

Thought Cloud Exercise

Think about a time where you felt bad or something didn't go very well. What happened? In the thought cloud, record some of the thoughts and feelings that you experienced.

- What did you tell yourself?
- How did you feel?
- How did you react?
- What did you do to cope?



Thought – Feeling – Behaviour Triangle



Thinking Traps

Thinking Traps	Examples
<p>Fortune-telling:</p> <p>Predicting that things will turn out badly. In reality, we cannot predict the future because we don't have a crystal ball!</p>	<p><i>"I know I'll mess up."</i></p> <p><i>"I will never be able to manage my anxiety."</i></p>
<p>Black-and-white thinking:</p> <p>Seeing things as only right or wrong, good or bad, perfect or terrible. People who think in black and white terms see a small mistake as a total failure. In reality, most events call for a more "moderate" explanation.</p>	<p><i>"I planned to go to the gym four times a week, but I missed going again today. I might as well stop going."</i></p>
<p>Mind-reading:</p> <p>Jumping to conclusions about what others are thinking, without any evidence. But, no one can actually read minds!</p>	<p><i>"Others think I'm stupid."</i></p> <p><i>"He doesn't like me."</i></p>
<p>Over-generalization:</p> <p>Thinking that a negative situation is part of a constant cycle of bad things that happen. People who overgeneralize often use words like "always" or "never." This type of thinking does not take all situations into account.</p>	<p><i>"I got an 'F' on my assignment, therefore I'll <u>never</u> be successful."</i></p>
<p>Labeling:</p> <p>Saying only negative things about yourself or other people. This kind of thinking is unfair. We are too complex to be summed up in a single word!</p>	<p><i>"My boss told me I made a mistake. He's such a jerk."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm a loser."</i></p>
<p>Mental Filter:</p> <p>Focusing only on the negative parts of a situation and ignoring anything good or positive. This prevents us from looking at all aspects of a situation and drawing a more balanced conclusion.</p>	<p><i>"I met a lot of great people at the party, but one guy didn't talk to me. There must be something wrong with me."</i></p>
<p>Catastrophizing/Over-estimating Danger:</p> <p>Imagine the worst possible thing will happen, and predict that we won't be able to cope with the outcome. The imagined worst-case scenario usually never happens and even if it did, we are most likely able to cope.</p>	<p><i>"I'll have a panic attack and no one will help me."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm going to be alone forever!"</i></p>
<p>Should statements:</p> <p>Tell yourself how you "should", "must", or "ought" to feel and behave. However, this is NOT how you actually feel or behave and you are constantly anxious and disappointed with yourself and/or with others.</p>	<p><i>"I should never feel anxious."</i></p> <p><i>"I must control my feelings."</i></p>
<p>Emotional reasoning:</p> <p>Believing that bad feelings or emotions reflect the situation.</p>	<p><i>"I feel stupid, therefore I must be stupid."</i></p>

Getting Unstuck from Thinking Traps

Strategy	Examples
Examine the evidence	Try to find evidence against the thought. "Is there any evidence to support this thought? Is there any evidence to disprove this thought?"
Counter the distortion	Write down your negative thoughts so you can see which of the cognitive distortions you're involved in. This will make it easier to think about the problem in a more positive and realistic way.
Double-standard	Ask yourself, "Would I judge my friend if they did the same thing? Am I being harder on myself than I am on other people?" This is a great method for challenging thinking traps that involve harsh self-criticism.
Survey Method	Find out whether other people you trust agree with your thoughts. For example, if you believe that public speaking anxiety is abnormal and shameful, ask several friends if they ever felt nervous before they gave a talk.
Conduct an experiment	Test your beliefs in person. For example, if, during an episode of panic, you become terrified that you're about to die of a heart attack, you could jog or run up and down several flights of stairs. This will prove that your heart is healthy and strong.
Thinking in shades of grey	Instead of thinking about your problems in all-or-nothing extremes, evaluate things on a range from 1 to 100. When things don't work out as well as you hoped, think about the experience as a partial success rather than a complete failure. See what you can learn from the situation.
Socratic questioning	Is this thought realistic? Am I basing my thoughts on facts or on feelings? What is the evidence for this thought? Could I be misinterpreting the evidence? Am I viewing this situation as black and white, when it's really more complicated? Am I having this thought out of habit, or do facts support it?
Define terms	When you label yourself "inferior" or "a fool" or "a loser", ask "What is the definition of 'a fool'?" You will feel better when you see that there is no such thing as "a fool" or "a loser"
The semantic method	Substitute language that is less colorful and emotionally loaded. This method is helpful for "should statements". Instead of saying "I shouldn't have made that mistake", you can say, "It would be better if I hadn't made that mistake."
Reattribution	Instead of blaming yourself entirely for a problem, think about the many factors that may have contributed to the problem or situation. Focus on solving the problem instead of using up all your energy blaming yourself and feeling guilty
Cost-benefit analysis	List the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling (like getting angry when the bus is late), a negative thought (like "no matter how hard I try, I always screw up"), or a behavior pattern (like overeating and lying around in bed when you're depressed). You can also use the Cost-Benefit Analysis to modify a self-defeating belief such as "I must always try to be perfect".

Catching Your Thinking Traps

1. Most people use more than one of the cognitive traps/biases described. Which one(s) seem to give you the most trouble?

2. You probably don't fall into this cognitive trap all the time. In which situations are you most likely to use this bias?

3. Cognitive biases work best when you are not aware that they are happening. The next time you find yourself in one of the situations you have described above, try to catch the bias as it happens. Then remind yourself what to do instead. What would be more of a reality-based way of thinking in one of the situations you have listed? What would you say to a friend in this situation?

4. Repeat this revised way of thinking over to yourself a number of times. It will probably feel quite artificial at first because you are not used to it. With time, it will become more natural.

