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## **Self-Talk Worksheet 2: Learning Healthier Thought Patterns**

This worksheet is designed to help you learn the basics of cognitive change. By changing your ways of talking to yourself, you can change the ways you feel and help motivate yourself to engage in healthy and constructive behavior. If you want further information about this approach, please contact Dr. Gore.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please describe the main situation that is on your mind at the moment

How upset do you feel while thinking about this situation right now?

Not at All Upset 0	Mildly Upset 1	Moderately Upset 2	Very Upset 3	Completely Upset 4
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Enter the number corresponding to your rating:

Clear your Mind and Relax Your Body

- Settle into your chair, lie flat on the ground, or find any reasonably comfortable position that you can.
- Clear your mind, focusing for a moment on the feelings in your body, the feeling of the ground supporting you.
- Take a slow, deep breath, filling your lower abdomen with air (a deep belly breath). Hold it for a second, then let it out with a loud sigh.
- Take 2 more deep breaths like that

Review Your Recent Thoughts

What thoughts, pictures, memories, or worries have you been running through your mind recently?

What feelings (emotional feelings or feelings in your body) go along with those thoughts, pictures, memories, or worries?

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### Identifying Cognitive Errors

Write out your thoughts about the situation that is bothering. Be detailed. Write at least five or six sentences about what you have been thinking, assuming, or imagining.

Write out your thoughts about an upsetting situation in your life:

Stage 1: Looking for Unwarranted Pessimism  
Stage 1 interventions are based on the work of David Burns and Christine Padesky (see Further Reading, at end). Burns and Padesky follow in the tradition of Aaron Beck, and all three therapists help people weed out unwarranted pessimism as a way to fight depression and anxiety.

*Look over the thoughts you have written, and try to find examples of each of the following cognitive patterns in your thinking. You might realize that you had a thought that you didn't write down. If so, just write it out in the appropriate section below. The point is to find examples of distorted thinking in your own thought process. Then, on the right hand side, generate alternative ways of thinking*

<b>Cognitive Errors</b>	<b>Healthier Alternative Thoughts</b>
<b>All or Nothing Thinking</b>  <b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>	<b>Middle Ground Thinking</b>  <b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>
<b>Overgeneralization</b>  <b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>	<b>Avoiding Overgeneralization</b>  <b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>
<b>Mental Filter</b>  <b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>	<b>Balancing Negatives with Positives</b>  <b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>
<b>Jumping to Conclusions (mind reading/fortune telling)</b>	<b>Sticking to the Evidence</b>

<b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>	<b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>
<b>Emotional Reasoning</b>	<b>Logical Reasoning</b>
<b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>	<b>How it makes me feel to think this:</b>

### Definitions and Examples of Cognitive Errors

**All or nothing thinking.** Are you looking at things in extreme terms?

**Example:** “I will never be able to make enough money to afford a good place to live”.  
“No desirable person will ever want to date or marry me”.

**Overgeneralization.** Are you taking one mistake and developing the idea that you will always experience nothing but failures?

**Example:** “Since I haven’t been able to find a job in the last few months, I will never be able to find a job”. “Since one person rejected, it means I am unlovable and nobody will ever accept me”.

**Mental Filter.** Are you paying more attention to negatives than to positives?

**Example:** “One person in the audience looked very bored and another was sleeping. I am a terrible speaker.” In reality, several people in the audience asked good questions and two people said they really enjoyed the talk, but I could focus only on the two people who looked bored and forget about the others.

**Mental Filtering, Type 1: Ignoring Positives.** In the example above, ignoring the people who expressed interest.

**Mental Filtering, Type 2: Magnifying Negatives.** In the example above, drawing conclusions about myself based only on the two people who looked bored.

**Jumping to Conclusions.** Are you concluding more than is justifiable based on your evidence? Could you prove in court the negative things you are saying to yourself?

**Jumping to Conclusions, Type 1: Mind Reading.** Are you drawing conclusions about what other people are thinking based on insufficient evidence.

**Example.** Someone yawned during my talk, so that means that I was boring them (and that, in turn, means that I am a terrible speaker).

**Jumping to Conclusions, Type 2: Fortune Telling.** Are you predicting the future, as if you had a crystal ball to see for sure what will happen?

**Example.** There is a rumor that the apartments on my street will all be torn down to make way for a highway. I become convinced that I’m going to be kicked out on a whim

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of the landlord. In reality, I cannot know for certain what the future will hold, and it will not help me to panic about it (though it might help me to prepare for the possibility).

**Emotional Reasoning.** Are you drawing conclusions based on your own moods?

**Example.** I feel pessimistic when I hear the news, so I conclude that the economy will not improve in my lifetime and I will be condemned to many years of excruciating financial hardship.

**Example.** I feel like my friend is angry with me, so I conclude that my friend must be angry with me and take this to mean that I am a bad person.

**Stage 2: Developing a Stress Resistant Philosophy of Life**

Albert Ellis has developed an excellent system for helping people identify problems in their basic philosophy of life. These problems make them vulnerable to future stress. Here are the four basic patterns of a stress-inducing philosophy of life.

<b>Cognitive Errors</b>	<b>Healthier Alternative Thoughts</b>
Awfulizing (This is awful or terrible)  How does it make me feel to think this?	Anti-Awfulizing (It's inconvenient or undesirable, but not truly awful)  How does it make me feel to think this?
I-Can't-Stand-It!  How does it make me feel to think this?	I can handle it!  How does it make me feel to think this?
Shoulds&Musts (I MUST do X! Other people MUST do X!)  How does it make me feel to think this?	Preferences (I would prefer to do X, but sometimes I won't. I wish people would do X, but sometimes they won't. I can accept this).  How does it make me feel to think this?
Self-Recrimination / Righteous Indignation  How does it make me feel to think this?	Unconditional Self Acceptance and Unconditional Other Acceptance. We are all fallable human beings.  How does it make me feel to think this?

## Definitions and Examples of Irrational Beliefs

<b>Irrational Beliefs</b>	<b>Rational Alternatives</b>
<p><b>Awfulizing.</b> Are you saying things to yourself such as “It’s awful! This is terrible!”</p> <p><i>You upset yourself when you say these things by making your situation seem as bad as it is possible to be.</i></p>	<p><b>Anti-Awfulizing.</b> Saying that something is not the way you’d like it, but not going to the extreme of saying it is awful or terrible.</p> <p><i>You can help yourself remember that many people would love to have your advantages. Your problems wouldn’t look so big to a lot of people, and they’d be right.</i></p>
<p><b>I-Can’t-Stand-it!</b> Are you saying things like “I can’t take this”, “I can’t stand it!”</p> <p><i>You upset yourself when you say these things by convincing yourself that your situation will destroy you or by talking yourself out of constructive activity that might help you improve your situation.</i></p>	<p><b>I-Can-Handle-It!</b></p> <p><i>This helps you remember that unpleasant situations will not destroy you, even if they feel unpleasant and are not preferable to you. Saying, “I can handle it” helps you build resiliency.</i></p>
<p><b>S&amp;M Thinking (Shoulds and Musts).</b></p> <p>Are you saying things to yourself like, “I MUST do this, no matter what”, or “That person SHOULD have done such and such!”</p> <p><i>You upset yourself by imposing rigid moral prescriptions on yourself and others, since you and all other people are fallible and you and all other people will sometimes (even often) make mistakes or do lazy or sloppy things.</i></p>	<p><b>Rational Preferences</b></p> <p>It would help you to replace “musts” and “shoulds” with “I would prefer to...” or “I wish other people would...”</p> <p><i>Instead of upsetting yourself by moralizing about your behavior and other people’s behavior, you can take honestly express your values as your own opinion or point of view (rather than as a universal and obvious moral law). This can help you to forgive yourself and other people when behavior doesn’t match your expectations.</i></p>
<p><b>Self-Recrimination / “Righteous” Indignation.</b> Are you saying things to yourself like, “If I fail to do X, that makes me a terrible and awful person and nobody will ever accept or love me like that”, or “That person is terrible for doing such and such a thing and they should be severely punished. People like that don’t deserve to live!”</p>	<p><b>Acceptance of Yourself and Others</b></p> <p><b>We are All Fallible Human Beings</b></p> <p>Remind yourself, “I am a fallible human being, just like everyone else”. Forgive others and forgive yourself, even while trying to live according to your values and while respecting the rights and dignity of other people. This is healthier and leads to less un-necessary unhappiness.</p>

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**Think about the situation you wrote about in the first part of this worksheet.**

How upset do you feel while thinking about this situation right now?				
Not at All Upset 0	Mildly Upset 1	Moderately Upset 2	Very Upset 3	Completely Upset 4
Enter the number corresponding to your rating:				

### **Rehearsing for the Situation**

Now, imagine the upsetting situation coming up again. Imagine using the healthy and rational beliefs to cope with that situation. Picture the situation clearly in your mind, and remind yourself of the healthy and rational ways to look at things.

Enter an X when you have followed the directions above:

### **Developing a Health Action Plan**

Now that you have looked at the situation from a healthy point of view, what constructive actions can you take in the next few hours and days to deal with the situation?

*Action plan:*

Great! Now you have completed your worksheet on learning about cognitive errors and irrational beliefs and how to combat them. Read more in the books below if you want to understand more about cognitive errors and irrational thinking, or contact Dr. Gore for help with this approach.

Further Reading.

David Burns. **The Feeling Good Handbook.**

Albert Ellis. **How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself Miserable about Anything (Yes, Anything, and I do Mean ANYTHING).**

Christine Padesky. **Mind Over Mood.**

**This worksheet can be downloaded from  
[www.freemindware.net/downloads.html](http://www.freemindware.net/downloads.html)**