

## THINKING OR COGNITIVE LIFE SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

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### GUIDELINES AND TECHNIQUES FOR ADDRESSING UNHELPFUL THINKING, IMAGES AND BELIEFS.

#### PRACTICE LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

1. *Is your unhelpful thinking, image or belief irrational? Does it not make sense and is not based on facts? If yes, then address it with the Thought Record technique.*

**a) Thought Record.** A Thought Record tool is a table that helps you to identify and challenge unhelpful thinking, images or beliefs. You can get a free copy of Thought Record from the Internet or [www.healthcity.org.uk](http://www.healthcity.org.uk). A Thought Record involves you identifying one unhelpful thinking, image or belief from a common list or with the help of your therapist and then working through to challenge, modify, or adjust it or replacing it with a new helpful one. It is helpful to rate at the start of the exercise and re-rate after completing the exercise to see if there is any reduction in the intensity or distress level of your feelings and how much you still believe in the unhelpful thinking style. For rating and re-rating, use a scale of 1 - 10, where 1 is the lowest and 10 is the highest.

#### **b) Additional Techniques**

*i) Check the evidence for and against by looking at past and current experiences.*

- *What are the facts that prove my unhelpful thinking, image or belief is totally true?*
- *What are the facts that my unhelpful thinking, image or belief is or could be wrong? What strengths do I bring to this situation?*
- *What is healthy and unhealthy about my unhelpful thinking, image or belief?*
- *What advice would I give someone else in the same situation?*
- *What would someone else say about this situation?*
- *What's the bigger or whole picture?*
- *Is there another way of seeing or looking at the situation?*
- *Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event?*
- *Is this really as important?*
- *What are the short-term and long-term consequences if I continue to think like this or for me of believing it is true? Look at the physical, professional, and psychological consequences (in terms of how it makes me feel and behave).*

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- *What if it really is true, (1) why would that be so bad? (2) And how could I cope with the situation that created the thinking, image or belief or the contents of the thinking, image or belief?*
- *Is there anything else I can change in my thinking or behaviour to help me feel and cope better?*
- ii) *Adjusting or modifying: What could be a less unhelpful thinking style or a better perspective? Ok, the bread was a little salty for some guests, but the chocolate was delicious and eaten by all my guests. Think of putting a third box in between the two extremes. Try to see things arranged in a line – person A is more trustworthy than Person B, who is more trustworthy than Person C....*
- iii) *Am I using the right words? If the dropping of milk on your shirt is a disaster, how would you describe a bucket of flirty water splashed over you?*
- iv) *Probability? How likely is it that all your peers will turn against you if your baking is not perfect?*
- v) *Look for the exceptions of the rule. Nobody likes me. The traffic lights are always red when I'm in a hurry. Well, my friend xy likes me. There was at least one time when the lights were green when you were in a hurry.*
- vi) *Generating new: What could be a new more helpful unhelpful thinking style?*
- vii) *Flipping: What could be a direct alternative or opposite to the unhelpful thinking styles?*
- viii) *Start to question the origin and validity of the unhelpful thinking rules and look for exceptions. Do they come from childhood? Do they apply all the time to everyone in all situations?*
- ix) *Reality checking – how do you know she crossed the road to avoid you? What other explanations are there? How do you know what she is thinking? Can you read all her thoughts?*
- x) *It is my fault that my friends did not enjoy the film we went to see. How were you responsible? You did not act in the film, or write the screenplay or direct it. They chose to see it with you.*
- xi) *I know something dreadful will happen because I feel so anxious. Remember the CBT model – thoughts give rise to feelings. You feel anxious because you think something dreadful will happen. Thoughts are not facts. My thinking the moon is made of cheese does not make it so.*
- xii) *The first step is to get into the habit of recognising something as positive. Then challenge the evidence you use to make it a negative. Maybe she does not know you completely, but she likes what you did.*
- xiii) *Choose and write down a statement that you can repeat to yourself that reflects your healthier and positive automatic thought, images, assumptions and affirmation.*
- xiv) *Am I self-labelling? If yes, am I happy to use the same label for a person, an animal or a plant I love?*
- xv) *Can I mindfully accept by adopting the attitude of 'it is there and so what?' A thought is not a reality.*
- xvi) *Can I learn to tolerate and sit on and with the uncertainty coming from this thought or belief?*
- xvii) *What are or could be the consequences/cost of my doing nothing or living with this thinking or belief?*
- xviii) *Is it only a worry about a problem that is yet to happen? If yes, can I apply Theory B techniques of scripting, postponing worry, or advance planning and resolutions?*
- xix) *Is it a problem that defies every known human solution? If yes, can I apply Theory C techniques of exiting, benefits*

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*focusing, and positive acceptance of reality?*

- xx) Have I used or been using Safety Coping behaviours or stress hormones' defensive-protective responses on this thinking or belief? Examples of coping I want to start to gradually take small steps to reduce or stop.*
- xxi) Have I used or been using Positive Coping behaviours or happy hormones' responses on this thinking or belief? Examples of coping I want to start to gradually take small steps to keep, increase or acquire.*
- xxii) Is this an old video or memories played back to me by my brain? If yes, it is a brain travelling back and stuck in time. I can snap out of it or reduce its impact with calming and anxiety reduction techniques that includes grounding techniques.*

*2) Is the thinking, image or belief rational? Does it make sense and based on facts? Is there a practical solution that can be implemented? Is it a problem that has happened before without a resolution and there is a real fear or concern that it may happen again? If yes, then no point trying to challenge with Thought Record technique. Use problem solving or other methods. Apply Theory A techniques of finding a solution and investing baby steps or hierarchy of problem solving.*