



How to Use Your Thought Record

A thought record is a powerful tool that helps you gain perspective on distressing thoughts, manage difficult emotions, and develop more balanced ways of thinking. This guide will walk you through each section of the thought record, offering tips on how to use it effectively.

1. Situation

What is happening?

Begin by describing the situation that triggered distressing thoughts or emotions. Try to be factual and objective—without adding interpretations or judgments.

✓ Example:

"I was at work, and my manager gave me feedback on a project. I felt like she was being critical and dismissive of my efforts."

2. Feelings

What emotions are you experiencing?

Identify the emotions you felt in the situation and rate their intensity on a scale from 0-100%. Try to be specific—naming emotions accurately helps you process them more effectively. Also, take note of any physical sensations.

✓ What to include:

- The emotions you are feeling (e.g., anxious, sad, frustrated, ashamed).
- Where you feel them in your body (e.g., tension in chest, lump in throat, tightness in stomach).

✓ Example:

"I felt anxious (80%), frustrated (60%), and self-doubt (75%). My chest felt tight, and I had a knot in my stomach."



3. Distressing Thought / Image

What thought or image is causing distress?

Write down the automatic thought or mental image that your mind generated in response to the situation. Explore why this thought feels distressing.

✅ What to include:

- The thought/image that came up.
- Why do you think this thought upsets you?

✅ Example:

"She thinks I'm terrible at my job. I'm not good enough, and I'll never succeed."

4. Take a Moment

🧘 Pause. Breathe. Reset.

Take a few slow, deep breaths. This helps ground you and create space between yourself and the distressing thought. Remind yourself:

Thoughts are not facts. Just because your mind presents something doesn't mean it is true or accurate.

✅ Tips for grounding yourself:

- Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4, and exhale for 6. Repeat.
- Notice what's around you—engage your senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste).
- Name five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can feel, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.



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5. Alternative Perspective

Is there another way to see this situation?

This step challenges the distressing thought and helps create a more balanced perspective. Ask yourself:

- Is there evidence that this thought might not be entirely correct?
- Are you focusing on the worst-case scenario?
- What is a more balanced or helpful way of thinking about this?
- If a friend were struggling with this, what would you say to them?
- What strengths or past experiences show that I can handle this?

✅ Example:

"My manager gave me feedback, but she didn't say I was terrible. Maybe she was just trying to help. I've received positive feedback before, and I'm always learning. One project does not define my worth."

6. How Do You Feel Now?

What has shifted?

Reflect on how you feel after considering a more balanced perspective. Have your emotions changed? What insights have you gained? If the situation arises again, how might you handle it differently?

✅ Example:

"I feel less anxious (50% instead of 80%) and more confident (50% instead of 25%). I realise that I tend to be self-critical and jump to worst-case thinking. Next time, I will remind myself to consider the full picture before reacting."

Final Thoughts


Using this thought record regularly can help you become more aware of unhelpful thinking patterns and develop a more compassionate, balanced mindset. The more you practise, the easier it becomes to manage difficult thoughts and emotions effectively.



Tip: Don't worry about getting it perfect—this is a tool for self-reflection, not a test! Be kind to yourself in the process.




Thought Record

Situation	Feeling	Distressing thought	Take a Moment	Alternative perspective	How do you feel now?
<p>Without judgment, what's going on? Describe the situation in detail. What happened? Where were you? Who was involved? What are you doing (or avoiding)?</p>	<p>What emotions are you experiencing? Rate the intensity of each emotion (0-100%) Where do you feel this in your body?</p>	<p>What is the thought or image that is causing distress? Why is this upsetting you? What does this thought say about you, others, or the future?</p>	<p>Pause </p> <p>Take slow, deep breaths</p> <p>Remind yourself: Thoughts are not facts.</p>	<p>Challenge the thought with curiosity: Is there evidence that this thought might not be entirely correct? Are you focusing on the worst-case scenario? Is there a more balanced or helpful way to see this? If a friend were struggling with this, what would you say to them? What strengths, experiences, or resources show that you can manage this?</p>	<p>How do you feel now? Have your emotions shifted? Without judgment, what have you learned from this? Is there a small action you can take to move forward?</p>



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