

Challenging your Thoughts

Section 1: Challenging Negative Automatic Thoughts

Below are certain questions that can be used to challenge your Negative Automatic thoughts and assumptions and understand whether they are guided by rational thinking or emotional ways of processing information.

Please note that some questions may apply to your thoughts/situation, while others may not... and can be skipped.

The evidence should be a fact or event as it happened and not your interpretation of the same, that is, “I felt he ignored me” is not an evidence, but “he did not talk to me at all that night despite me trying to talk to him” is an evidence.

Thought that I want to challenge: _____

How much do I believe in this thought: (Rate on a scale of 0-100)? _____

Q. What is the evidence to prove that my thought is true?

Q. Is there any evidence against this thought?

Q. If this thought is true, what does it mean to me? What does it say about me or others or my life?

Q. If there is enough evidence to prove that my thought is rational, what can I do about it? (E.g., change the way I react to the situation or change the situation etc.)?

Q. Q. Is there another way to interpret the situation?

Q. Would everyone in this situation think in this way?

Q. Is it a fact or an opinion?

Q. What would I tell a friend in this situation?

Q. If I don't have enough evidence to prove my thought, could I be operating from point of dysfunctional assumptions like:

Mind reading

Catastrophizing

Jumping to conclusions

Minimization and maximization

Black and white thinking

Over generalization

“should” and “musts”

Personalization


Q. What can be more rational thought?

Section 2: Dysfunctional Assumptions

Dysfunctional Assumptions are “rules” that we use to navigate through the world or to understand it. We all fall into the trap of these dysfunctional assumptions from time to time, however, the problem arises when these become the primary ways of looking at situations and are held in a rigid pattern.

Some of the common dysfunctional assumptions and ways to challenge them are as follows:

Assumption	Questions to Ask
<p>Mind reading: Assuming I know what others are thinking about me Examples: “She looked at her watch, she must be thinking I am so boring” “They both smiled at each other, must be making fun of me” “He thinks I am stupid”</p>	<p>Q. What is the advantage or disadvantage of this kind of thinking?</p> <p>Q. How can I be sure of what others are thinking?</p> <p>Q. Even if they are thinking negative about me, does it really matter?</p> <p>Q. How does assuming what they are thinking helps me?</p>
<p>Catastrophizing: Assuming the worst in every possible situation. Examples: “I will definitely fail the test” “My life is doomed” “I will never be independent” “I will always be a failure”</p>	<p>Q. What is the advantage or disadvantage of this kind of thinking?</p> <p>Q. What is the worst possible thing that can happen? What is the actual possibility of that happening?</p> <p>Q. If it does happen, what can I do about it?</p> <p>Q. Is there anything I can do NOW to prevent the worst from happening?</p> <p>Q. Could there be another outcome that I am overlooking?</p> <p>Q. What is a more realistic outcome?</p> <p>Q. Will this matter in five years?</p>
<p>Jumping to conclusions: Making a hasty decisions without taking all facts into consideration Example, “He didn’t call me back, he is trying to ignore me.” “The property dealer didn’t tell about any problems in the house, thus I assume there aren’t any problems” “She is ready to pay for my lunch, she must be earning quite well.”</p>	<p>Q. Am I taking all facts into consideration before assuming the outcome or making a decision?</p> <p>Q. What is the advantage or disadvantage of this kind of thinking?</p> <p>Q. What does their behavior mean to me?</p> <p>Q. Is there an alternate way of looking at the situation?</p>

<p>“They put happy pictures of themselves on Instagram, they have the best marriage one can ask for” “If the person didn’t give attention to me, they dislike me”</p>	
<p>Minimization and Maximization Exaggerating the importance of insignificant events, e.g., mistake and lessening the importance of significant events, such as personal achievement. “I didn’t score as well in grade VIII.” “Anyone could have passed that Math competition”</p>	<p>Q. Am I only looking at the negatives and ignoring the positives? Q. Am I being over critical of my own self? Q. What is the probability of my success being just a chance factor? Am I discounting my efforts? Q. What is the advantage/disadvantage of this kind of thinking?</p>
<p>Black and white/All or none thinking Assuming things/people/situations to be either good or bad, without considering the grey areas. “She didn’t understand my problem the other day, she is really an insensitive person.” “My partner is either the best or the worst” “My life is either going perfectly or is a disaster” “If I can’t be the perfect daughter, I am the ugly duckling of the family”</p>	<p>Q. Am I taking an extreme view of the situation? Q. Can there be a middle point of view? Q. What is the advantage/disadvantage of this kind of thinking? Q. Is anything 100% good or bad? Remind yourself of the yin-yang</p> 
<p>Personalization Assuming whatever wrong happens, it is because of me. “Mom is looking upset, I must have done something wrong.” “People look bored, I didn’t plan the party well.” “The deal didn’t come through, I must be responsible for it somehow” “The team lost the competition because of me”</p>	<p>Q. What is the advantage/disadvantage of this kind of thinking? Q. Am I taking in too much responsibility on myself? Q. What could be the role of others? (E.g., dad had fought with mom and therefore her mood was off; another member of the team messed up etc.) Q. In team-effort/groups/whole family, if I make a pie-chart, how much responsibility would I be having for its ups and downs/success or failure? Q. If it was indeed my fault or responsibility, what can I do about it? In the present to undo it? Or in the future to prevent it?</p>
<p>Should’s and Must’s Making unreasonable demands on self or others. “People should always follow rules” “People should be more empathetic”</p>	<p>Q. What is the advantage/disadvantage of this kind of thinking?</p>

<p>“Friends should always be available” “People must not tell lies” “I should always be the good son/daughter” “I should never ask for help from others.”</p>	<p>Q. Am I being realistic or too rigid in my thinking pattern?</p> <p>Q. What’s the worst thing that can happen if others/I are not being perfect?</p> <p>Q. Isn’t it human to err?</p>
<p>Emotional Reasoning Looking at situations depending on how you are feeling, rather than rationally <i>“I feel; therefore, it is”</i> An anxious person while getting in the car – “I am feeling anxious, I fear that I will be in an accident.” A depressed person – “I feel so low that I know nothing will ever get better” or “I feel really sad in this place, I don’t think working here is a good idea.”</p>	<p>Q. Could I be viewing this situation from the lens of emotions?</p> <p>Q. Would I have thought the same way, if I wasn’t feeling like this?</p> <p>Q. What could be a more rational way of looking at the situation?</p> <p>Q. What is the advantage/disadvantage of this type of thinking?</p>
<p>Overgeneralization Taking one instance from the past or present, and imposing this on all situations. “You have always been like this, you would never change.” “All men only want one thing” “I always have to make the sacrifices” “You never listen to what I have to say”</p>	<p>Q. What is the advantage/disadvantage of this type of thinking?</p> <p>Q. Am I using the words – “never”, “always”, “all the time”, “everyone” etc.? If yes, is that the true scenario?</p> <p>Q. Can I reframe using – “some times”, “some people” “few times”, “most of the time” etc.?</p>

Dysfunctional Thought Record

	X's Responses (examples)	Your response
Situation (where were you? Whom were you with? What really happened?)	I was with another friend and we were talking to a common friend. He was giving her more attention, rather than talking to me.	
Thoughts (what was going on in your mind? What did the situation make you think?)	“Is there something wrong with the way I look?” “Why is he not paying me any attention?”	
What does this thought mean to me? (Ask yourself – “so what?”)	If he is not giving me attention, he doesn't like me/ I am not likable.	
Emotions (how did it make you feel?) Rate strength of feeling on a scale of 0-100	Angry (90) Alone (90)	
Be the Detective - Take a step back and Evaluate your thoughts (after asking yourself questions from Section 1) Q. Am I making a thinking error/dysfunctional assumption?	Yes, Mind-reading and Jumping to Conclusions	
Reconsider and Dispute thoughts	<p>Q. Am I taking all facts into consideration before assuming the outcome or making a decision?</p> <p>Ans.: Not really. He does talk to me time and again.</p> <p>Q. What is the advantage or disadvantage of this kind of thinking?</p> <p>Ans: Advantage : I will know how to behave in front of him. Disadvantage – it makes me angry and uncomfortable with my own self.</p> <p>Q. Does their behavior even matter?</p> <p>Ans: Not really.</p>	

	<p>Q. How can I be sure of what others are thinking?</p> <p>Ans: I cant be sure always. Only sometimes.</p> <p>Q. Is there an alternate way of looking at the situation?</p> <p>Ans:</p> <p>(1) he doesn't really matter to me and nor does his attention.</p> <p>(2) its not that he dislikes me, its just that he likes my friend more/is trying to woo her.</p> <p>(3) Not getting attention is not always equal to being disliked.</p> <p>Q. Is there anything that I can do to change the situation?</p> <p>Ans: Not required. Right now, I can focus on something happy and pleasurable to feel good.</p>	
Re-evaluate Feelings	Anger (40) Alone (30)	