

VIBRANTANDSAIN

# COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

NEW  
OUTLOOK

*Rewire Your Mind  
for Positive Change*



# Cognitive Restructuring

In order for us to become aware of and change stressful thinking we need to identify and challenge our thoughts, to help do this we can use a 4-step approach.

**Step 1. - Becoming Aware of our Automatic Negative Thoughts**

**Step 2. - Identifying Stressful Thinking Errors**

**Step 3. - Challenging Stressful Thinking Errors**

**Step 4. - Replacing Stressful Thinking Errors with Realistic Alternatives**

We have combined this 4-step process into a Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet.

## Step 1 **Becoming Aware of our Automatic Negative Thoughts**

The first step in reducing Stressful Thinking is to become aware of our internal self-talk and our Automatic Negative Thoughts/Beliefs. Recording our thoughts in a thought record/diary is a useful tool for this. When we encounter challenging events, it is useful to write down our thoughts so we can start to tune into what we are saying to ourselves in our internal self-talk. (During Cognitive Behavioural Therapy treatment this record would be

own to the therapist.) As we have previously discussed in The  $A + B = C$  Model of Stress, our thoughts influence and play a powerful role in our feelings. Everybody has negative thoughts but these increase when we are stressed. Our thinking style is a habit and we can with patience and practice change a habit. (Ref: <http://open-mind.org/SP/Articles/9c1.htm>)





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## Step 2

### Identifying Stressful Thinking Errors

The next step is to examine our Automatic Negative Thoughts for Cognitive Distortions (Stressful Thinking Errors). After writing down the thoughts we experienced during stressful events (Step 1), we then need to look at them to see which if our thoughts match any of the stressful thinking errors (see the list of Stressful Thinking Errors that follows), writing down the stressful thinking errors

we have made. As we have previously discussed stressful thinking errors are not accurate and if unrealistic and rigid can not only cause stress, but also exacerbate any stress we are experiencing. The problem with our thinking is that we tend to believe it is accurate. We never examine our thoughts to see if they are unrealistic or inaccurate, we just accept them as being fact which they may not be; and here partly lies the core of stress.



### Identifying Stressful Thinking Errors:

List of Stressful Thinking Errors (Cognitive Distortions). Use this list to help identify any Stressful Thinking Errors you may be making.

1 Catastrophising

2

3

4

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## Step 3

### Challenging Stressful Thinking Errors

Identifying stressful thinking errors is important but we have to then begin to challenge them for their accuracy. If we have thoughts that we are a failure we just tend to accept this, but chances are these thoughts are inaccurate and fuel the difficulties we are having. The problem with modern society is that it demands ever increasing excellence and when we think we have not met up to these demands we then say to ourselves that we have failed.



### Downward Arrow Technique:

This is a useful method for challenging stressful thinking errors. The downward arrow technique consists of challenging statements to make about our stress and the related thinking errors: we keep repeating the questions: If this were true, why would it be so upsetting?

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## Probability Dispute Handles:

1. What are the other possible outcomes?
2. What evidence do we have that \_\_\_\_\_ will happen?
3. Does \_\_\_\_\_ have to equal or lead to \_\_\_\_\_?
4. What has happened in the past? Any exceptions?
5. What are the chances of it happening/happening again?

## Coping Dispute Handles:

**1. What is the evidence to suggest disastrous?**

**2. Could there be any other explanation?**

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## Challenging Stressful Thinking Errors (Contd.)

### Probability Dispute Handles

- What are the other possible outcomes?
- (How likely is what we worry about likely to happen?)
- What evidence do we have that \_\_\_\_\_ will happen?
- Does \_\_\_\_\_ have to equal or lead to
- \_\_\_\_\_?
- What has happened in the past? Any exceptions?
- What are the chances of it happening/happening again?
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### Coping Dispute Handles

- What is the evidence to suggest the consequences will be disastrous?
- Could there be any other explanation?
- Is \_\_\_\_\_ really so important that my whole future depends on it?
- Does \_\_\_\_\_s opinion reflect that of everyone else?
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## Step 4

### Replacing Stressful Thinking Errors with Realistic Alternatives

Often the replacements for automatic thoughts become evident in the course of refuting the irrational beliefs on which they are based. The following excerpt from a fictional case illustrates how this might happen. Jim is a 25 year old male with a fear of negative evaluation and rejection from females he would like to approach for a date. The therapeutic contract he negotiated with his therapist established the following g



1. Increase the number of opportunities for meeting women by joining a health club, taking a course and by participating in some functions of a local singles club.
2. Initiate conversations and engage in small talk with women he hasn't met before.
3. Initiate follow-up conversations with women he has met previously.
4. Ask a woman to join him in a social outing

The following automatic thoughts were reported by Jim in response to anticipating a role play of initiating a conversation with a woman. Listed below his automatic thoughts are the underlying stressful thinking errors/beliefs, the rebuttal he used to challenge these beliefs and the alternative beliefs he substituted:

1. Automatic thought: I won't be able to talk.
2. Stressful thinking error: fortune telling.
3. Rebuttal used to challenge the thought: I'm able to talk to men and women for whom I have no attraction.

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## Stressful Beliefs

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## Stressful Thinking Errors

## Automatic Negative Thoughts

We all have automatic negative thoughts but these increase when we are stressed. Automatic negative thoughts as the term says, can be automatic. They are not based on logical reasoning, they just occur. Automatic thoughts are habitual ways of thinking. Automatic negative thoughts usually occur spontaneously. When they don't, we can use any one of the following techniques to elicit them.

- 1. Focus on the other components of the problem (mood, behaviour) and notice the associated thoughts.**
- 2. Focus on an image and notice what words come to mind.**
- 3. Use imagination in mentally recreating the situation, perhaps with someone else in your role. Notice what thoughts you have.**

### COPE (complete version)

The COPE Inventory was developed to assess a broad range of coping responses, several of which had an explicit basis in theory. The inventory includes some responses that are expected to be dysfunctional, as well as some that are expected to be functional. It also includes at least 2 pairs of polar-opposite tendencies. These were included because each scale is unipolar (the absence of this response does not imply the presence of its opposite), and because we think people engage in a wide range of coping during a given period, including both of each pair of opposites. The items have been used in at least 3 formats. One is a "dispositional" or trait-like version in which respondents report the extent to which they usually do the things listed, when they are stressed. A second is a time-limited version in which respondents indicate the degree to which they actually did have each response during a particular period in the past.



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The third is a time limited version in which respondents indicate the degree to which they have been having each response during a period up to the present. The formats differ in their verb forms: the dispositional format is present tense, the situational-past format is past tense, the third format is present tense progressive (I am ...) or present perfect (I have been ...). You are welcome to use all scales of the COPE, or to choose selected scales for use (see below regarding scoring). Feel free as well to adapt the language for whatever time scale you are interested in. Be sure to adapt the instructions for completion, as well as the items themselves. An abbreviated version of the COPE has also been created, if you have time constraints or high response burden. If you are interested in assessing in Spanish, the abbreviated version was translated into (western hemisphere) Spanish by our research group, and can be found [here](#). The full COPE has been translated (independently) into Spanish Spanish by Dr. Esther Calvete, of the University of Deusto in Bilbao, Spain. It can be found [here](#). I believe that the COPE has been translated by at least one team into French. Contact Dr. Lise Fillion at the University Laval in Quebec: [Lise.Fillion@fsi.ulaval.ca](mailto:Lise.Fillion@fsi.ulaval.ca) Citation to the full COPE: Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Weintraub, J. K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 267-283. For a copy of the article, [click here](#). The items below are the "dispositional" version of the COPE Inventory, as we have administered it. The items are followed by instructions regarding which items are summed for each scale

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy:** The transactional model states that stress is triggered due to a gap you perceive between the demands being placed on you and your ability to cope. Therefore, an easy method of stress management would be to reduce the perceived demands or improve your coping abilities. CBT aims to do this by encouraging the client to perceive and evaluate stressful situations accurately and improve coping skills. Meichenbaum and Cameron 1983's stress inoculation training is designed to prepare individuals for stressors and improve their resilience. It has three stages:

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1. Conceptualization: The client is encouraged to relive stressful situations and analyse features of the much as what was so stressful? This helps clients to make amore realistic understanding of the demands being placed on them.
2. Skill straining and practice: Once the key elements of stressful situations have been identified, clients can be taught specific and non specific ways of coping with them.
3. Application: Finally, the client puts their training to the test in real life. They maintain contact with the therapist, and further sessions can take place if necessary. The method of coping then becomes self sustaining.

## - Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

Whilst we may feel we know how to relax, it is important to be taught a way of effective relaxation. The standard procedure is to train clients to clench and unclench muscles so they can get used to the processes of tension and relaxation. The process would start with one muscle, and work its way through the whole body. Eventually, the client should understand the process well enough to be able to use it to reduce bodily arousal in everyday life. During relaxation, stress response mechanisms are inactive, heart rate and blood pressure fall, and the parasympathetic division of the automatic nervous system is activated.

## - Hardiness Training:

Kobasa's belief that hardiness was an important factor of stress management led her to propose ways which it could be increased. Again, there is a three part procedure:

