

# Exercise

Professional Version | US English

# Prompts For Challenging Negative Thinking



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## Description

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Cognitive restructuring / challenging overly negative thinking is a core cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) technique. It is often taught to clients in the context of monitoring automatic thoughts. Clients may have habitual (biased) ways of analyzing situations and often benefit from being taught ways of thinking more flexibly. This *Prompts For Challenging Negative Thinking* handout provides some prompts and questions to trigger alternative perspectives.

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## Instructions

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This client information handout can be used in session as prompts to explore negative thinking, or can be given to clients to facilitate their process of analyzing specific thoughts. Clients can be instructed to identify a specific thought to be challenged, and then work through the prompts (e.g. considering the thought which is causing distress and asking "Ten years from now, if I look back on this situation, will I look at it any differently?").

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## References

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Beck, A.T., Rush, A.J., Shaw, B.F., & Emery, G. (1979). *Cognitive therapy of depression*. New York: Guilford.

Greenberger, D., Padesky, C. (1995). *Mind over mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think*. New York: The Guilford Press.

# Prompts For Challenging Negative Thinking

Use the list of prompts below to help you assess the truthfulness of your negative thinking.



## Evidence

Am I confusing a fact with an opinion?

What is the evidence for the negative thought?

What is the evidence against the negative thought?

Are there any small things that contradict the thought? Perhaps things that I am discounting as unimportant?



## Helpfulness

Are these thoughts helpful to me?

Will thoughts like this help me to achieve my goals?

Do thoughts like this truly have my best interests at heart?



## Alternative perspectives

If a good friend knew I were having this thought, what would they say to me?

If someone I loved had this thought, what would I tell them?

What would Batman say to me about this thought?

Am I making the mistake of assuming my perspective on this issue is the only one?

If I wasn't interested in punishing or condemning myself would I think in this way?

Ten years from now, if I look back on this situation, will I look at it any differently?



## Thinking biases

Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms? (Am I using words like 'always' or 'never'?)

Am I catastrophizing?

Am I jumping to any conclusions that are not completely justified by the evidence?

Am I holding myself to a higher standard than I would hold other people?

Am I labelling myself?

Am I focusing on my weaknesses and minimizing my strengths?

Am I making unreasonable demands? (Am I using words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought'?)

Am I condemning myself totally on the basis of a single event?

Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?

When I am not feeling this way, do I still think about this type of situation in the same way?

# Prompts For Challenging Negative Thinking

Use the list of prompts below to help you assess the accuracy of your thinking.

What is your negative thought:

## Evidence

- Am I confusing a fact with an opinion?
- What is the evidence for the negative thought?
- What is the evidence against the negative thought?
- Are there any small things that contradict the thought? Perhaps things that I am discounting as unimportant?

## Helpfulness

- Are these thoughts helpful to me?
- Will thoughts like this help me to achieve my goals?
- Do thoughts like this truly have my best interests at heart?

## Alternative perspectives

- If a good friend knew I were having this thought, what would they say to me?
- If someone I loved had this thought, what would I tell them?
- What would Batman say to me about this thought?
- Am I making the mistake of assuming my perspective on this issue is the only one?
- If I wasn't interested in punishing or condemning myself would I think in this way?
- Ten years from now, if I look back on this situation, will I look at it any differently?

## Thinking biases

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- Am I labelling myself?
- Am I focusing on my weaknesses and minimizing my strengths?
- Am I making unreasonable demands? (Am I using words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought'?)
- Am I condemning myself totally on the basis of a single event?
- Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?
- When I am not feeling this way, do I still think about this type of situation in the same way?

Write an alternative thought now:

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