

Anxiety Toolbox

Thoughts




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Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking

Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'



If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

Over-generalizing

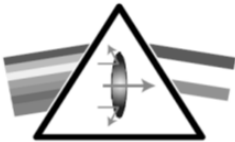
Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw



"nothing good ever happens"

Mental filter

Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.



Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

Disqualifying the positive

Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another




That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:


- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)



$2 + 2 = 5$


Magnification (catastrophizing) & minimization

Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophizing), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important



Emotional reasoning

Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.



I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should


Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

must

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labeling

Assigning labels to ourselves or other people



I'm a loser

I'm completely useless

They're such an idiot

Personalization

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

"this is my fault"

Identifying Triggers Worksheet (In-session)

While at times it may be difficult to identify a trigger, understanding your triggers for anxiety is an important step in helping you know when to implement and/or emphasize practice of the coping strategies you will learn in Anxiety Toolbox. Triggers can be external events (e.g., a test) or internal stimuli (e.g., a physical sensation or emotion) that led to your experience of anxiety (i.e., the emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms previously discussed during this workshop). Remember that sometimes the symptoms themselves can be a trigger that starts the cycle of anxiety.

The following are some typical categories in which triggers might appear with examples:

Responses to Internal Stimuli:

- **Emotions:** e.g., feeling down, fear or worry
- **Mental Images:** e.g., replaying interpersonal interactions or performance experience
- **Physical State:** e.g., racing heartbeat, lightheadedness, tightness in chest
- **Thoughts:** e.g., “I might fail this test”, “That person must not like me”, “If someone talks to me in class, I won’t be able to handle it.”

Responses to External Stimuli:

- **Presence of Others:** e.g., attending a social event, meeting with a professor, spending time with roommates, family interactions
- **Physical Setting:** e.g., a classroom, open areas on campus, inside a car
- **Social Pressure:** e.g., feeling pressured to make friends, feeling pressured to perform well in school (in comparison to your peers)
- **Activities:** e.g., a sports event, a party, going home for the weekend

List some triggers you experience related to your anxiety:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Identifying Triggers Worksheet (Homework)

Pay attention to any triggers for anxiety that you may experience over the next week.

Write them down in the following categories. You may have triggers in all of the categories or you may notice triggers in only one or two categories. (Use the “other” category for triggers you feel don’t fit in the options listed.)

Emotions:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Mental Images:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Physical States:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Thoughts:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Presence of Others:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Physical Setting:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Social Pressure:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Activities:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Other:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Alternative Response Worksheet (example)

Situation: *(When? Where? What? With whom? What did you feel anxious about?)*

A student invited me to a party in my residence hall, but I didn't know her very well and felt anxious about going.

Alternative Thoughts and Images: *(Are these thoughts helpful? Are the anxious thoughts 100% true/accurate, 100% of the time? What are other ways of looking at this? What is the bigger picture?)*

I may not be as socially awkward as I think.

If she invited me, she probably wants me there.

I might still have an okay time, even if I am anxious.

Alternative Behaviors: *(What could you do that would be more helpful for you, others, &/or the situation? What are coping strategies that might be helpful?)*

Coping Strategies I Can Use:

- Deep breathing*
- Distract myself*
- Seek support from a friend/ family member*
- Do a pleasurable activity*
- Use alternative response worksheet*

Alternative Feelings: *(What are feelings that are more helpful? What if you acted and thought differently about the situation? How might these changes help you feel differently?)*

Excited

Wanted

Liked

Hopeful

Original Outcome: *(What was the original outcome?)*

I stayed in my room and watched Netflix.

Desired Outcome: *(Using these new alternatives, what would you like the outcome to be in the future?)*

I want to go to the party so that I can make friends. If I feel too uncomfortable, I can always leave.

If you're having trouble, ask yourself these questions:

Whenever we recognize an anxiety-related thought, feeling or behavior, it can be very helpful to ask ourselves the following questions:

Alternative THOUGHTS:

1. What are other ways of looking at this situation?
2. Am I looking at the whole picture?
3. What might be a more helpful way of picturing this situation?
4. What unhelpful thinking styles might I be using here (see below)?
5. What is the evidence that my thoughts are true? Is there an alternative way of thinking about this situation that is more true?
6. What is the probability that my thoughts will happen? What are some other things that could happen that are equally, if not more, probable?
7. Have I had any experiences in the past that suggests that this thought might not be COMPLETELY true ALL of the time?
8. Can I really predict the future? Is it helpful to try? What is more helpful?
9. Am I exaggerating how bad the result might be? What is more realistic?
10. Can I read people's minds? What else might they be thinking (that's not so negative)?
11. If a friend or loved one were in this situation and had this thought, what would I tell them?

<i>Common Cognitive Distortions (Unhelpful Thinking Styles)</i>	
All or Nothing Thinking: thinking in absolute, black and white categories	Over-Generalizing: seeing a pattern based upon a single event or being overly broad in conclusions we draw
Mental Filter: only paying attention to certain types of evidence (e.g., dwelling on the negatives)	Disqualifying the Positive: discounting the good things that have happened
Jumping to Conclusions: Mind Reading: imagining we know what others are thinking Fortune Telling: predicting the future	Magnification (Catastrophizing) and Minimization: blowing things out of proportion or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important
Emotional Reasoning: assuming because we feel a certain way, what we think must be true	Should/Must Thinking: using words like "should", "must", "ought to" or "have to"
Labeling: assigning labels to ourselves or others	Personalization: blaming yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for OR blaming others and overlooking ways you may have contributed to the outcome

Alternative BEHAVIORS:

1. What could I do in the moment that would be more helpful?
2. What's the best thing to do (for me, for others, or for the situation)?
3. If my feared situation happens, how will I cope? What coping skills can I use to handle my feared situation? What have I done in the past that was successful?
4. Am I needing to work on acceptance, letting go of control, being okay with less than perfect, or having faith in the future and myself?
5. Breathe: Focus your attention on your breathing. Imagine you have a balloon in your belly, inflating on the in-breath, deflating on the out-breath.

Alternative FEELINGS:

1. What might it feel like if I acted/thought differently?
2. When I'm not feeling this way, do I think about this situation differently?
3. Are there any strengths or positives in me or the situation that I might be ignoring?
4. What else might this anxiety be related to? Is it *really* about feeling _____?
5. Tell yourself: "This feeling will pass. It's a normal body reaction."

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Original Outcome: (*What was the original outcome?*)

Desired Outcome: (*Using these new alternatives, what would you like the outcome to be in the future?*)

Alternative Response Worksheet

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