



Spokane Holistic Healing Client Handout

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Exercises for Negative Thinking

Here are some **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** exercises that you can practice to help manage thoughts, emotions, and behaviors more effectively:

1. Thought Record Exercise

Purpose: To identify and challenge negative thoughts.

How it works:

- **Step 1:** Write down a situation where you experienced a negative emotion or reaction.
 - **Step 2:** Record the automatic thoughts that came to mind during that situation (e.g., "I'll never succeed" or "They must not like me").
 - **Step 3:** Identify the emotional response you had (e.g., sadness, anxiety).
 - **Step 4:** Rate the intensity of the emotion on a scale from 0 to 100.
 - **Step 5:** Challenge the automatic thoughts by asking yourself:
 - What evidence supports this thought?
 - What evidence contradicts it?
 - Are there alternative explanations?
 - **Step 6:** Reframe your original thought into a more balanced and realistic one.
 - **Step 7:** Re-rate your emotional intensity after this process.
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2. Cognitive Restructuring Exercise

Purpose: To replace negative or irrational thoughts with more rational, helpful thoughts.

How it works:

- **Step 1:** Identify a negative or irrational thought you regularly experience.
 - **Step 2:** Examine the belief in detail (e.g., "I am a failure" or "This will never get better").
 - **Step 3:** Ask yourself:
 - Is there evidence to support this thought?
 - Is the thought helpful or harmful?
 - What would I tell a friend who had this thought?
 - **Step 4:** Challenge and reframe the thought with a more rational, positive statement. For example, "I made a mistake, but that doesn't define me as a failure. I can learn from this."
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3. Behavioral Activation Exercise

Purpose: To reduce feelings of depression by increasing engagement in positive, rewarding activities.

How it works:

- **Step 1:** Make a list of activities you enjoy or used to enjoy but may have stopped doing (e.g., walking, reading, socializing).
 - **Step 2:** Rank them from most to least enjoyable or easiest to hardest.
 - **Step 3:** Set small, manageable goals to engage in one activity per day.
 - **Step 4:** After completing the activity, reflect on how you felt before, during, and after.
 - **Step 5:** Track your progress and reward yourself for engaging in these activities.
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4. Exposure Exercise (for Anxiety or Phobias)

Purpose: To gradually confront and reduce anxiety toward feared situations.

How it works:

- **Step 1:** Identify a fear or anxiety-provoking situation you want to confront (e.g., public speaking, elevators).
 - **Step 2:** Break it down into smaller, more manageable steps.
 - **Step 3:** Rank the steps in order of difficulty (this is called a **fear hierarchy**).
 - **Step 4:** Start with the least anxiety-provoking step and gradually expose yourself to it.
 - **Step 5:** Rate your anxiety before, during, and after the exposure on a scale from 0 to 100.
 - **Step 6:** Continue exposing yourself to each step in the hierarchy, noting any decrease in anxiety over time.
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5. Problem-Solving Exercise

Purpose: To develop practical solutions to challenging situations.

How it works:

- **Step 1:** Identify the problem you want to solve (e.g., work stress, relationship conflict).
 - **Step 2:** Brainstorm potential solutions (no matter how unrealistic they may seem at first).
 - **Step 3:** Evaluate the pros and cons of each solution.
 - **Step 4:** Choose the most realistic and effective solution.
 - **Step 5:** Develop a step-by-step plan to implement the solution.
 - **Step 6:** After implementing the plan, evaluate its effectiveness and adjust if necessary.
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6. Graded Exposure for Avoidance

Purpose: To reduce avoidance behavior that reinforces fear or anxiety.

How it works:

- **Step 1:** Identify situations you tend to avoid due to anxiety or fear.
 - **Step 2:** Rank them from least to most anxiety-provoking (similar to the fear hierarchy).
 - **Step 3:** Gradually confront these situations, starting with the least distressing.
 - **Step 4:** After each exposure, note your level of anxiety and reflect on the experience.
 - **Step 5:** Over time, you should notice a decrease in anxiety and avoidance.
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7. Self-Compassion Exercise

Purpose: To develop a kinder, more forgiving relationship with yourself.

How it works:

- **Step 1:** When you make a mistake or experience failure, instead of being critical, practice self-compassion.
 - **Step 2:** Talk to yourself as you would to a friend who is struggling. Use kind, understanding, and supportive words.
 - **Step 3:** Reflect on the situation and remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes and it's okay to be imperfect.
 - **Step 4:** Practice this regularly to shift towards a more compassionate mindset.
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8. Mindfulness Practice

Purpose: To stay grounded in the present moment and manage overwhelming emotions.

How it works:

- **Step 1:** Choose a time each day to practice mindfulness (e.g., in the morning or before bed).
 - **Step 2:** Focus on your breath, bringing your attention to the sensations of inhaling and exhaling.
 - **Step 3:** If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your breath without judgment.
 - **Step 4:** You can also use mindfulness to focus on specific sensations, sounds, or sights in your environment, helping you stay in the moment.
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These exercises are designed to help individuals develop skills for managing their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, leading to greater psychological well-being over time.