

**SELF-GUIDED INTERVENTIONS**  
**MANAGING DEPRESSION**  
**IN THE WORKPLACE**



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# Putting Your Thoughts on Trial

Challenge your distressing thoughts in an imaginary court. The defense claims it's true. the prosecution claims it's false. You are the defense, the prosecution, and the judge.

- 1** Identify a single thought for trial and write it down.
- 2** Be the defense. Make a list of all the reasons why the thought is true. Don't censor them—write them all down.
- 3** Be the prosecution. Make a list of all the reasons why the thought is false. Ask yourself, "If a friend thought this about themselves, what would I say to them?", "When was the last time I had a thought like this that wasn't true?" or "Have there ever been any times when this wasn't true?"
- 4** Present the case to the judge. Read the original thought, all the reasons why it might be true, and all the reasons why it might not be true. Do this out loud if you can.
- 5** Be the judge. Ask yourself, "Given all of the evidence, what is the fairest way of summing up this situation?" Write down your answer. Some other helpful questions include:
  - "Is there a more helpful way of thinking about myself or this situation?"
  - "Have I been judging myself harshly? Is there a fairer, more balanced way of summing this up?"
  - "Is there a way I can think about this that is more likely to help me achieve my goals?"

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# Putting Your Thoughts on Trial

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**6** Reflect on your verdict. Courts often use one of two ways to decide whether the evidence is convincing.

- Beyond a reasonable doubt: the evidence is so convincing that a reasonable person would have no doubt about the truth.
- On the balance of probabilities: a standard of proof that means something is more likely than not.

Keeping the above in mind, read your verdict and think about how strong the evidence is that your distressing thought is true.

**7** After having put your thought through on trial, what do you notice about your thoughts and emotions? Write about your thoughts and emotions in a journal.





# Evidence For and Against a Thought

Test whether a thought is accurate with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. The best time for this exercise is just after you notice a change in how you are feeling. A sudden shift in your emotions is a sign that you have had a thought about something or have interpreted an event in a particular way. Writing your thought down quickly keeps the incident fresh in your mind, and will help you recall important details.

- 1** Grab a pen and paper and sit in a comfortable place.
- 2** Draw 7 columns with the following headings:
  1. Situation
  2. Emotion/Feeling
  3. Automatic Thought
  4. Evidence That Supports the Thought
  5. Evidence Against the Thought
  6. Alternative Thought
  7. Emotion/ Feeling
- 3** In the “Situation” column, write about the situation or the context in which you noticed the change in your emotions. Helpful information might include the date and time, where you were, who you were with, and what happened just before the change.
- 4** In the “Emotion/Feeling” column, briefly describe your emotions and body sensations. Rate the intensity of these on a 0-100 scale.

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# Evidence For and Against a Thought

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- 5** In the “Automatic Thought” column, identify the thought that might be behind the feeling you just wrote down. Write just the one thought you want to work on. If you have an image rather than a verbal thought, ask yourself “What does that say about me?” and use that answer as your thought. If your original thought was in the form of a question (“Why am I so stupid?”), turn it into a statement (“I am so stupid”).
- 6** Give the thought an initial Belief Rating. How strongly do you believe in the truthfulness of that thought right now? (0% = not at all, 100% = completely).
- 7** In the “Evidence That Supports the Thought” column, make a list of all the reasons that thought might be true. Don’t censor anything—write them all down.
- 8** In the “Evidence Against The Thought” column, make a list of all the reasons why this thought might not be 100% true all the time. You might find it helpful to ask yourself: “If a friend thought this about themselves, what would I say to them?”, “When was the last occasion that I had a thought like this that wasn’t true?” and/or “Have there ever been any times when this wasn’t true?”

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# Evidence For and Against a Thought

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- 9** In the “Alternative Thoughts” column, ask yourself: “Given all of the evidence, is there a better way of summing up this situation?” and write down your new alternative thought. The following questions might help:

“Is there a more helpful way of thinking about myself or this situation?”

“Have I been judging myself harshly?  
Is there a fairer, more balanced way  
of summing this up?”

“Is there a way of thinking about this  
now that is more likely to help me  
achieve my goals?”

Rate how strongly you believe both your new thought compared to your old thought (again, from 0-100%).

- 10** In the “Emotions/Feelings” column, record the emotions you’re feeling now.





# Alternative Thought Journaling

Our thinking can become biased, but it is within our power to change the way we think. One good way to challenge your thinking is to practice looking from different perspectives.

- 1** Grab a pen and paper and sit in a comfortable place.
- 2** Draw 4 columns titled: Situation, Feeling, Thought and Alternative Viewpoint.
- 3** In the “Situation” column, write about the situation that bothered you. Helpful information might include where you were, who you were with, and what happened just before you noticed a change in how you were feeling.
- 4** In the “Feeling” column, briefly describe your emotions and body sensations. Rate the intensity of these on a 0-100 scale.
- 5** In the “Thought” column, identify a single thought that came with the emotion.
- 6** In the “Alternative Viewpoint” column, take a mental step back to try a new perspective: What is another way of looking at the situation? What would a friend say to you? Will you remember this problem in ten years’ time? How would you respond to this situation if you had no fear?
- 7** Reflect on how you are feeling now compared to how you were feeling when you had started this exercise.







# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

We all get stressed and anxious, and sometimes that can make us feel tense. One great way of managing our stress is this Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique. Caution: If you have aches in any part of your body, do not tighten that part.

- 1** Sit in a comfortable position and focus on your breathing.
- 2** Inhale deeply, hold for 4 seconds and exhale slowly. Repeat at least 5 times.
- 3** Clench your fists for 1 minute. Slowly release them and feel them relax.
- 4** Repeat, tightening your arm muscles.
- 5** Repeat, pushing your shoulders back and up.
- 6** Repeat, pulling in your stomach as much as you can.
- 7** Repeat, tensing your legs—especially your calves.
- 8** Repeat, curling your toes and clenching your feet.
- 9** Repeat, crunching the muscles in your face.
- 10** Focus on your breathing. Inhale deeply, hold for 4 seconds and slowly let it go. Repeat at least 5 times.







# Developing a Nurturing Voice

A nurturing inner voice is one way to counterbalance that critical inner voice that tells us that we're damaged, a disappointment, or simply not good enough.

- 1 Ask yourself if you know of anyone who has a nurturing quality, real or fictional. Who is it?
- 2 Close your eyes and imagine that person in front of you. What do they look like? Imagine them doing something that makes you feel nurtured. What are they doing? Singing? Cooking? Reading a book? What feels right?
- 3 Allow that scene to become as vivid as possible. Listen to the words and the tone of their voice.
- 4 Imagine being next to that person. What would you feel? Feel those feelings throughout your entire body.
- 5 Imagine a time you criticized yourself. Hear the words you said, and the feelings they evoked. Feel those feelings throughout your entire body.
- 6 Switch out of the critical voice back to the nurturing one.
- 7 Notice what it feels like to be responded to with kindness and compassion, instead of criticism.
- 8 Practise this a few more times.
- 9 Remember this technique the next time you find yourself using a critical voice.







# Gratitude Journal

We tend to focus more on the negative than the positive, but this exercise will help us put our experiences into perspective. Instead of ending each day thinking about what went wrong, you'll spend a few minutes thinking about what went right, and get in the habit of noticing positive experiences as they happen.

- 1 Get a book you write in.
- 2 Plan when you'll write in your gratitude journal—at least once every 3 days, though every day would be beneficial. Ensure you won't forget by setting a repeating alarm on your phone or leaving a reminder on your calendar.
- 3 Each time you journal, write down 3-5 things you're grateful for. Spend a moment elaborating on why you are grateful for each entry. For inspiration, try thinking about what your life would be like without the thing you are grateful for. Consider writing about the people in your life, unexpected or surprising events, personal achievements, or even mundane daily pleasures like a good meal or sunny walk.
- 4 Make your gratitude journal a priority. If you treat it as just another chore to be completed and tossed to the side, it won't do much good. Genuinely spend time thinking about your life and experiencing gratitude.
- 5 Read through your journal at least once every month.







## Gratitude Visit

Positive relationships are one of the best predictors of happiness and well-being. Many of us have people in our lives who we cherish and appreciate, but we don't take the time to appreciate the reasons why. There may be people from our past who have positively impacted our lives, but have no idea. Gratitude visits are the perfect opportunity to strengthen our relationships and make someone's day.

- 1** Think about someone who has had a positive impact on your life, or has done something generous for you. It could be a parent, a friend, a teacher, a partner, or just about anyone else. Preferably, it's someone you are able to visit.
- 2** Write a letter to this person telling them how they have impacted your life for the better. Tell them how they have helped you, or why you are grateful for them.
- 3** If possible, deliver your letter in person. Read the letter to them, and then allow the conversation to move forward organically. Allow them to keep the letter as a gift. If it isn't possible to meet in person, call your friend and read the letter over the phone, then mail the letter to them to keep.
- 4** Do this as often as you can.





# Developing Meaning

Having a sense of meaning associated with the past, present, and future can help improve well-being. Meaning can be discovered by creating a narrative or story about your life.

- 1** Write the **story of your past**, 1-2 pages long. Describe how you overcame significant challenges using your strengths. Write an hour or two, wait a few days, then come back and review what you wrote. Feel free to make revisions.
- 2** Write about **who you are now**. Write about how your present self is different from your past self. Include discussion about how your strengths have evolved. This entry should be about one page in length, but feel free to write longer.
- 3** Write about your **imagined future self**. What kind of person do you hope to become? How will your strengths grow? What would you like to achieve? Finally, how can you go about achieving these things? This entry should be about one page in length, but feel free to write longer.
- 4** Save your writings and review them regularly. Update your narratives as you grow.







# Self-Compassion Letter

Well all deserve compassionate thinking when we are struggling with a problem. This exercise will help shift our perspective from one that is self-critical to one that is self-compassionate.

- 1** Decide which problem will be the focus of the letter. It could be something related to your personality, behaviour, abilities, relationships, or any other part of your life.
- 2** Write it down and describe how it makes you feel. Be honest. Only you will see what you write.
- 3** Remind yourself that everyone has flaws. Think about how many other people are struggling with the same thing.
- 4** Consider how the events in your life, the family environment you grew up in, or even your genes may have contributed to this negative aspect of yourself.
- 5** In a compassionate way, ask yourself whether there are things you could do to improve or better cope with this negative aspect. Focus on how you could feel happier, healthier, or more fulfilled, and avoid judging yourself.
- 6** Write a compassionate letter to yourself expressing understanding and acceptance for the part of yourself you dislike. Write as someone who loves and accepts you unconditionally.
- 7** After writing the letter, put it away for a while, then come back to it later and read it again. It may be especially helpful whenever you're feeling bad about this aspect of yourself.







## Unsent Letter

This is a form of writing therapy where you address a letter to someone you feel you can't talk to directly—perhaps a former lover, a former friend, or someone who has died. It's a way of articulating and processing a deeply-held thought or feeling that has somehow been damaging you or holding you back.

- 1** Grab a pen and paper and sit in a comfortable place. Focus on your breathing. Inhale deeply, hold it briefly, and slowly let it go.
- 2** Think about the person who hurt you and write them a letter. Include the things that hurt you, the way you felt hurt, and how you are feeling in the moment. Allow yourself to be as vulnerable as possible when you are writing the letter.
- 3** Once you're finished writing, take your letter and go for a long walk. Observe the things and people around you.
- 4** Go to a river, read your letter one last time, then use the letter to make a paper boat.
- 5** Place your paper boat in the water and watch it float or sink away. Imagine what you have written drifting away from you as well.







# The Reverse Golden Rule

Sometimes it's easier to treat others with love and care while we're harder on ourselves. This exercise is designed to make us more compassionate towards ourselves.

- 1** Imagine a close friend feeling distressed or struggling in some way. How would you respond to your friend in these situations when you're at your best? Write down what you would do and say, and the tone you'd use.
- 2** Think about when you are feeling bad about yourself or struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself? Write down what you would do and say, and the tone you'd use.
- 3** Is there a difference? If so, ask yourself why. What factors or fears lead you to treat yourself differently from others?
- 4** Write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you'd typically respond to a close friend.
- 5** Next time you are struggling with something, try treating yourself like a good friend and see what happens.





## Best Possible Self

Healing happens first in the imagination. This exercise is designed to help you imagine you as your best self. Once you have an idea in your mind, speak to a counsellor to learn the skills and tools to help you reach your full potential.

- 1** Grab a pen and paper and sit in a comfortable place. Focus on your breathing. Inhale deeply, hold it briefly, and slowly let it go.
- 2** Imagine your life in the future. What is the best possible life you can imagine? Consider all the relevant areas of your life, such as your career, academic work, relationships, hobbies, and health. What would happen in these areas of your life in your best possible future?
- 3** You may be tempted to dwell on the gap between your current life and your best possible future, or the difficulties or barriers you have faced in the past, but for this exercise we encourage you to focus solely on a future in which you are your best self, and where your circumstances have changed just enough to make it happen.
- 4** Be specific and engaged. If you think about a new job, imagine exactly what you would do, who you would work with, and where it would be.
- 5** Spend 15 minutes writing about your best possible future.
- 6** Set your work aside for a few hours, then return and read it over. Think about the steps you can take to achieve it, and consider speaking to a counsellor to help you on your way.







# Feeling Supported

When our critical voices are especially loud, it might be helpful to recall how others have comforted and supported us.

- 1** Make a list of people who have given you comfort or support.
- 2** Write down 6 positive qualities that are common to some or all of these people—qualities that they strongly embody.
- 3** Recall and visualize a specific situation when you were feeling distressed or worried and one of these people comforted and helped you.
- 4** Write a brief description of the situation and the way you felt during it.
- 5** Think about how you can treat yourself in the same way you were supported.

