



# Cognitive Restructuring





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## When to use this workbook

Cognitive Restructuring, or Thought Challenging, is an evidence based intervention for the treatment of low mood or anxiety, recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2009).

This workbook can be used either alone or with the support of your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner.

## How to use this workbook

Cognitive Restructuring has three steps. It is important to work through one step at a time, only move on to the next step of Cognitive Restructuring once you are comfortable with using the previous step.

It can take some time for a coping technique to become effective and to show improvement. It is important to practice and to allow enough time to see the benefits.

## Helpful Resources

### **A Recovery Programme for Depression, by Lovell and Richards**

[https://cedar.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/schoolofpsychology/cedar/documents/Recovery\\_programme\\_for\\_depression\\_booklet\\_April\\_2012\\_-\\_FINAL\[1\].pdf](https://cedar.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/schoolofpsychology/cedar/documents/Recovery_programme_for_depression_booklet_April_2012_-_FINAL[1].pdf)

### **Self Help Resources for Mental Health Problems**

[www.cci.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au)

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>



# What is Cognitive Restructuring?

Cognitive Restructuring is an evidence based treatment used to challenge unhelpful thoughts. It works by identifying negative or unhelpful thoughts (which may be about yourself, the world or others) and then gathers evidence to challenge the accuracy of the thought. This evidence then helps us to develop a more realistic and balanced thought.

“For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” - Shakespeare

Our thoughts can have a big impact on the way we feel. When we feel low or anxious we may find this is due to having negative or unhelpful thoughts, or making negative ‘predictions’ about the future . By challenging these thoughts and developing more helpful and realistic thoughts we can help improve our mood. Helpful and realistic thinking is neither negative or positive, it takes all perspectives into account. This would mean looking at yourself, others, and the world in a balanced and fair way.

What are some of the negative thoughts you experience?

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Summary:

- Negative automatic thoughts are common and can impact our mood
- Cognitive Restructuring is a technique to challenge these thoughts and make them more realistic and balanced



# Setting Goals

## Why set goals?

Goal setting is an evidence based way of helping ourselves to decide on things you would like to achieve and what you will do to get there as well as work toward them.

This helps us to stay focused on achieving things that matter most to us.

## Goals should be:

- ⇒ Focused on short term objectives to begin with
- ⇒ Limited to no more than 3 goals
- ⇒ Positive in nature

## You can use SMART to help you consider your goals:

<b>S</b> pecific	Try and be specific with a time, date or anything you'll
<b>M</b> easurable	Goals should be able to be measured on a scale
<b>A</b> chievable	Goals should not 'set you up to fail' and should be feel
<b>R</b> elevant	Goals should be relevant to your life or current
<b>T</b> ime specific	Set a specific time or deadline to achieve your goal

# Setting Goals

Have a go at creating your own goals and rating how much you have achieved your goal so far:

0	2	4	6	8	10
= Not achieved this goal at all	= slightly achieved this goal	= somewhat achieved this goal	= markedly achieved this goal	= mostly achieved this goal	= completely achieved this goal

<b>Goal 1</b>	Write your goal here:	<b>Goal rating:</b> /10
<b>Goal 2</b>	Write your goal here:	<b>Goal rating:</b> /10
<b>Goal 3</b>	Write your goal here:	<b>Goal rating:</b> /10



# Taylor's Story

I am 35 years old and started feeling low around 8 months ago. It happened gradually and I started to feel more and more low over time. I would beat myself up over little mistakes and that negative voice in the back of my mind got louder, and I started to think negatively about myself a lot of the time.

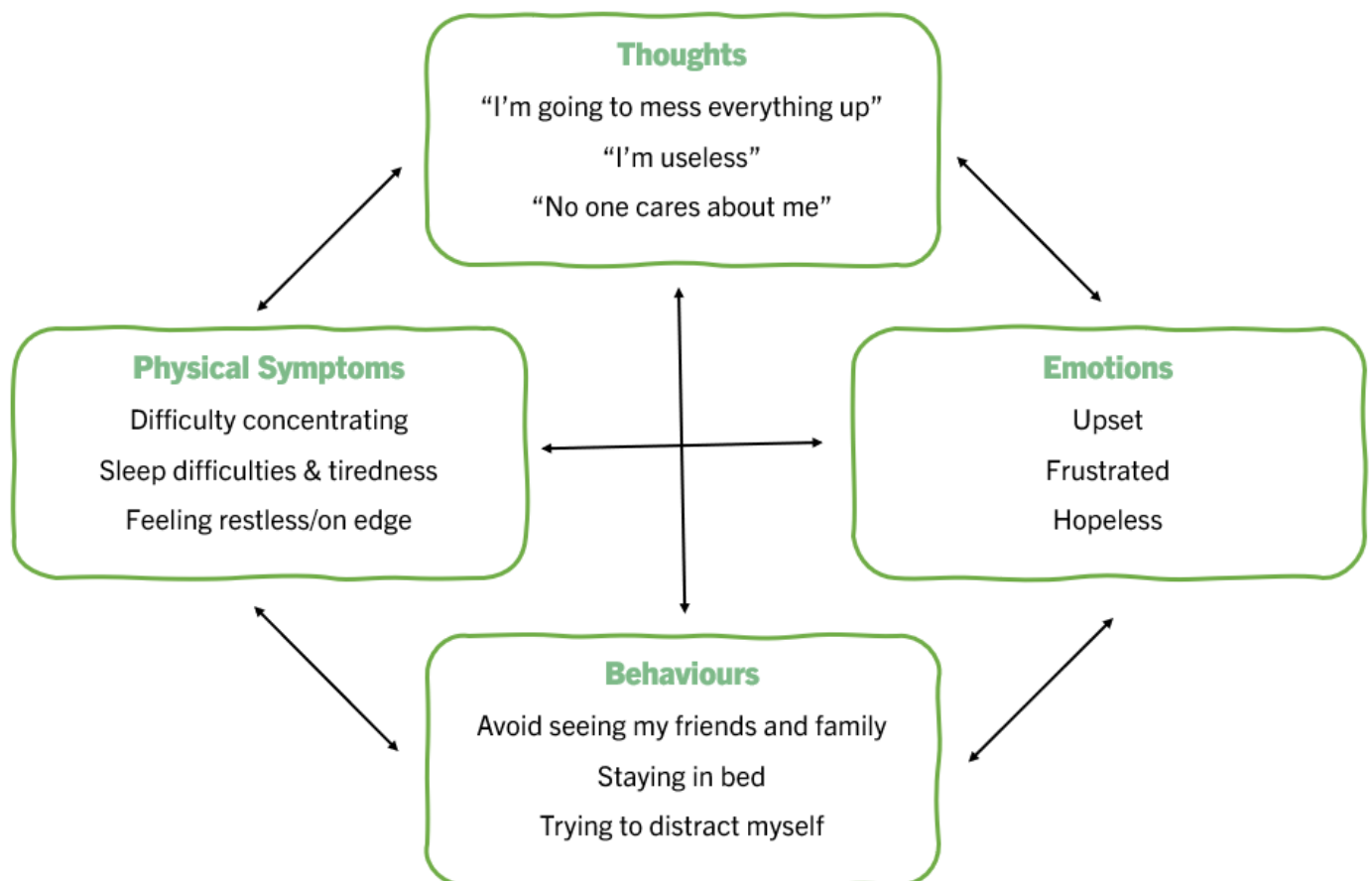
The negative thoughts started to impact my confidence and I began to withdraw from my loved ones. I couldn't shake the thought that they would have more fun without me and that I wasn't a very nice person to be around. The thoughts lowered my confidence when applying for jobs and I started to assume the worst, thinking that I would never be employed again even though I have had successful interviews in the past.

My negative thinking got to the point where I stopped doing things, such as seeing friends or applying for jobs, as I was so convinced there would be a negative outcome. My friend noticed that I didn't seem my usual self and encouraged me to seek support and so I referred myself to my local NHS Talking Therapies service.

My Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner encouraged me to work through the steps of Cognitive Restructuring, which they explained was not all about 'positive thinking' (as I thought CBT was), but about developing more realistic thinking based on evidence. I was supported in the techniques to notice my unhelpful thinking patterns and then to look at evidence to develop more realistic patterns of thinking. This took time and practice, but looking back now I can see that I was making a lot of very negative predictions that frequently turned out to be inaccurate! It is not that I don't get any negative thoughts now— I do sometimes but I am now able to 'step back' from them before they become too powerful, and evaluate how realistic they are.

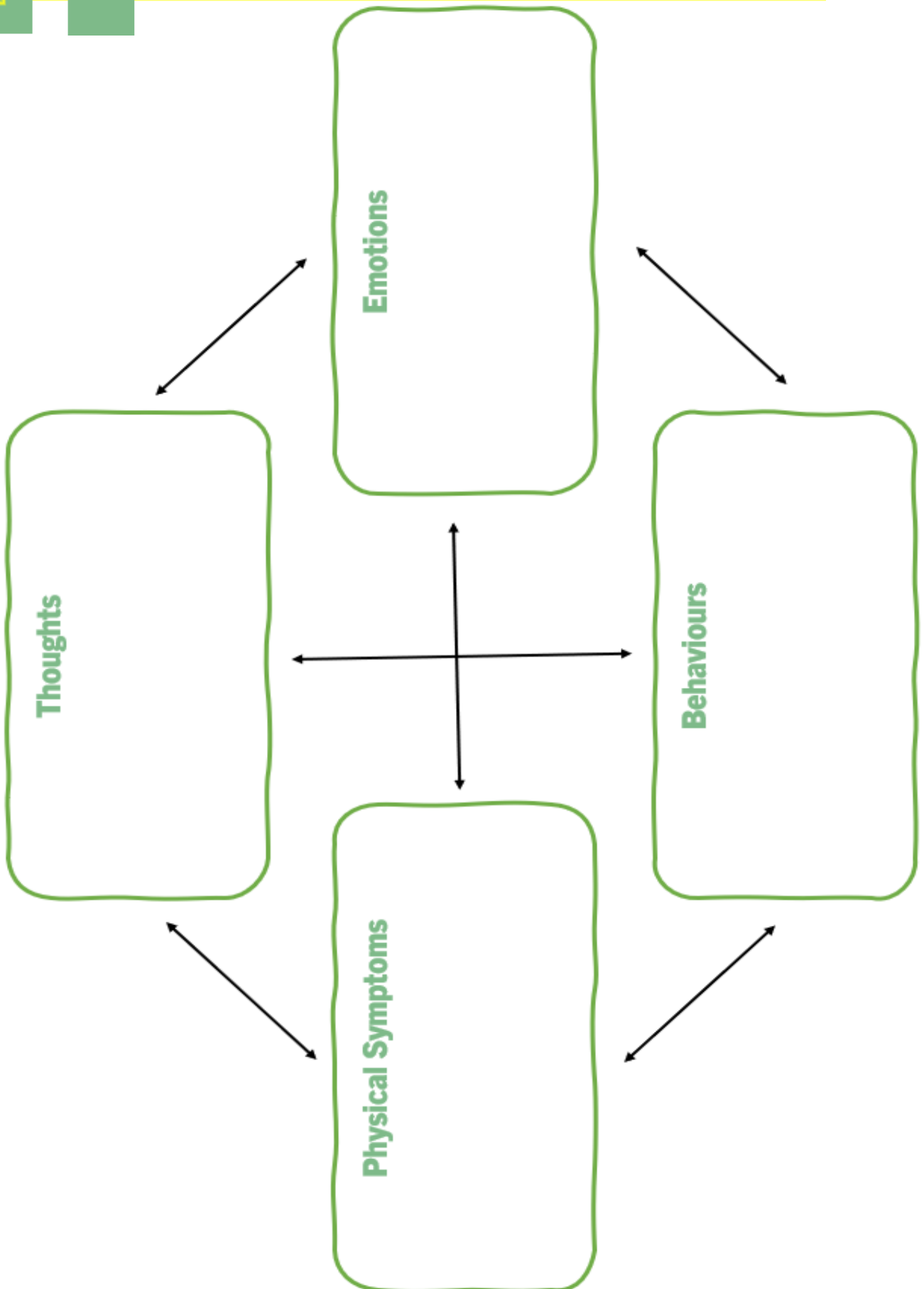
# The Vicious Cycle of Unhelpful Thinking

When we have a negative or unhelpful thought about a specific situation, ourselves, other people or the world it can make us feel low or anxious. Our thoughts tend to focus mainly on the threat or current problem when we are low or anxious, this is called a negative bias. This can impair our ability to take into account other perspectives. In this way, negative or unhelpful thinking can maintain the way we are feeling. See below for an example of how Taylor’s negative thoughts impacted the way they feel, their behaviours, and the impact on their body:



On the next page, write down the unhelpful thoughts that you have experienced recently in the thoughts box and then see how they made you feel, how they changed what you did or didn't do (your behaviour) and also what you felt in your body.

# My CBT Cycle







# UNHELPFUL THINKING TRAPS

Thinking traps can also be described as unhelpful thinking patterns that usually prevent us from seeing situations as they really are.

Using the next two pages of **Unhelpful Thinking Traps** , consider which ones apply to Taylor’s thoughts about their interview.

Situation	Thought	Unhelpful Thinking Trap
<b>At a job interview</b>	“I’m going to mess up”	
<b>After the interview</b>	“I’m useless in interviews”	
<b>Thinking about the interview</b>	“They thought I did not know what I was talking	

Take a moment to look at the next 2 pages of Unhelpful Thinking Traps and consider which ones affect you when you are stuck in that vicious cycle.



# Unhelpful Thinking Traps

## CATASTROPHIZING

Jumping to the worst case scenario and believing the worst possible thing will happen

## SHOULD AND MUSTS

‘Should and must’ thinking places unrealistic expectations on ourselves and others. “I should be able to do this” or “I must do the laundry today” can lead to feeling frustrated and pressured.

## ALL-OR-NOTHING

Seeing things as black and white, without any grey area, such as seeing things as good or bad with nothing in between

## MIND-READING

Assuming we know what other people are thinking. For example, if two people were whispering and looking in your direction, you might automatically assume they are saying something bad about you.

## CRITICAL SELF

Placing too much blame on yourself when things go wrong and believing you are responsible for things you may not be entirely responsible for.

## MENTAL FILTER

Only seeing what fits with our perspective. Example- “People don’t like me” but only one person frowns at you and others smile. You only take in that negative evidence as it fits your theory.



# Unhelpful Thinking Traps

## JUDGEMENTS

Making evaluations or judgements about events, ourselves, others, or the world, rather than describing what we actually see and have evidence for.

## EMOTIONAL REASONING

This is a style of unhelpful thinking where you base your view of situations, yourself, or others, on the way you are feeling. E.g. I feel anxious, so I must be in danger.

## PREDICTION

Believing we know what's going to happen in the future

## BLACK AND WHITE

Believing that something or someone can be only good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in-between or 'shades of grey'.

## MOUNTAINS AND MOLEHILLS

Exaggerating the risk of danger, or the negatives.  
Minimising the odds of how things are most likely to turn out, or minimising positives.

## MEMORIES

Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past, causing us distress right now.



# STEP ONE

## Identifying Unhelpful Thoughts

The first step of Cognitive Restructuring is to identify unhelpful thoughts that are causing us distress. We then record these captured thoughts into a Thought Diary along with the situation we had the thought in, how much we believe the thought and how it made us feel.

Initially it may be difficult to capture our thoughts as it is not something we do in our day to day lives. By using the technique below we can begin to capture the thoughts that are causing us to feel low or anxious. When you notice you are feeling low or anxious;

### Stop

Stop what you are doing and take a moment.

### Take a breath

Pay attention to your breathing. Take a deep breath in and release it slowly.

### Overview

Ask yourself some questions to get an overview of what is happening.

### Perspective

Record the thought going through your mind to get a better perspective.

**Some useful questions to help identify your unhelpful thoughts are:**

*“What am I telling myself right now?”*

*“What is making me feel this way?”*

*“What bad thing am I predicting will happen?”*

# Keeping a Thought Diary

The Thought Diary on [Worksheet 1 \(page 14\)](#) uses different columns to help us understand the patterns in our negative thinking.

## Taylor’s Thought Diary:

Situation	Thought	Emotion	Belief in thought	Intensity of emotion
At a job interview	“I’m going to mess up”	Anxiety Fear	70%	75%
After the interview	“I’m useless in interviews”	Sadness Disappointment	60%	90%

Using the thought diary record the situation you were in, the thoughts you had and the emotion you were experiencing. The last two columns are to record how much you believe the thought to be true (from 0-100%) and the intensity of the emotion you were experiencing. Often, the more that we believe the thought to be true the higher the distress it can cause. Recording all this information not only allows us to better understand the thought but allows us to start considering a different perspective.

## Top Tips:

- When you feel low or anxious use the ‘**STOP**’ technique to help capture any unhelpful thoughts that may be in your mind.
- Record the thought as soon as possible to accurately rate your belief in the thought— use your phone or notepad to jot information down until you can fill in the thought diary
- Sometimes the thoughts we identify can be in the form of questions, in this case it is important to answer the question to understand what we are predicting will cause us distress. For example; “What if I don’t meet my deadline at work?”, the answer might be “If I don’t meet my deadline I will be sacked”. This is the statement we would then record.

# Worksheet 1

Intensity of emotion (0 - 100%)								
Belief in thought (0 - 100%)								
Emotion								
Thought								
Situation								

# STEP TWO

## Thought Challenging

The second step is to choose a thought from **Worksheet 1** that causes the most intense emotion. This step then involves gathering evidence for and against the accuracy of your chosen thought. By gathering evidence both for and against the thought we are able to assess whether the thought is realistic or helpful.

**Worksheet 2** (page 16) allows you to gather evidence **FOR** the thought and **AGAINST** your thought. Similar to how you would look at evidence in a court case.

It may be difficult to decide on a thought to gather evidence for and against; it is important that we try to choose a thought that caused us the most intense distress. Using the column “Intensity of emotion” pick one that has a high percentage to start with, this is often called a “hot thought”. Once you have chosen a “hot thought” transfer the information about the thought from *Worksheet 1* onto *Worksheet 2*.

It can often be difficult to think of evidence to disprove our thought when we are feeling low or anxious. Below are some questions to help find evidence against the thought;

*Have I confused a thought with a fact?*

*What would I tell a friend if they had this thought?*

*What would a friend say about my thought?*

*How many times has it happened in the past?*

*Am I confusing a possibility with certainty? It may be possible, is it likely?*

*If I was not feeling low or anxious would I see the situation differently?*

### Top Tips:

- Remember to only use facts rather than opinions as evidence



# Worksheet 2

Situation	
Thought	Emotion
Belief in thought (0-100%)	Intensity of emotion (0-100%)

Evidence for	Evidence against

In *Step Three* on the next page, you will look at developing an alternative thought. Once you have done that, come back to this page and record your alternative thought.

Alternative thought:

Belief in my alternative thought (0-100%)

Intensity of emotion (0-100%)



# STEP THREE

## Increasing balanced thinking

The final step of Cognitive Restructuring is to develop a balanced thought.

It is then important to rate your belief in the new thought and whether it would have made you feel differently at the time.

Our thoughts can have a negative emotional impact on us, the purpose of *Step Three* is to develop a more helpful and balanced thinking style in order to improve the way we feel. We are not trying to disprove the original thought but to ensure all evidence is taken into account to get a different perspective. There may be several ways of looking at a situation so you might find there are a number of ways of including the evidence to form a new thought.

You might find the alternative thoughts worksheet helpful on the next page (page 18).

Based on the evidence you have gathered, write down a new thought in the form of a sentence that summarises all information from both the for and against columns.

Your belief in the new thought may not be as high as for the original thought.

However it is important that you do somewhat believe the new thought or it will not be helpful in reducing your distress. You can test how effective the new thought is by reading or speaking the thought through a few times. The suggestions below are helpful ways to develop an alternative thought:

*Based on the evidence I have listed in the for and against column is there an alternative way of thinking about this situation?*

*Write one sentence which summaries evidence for and another for evidence against, when you combine these sentences with the word “and” or “but” does it create a more balanced thought?*

*If a friend was in a similar situation what would I say to them?*

*Can a friend or family member think of any other ways of understanding the situation?*



# Alternative Thoughts

It can often be difficult to think of alternative thoughts when we are feeling low or anxious. Below are some questions to help find evidence against the unhelpful thinking trap;

## CATASTROPHISING

**Ask yourself:** How likely is it that will happen? What tools do you have to cope if it does? Is it helpful to imagine the worst case scenario? Have you imagined this before to find it doesn't actually happen?

## CRITICAL SELF

**Ask yourself:** Are you entirely to blame? Is it helpful to be self-critical? If we make a mistake is it more helpful to bully ourselves or to learn from the mistake and encourage ourselves to try another approach. What would

## SHOULD AND MUSTS

**Ask yourself:** Am I placing too much pressure on myself or others? What would be more realistic?

## MIND-READING

**Ask yourself:** Is it ever possible to know what others are thinking? Could I be making an assumption?

## ALL-OR-NOTHING

**Ask yourself:** Is it possible for there to be a spectrum. Instead of 0 and 10, whereabouts are you in between? "I'm bad at my job" might become "I'm not the worst or the best at my

## JUDGEMENTS

**Ask yourself:** I'm making an evaluation about the situation or person. It's how I make sense of the world, but that doesn't mean my judgements are always right or helpful. Is there

## MENTAL FILTER

**Ask yourself:** Am I wearing "gloomy specs"? Is there any other evidence to the contrary? What would be a more realistic thought?

## EMOTIONAL REASONING

**Ask yourself:** Just because I feel bad, does it mean that it is bad? My feelings are just a reaction to my thoughts, which are just automatic

## PREDICTION

**Ask yourself:** Am I thinking that I can predict the future? How likely is it that that might really happen?

## BLACK AND WHITE

**Ask yourself:** Things aren't either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?

## MOUNTAINS AND MOLEHILLS

**Ask yourself:** Am I exaggerating the bad stuff? How would someone else see it? What's the bigger picture?

## MEMORIES

**Tell yourself:** This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it's not actually happening again right now.

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of several overlapping squares in shades of green and yellow.

# Maintaining Progress

**What techniques have been most helpful?**

**What are my early warning signs?**

**Are there any future obstacles coming up?**

**How can I prepare for these?**

**What are my goals?**



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