

CHALLENGING OUR NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

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DO YOU HAVE A NEGATIVE NARRATIVE?

Do you often have a negative view of yourself, or **are you highly self-critical**? When someone offers constructive criticism at work, does it feel more personal or overwhelming than intended? Or do you notice recurring negative thoughts about yourself, causing any perceived criticism to trigger a strong emotional reaction?

WHAT IS CBT?

The thought record is one of the most impactful techniques, and it was founded by Aaron Beck, the founder of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). This structured tool helps individuals identify and challenge negative automatic thoughts. It has substantial evidence supporting its effectiveness in recognizing patterns of negative thinking, challenging unhelpful beliefs, and reframing thoughts in a more constructive way.

MY MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY

As someone who has navigated my mental health journey, including extensive therapy for childhood and adult trauma, I found that using a CBT thought record was particularly transformative. After learning about the science behind EMDR and other therapeutic techniques, **I realized how powerful it is to put thoughts into writing.** Research shows that writing helps process emotions and enhances memory retention. By deliberately replacing negative thoughts with truthful, constructive narratives, I could more easily recall these positive reframes in moments of self-doubt or distress. Over time, my brain began countering negative self-talk, instinctively reinforcing healthier perspectives.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

A standard thought record includes sections documenting the situation, automatic thoughts, emotions, and alternative thoughts. This tool helps individuals become aware of how their thoughts shape their feelings and behaviors and provides a method for shifting unhelpful thinking patterns.

THE ART OF APPLICATION AND THE KNOWING WHEN TO SEEK HELP



CAN I DO THIS BY MYSELF?

The beauty of CBT is its adaptability—it can be used by anyone, regardless of their background in mental health education. This is not something that requires a mental health professional to complete. I **personally keep a journal nearby** for those days when I need to identify why someone's words or actions toward me seem to have a significant impact or when I catch myself not being kind to myself over simple things, like forgetting to complete a task before a deadline—both personally and professionally.

HOW CAN I APPLY THIS IN DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF MY LIFE?

This technique is easy to have in your toolbox, along with all the other amazing skills you may have. **For me, practicing this technique has been a game-changer!** I even implement it in my parenting, specifically for my son, who is in elementary school. Through his autism, he has struggled with having a negative view of himself. I don't necessarily have him write it out, but I verbally walk him through it. This way, whatever his initial negative thoughts about himself are, they will not only be challenged with truth but also help him realize how untrue his self-perception can be. He is a brilliant boy—though he may struggle in some areas more than his peers, his strengths surpass the challenges that may feel overwhelming to him at the moment.

EVEN WITH OTHER RELATIONSHIPS?

Practicing this technique over the past five or seven years has been extremely helpful for other relationships, such as friendships. For instance, a friend once called me upset, struggling, and extremely hard on herself. I first asked for consent and if she would be open to doing an exercise with me. I instructed her to grab a piece of paper and a writing utensil and then to make eight horizontal columns on a blank sheet. From there, I walked her through the questions that you will see in the example below, reflecting something similar to what was upsetting her and something I struggled with myself due to ADHD. To no surprise, by the time we finished the exercise, she **felt much calmer and more regulated**. I could help someone you know as well.

FINAL THOUGHTS: UNDERSTANDING WHEN YOU NEED MORE THAN A THOUGHT RECORD

*While this tool can be incredibly beneficial, it is essential to recognize that if you are struggling with suicidal thoughts, seeking professional mental health support is vital. Therapy is not a response to a crisis but a proactive way to prevent one. Emotional maturity includes understanding that everyone can benefit from mental health counseling. **Therapy equips us with tools to navigate life's inevitable challenges with greater confidence and resilience.** Investing in your mental well-being is not a sign of weakness—it is a powerful step toward self-growth and stability. If you feel vulnerable and are contemplating suicide, please call or text 988. Even if you are not suicidal but are so overwhelmed and unable to calm down, I can assure you that the individuals on the other end of that line are not only trained but the most fantastic listeners you have ever encountered!*

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT RECORD

THE SITUATION

What happened?

I missed a work deadline that I had planned to complete today.

MY FEELINGS/EMOTIONS

How intense are your feelings?
(Rate 0-10)

Frustrated, anxious, self-critical
8/10.

AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

How true do you feel these thought to be?

"I always miss deadlines." "I am unreliable, and my team can't depend on me." "My boss will be disappointed in me." 100% True

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING MY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

"This is not the first time I have been late submitting something." "I had extra time to finish, but I still didn't complete it." "I had to ask for an extension before."

EVIDENCE OPPOSING MY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

"I met all my other deadlines this month on time." "The workload this week was unexpectedly high, making it difficult to meet this deadline." "My boss has never raised concerns about my reliability in the past."

ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS

What could you say instead?

I faced unexpected challenges this week, and I can learn from this experience to better manage my workload in the future." "No one is perfect, and occasional delays happen to everyone."

HOW AM I FEELING NOW?

Rate the emotions you first had
(0-10)

More reassured and confident in my abilities – 3/10. I recognize that missing one deadline does not make me incompetent or unreliable. I can take steps to improve time management moving forward.

HOW TRUE DO I THINK MY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ARE NOW?

(Rate 0-100%)

0%

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT RECORD

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What happened?

MY FEELINGS/EMOTIONS

How intense are your feelings?
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How true do you feel these
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EVIDENCE SUPPORTING MY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

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ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS

What could you say instead?

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