Level	Action I can try	When I will try it
Tiny step		
Tiny step		
Small step		
Small step		
Medium step		
Medium step		
Support step		

Examples

Tiny step: sit up, drink water, open the curtains. Small step: shower, text someone, take a five-minute walk. Support step: call 988, contact a counselor, return to a crisis center, or ask someone to stay with you.

Thoughts Are Not Facts Practice Log

Use this page as a quick version of the method. It can be copied and reused.

Step	My notes
Situation	
Automatic thought	
Feeling and body cues	
Thought trap	
Facts for and against	
Balanced thought	
One small action	
Mood before and after	

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Support and Safety Plan

Some thoughts need more than a worksheet. Use this page to identify when you need connection, professional support, or immediate safety help.

Warning sign	What I will do
My thoughts are getting darker or more hopeless.	
I am isolating and not responding to people.	
I am thinking about hurting myself.	
I have a plan, intent, or access to means.	
I feel unable to stay safe alone.	

Support	Name or number
Trusted person 1	
Trusted person 2	
Therapist, counselor, or case manager	
Crisis line	988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988
Emergency help	911 or nearest emergency room

When the Thought Comes Back

Depression thoughts may return. That does not mean the workbook failed. It means the brain is practicing an old pattern. Each time you notice the thought and respond with skill, you are building a new pattern.

You are not trying to erase every painful thought. You are learning to pause before believing it, check what is true, and choose a next step that keeps you connected to life.

My Personal Reminder

A depression thought I want to remember is not a fact:

A balanced thought I can practice:

One small action that usually helps me:

One person, place, or service I can reach toward:

Final reminder

You are allowed to have hard thoughts without letting them make every decision. Notice the thought. Check the facts. Build balance. Take one small step.