Thoughts and feelings

For a 90-minute group session. A thought record, adapted from the Thought Record.

NAME

DATE

The same situation can feel very different depending on what goes through your mind. If a friend doesn't text back, "She's busy" and "She's tired of me" lead to very different feelings. Most of the time those thoughts go by too fast to notice, and they feel like facts.

A thought record slows the moment down. You write what happened, how you felt, and what went through your mind, then look at the thought most tied to the feeling and weigh the evidence. The goal isn't positive thinking. It's a thought that fits the facts better, one you can actually believe.

How it works

1. **Work one through together.** The group takes a made-up situation through every step.
2. **Learn the thinking styles.** Match example thoughts to familiar patterns.
3. **Do one of your own.** Catch a hot thought, then weigh it with a partner using the question list.
4. **Write a balanced thought.** Rate the feelings and the hot thought again.

Before you start

- Pick a moment that matters but isn't the hardest thing you're facing. A middle-sized feeling is the best place to start.
- Nobody has to see your page. If you talk in the group, you can talk about what this was like without saying what the thought was.
- There's no wrong answer. The page is for you.

An example

THE SITUATION	Texted a friend Saturday morning about getting coffee. By evening, no reply.
FEELINGS	Hurt 70, anxious 50
THE HOT THOUGHT	"She's tired of me." Believed 80.
EVIDENCE FOR	She took a day to answer last time too. We haven't seen each other in a month.
EVIDENCE AGAINST	She asked to get together two weeks ago. She works Saturdays. She's never said anything like that.
A BALANCED THOUGHT	"She's probably busy, and I've missed her, which is why this stings." Believed 70. Hurt now 35.

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1 A made-up situation

Weeks ago, Marcus told his friend Dev he'd come to Dev's birthday dinner. Of the eight people going, he only knew Dev well. At the last dinner like this, two people needed reminding of his name, and he left early. Before that, though, Dev's roommate Sam had talked with him for twenty minutes about a show they both liked. The day of the dinner, his manager pointed out a mistake he'd made, and work ran late. At 5:30, in his car outside the office, he pictured himself at the end of the table with nothing to say while everyone laughed at stories he wasn't part of. He texted Dev that he wasn't feeling well and drove home. That night Dev wrote back, "Feel better! We missed you. Sam asked if you were coming. Lunch next week?" Dev had also made the plans the last three times they got together.

THE SITUATION, JUST WHAT A CAMERA WOULD HAVE CAUGHT

HOW MARCUS MIGHT HAVE FELT

THOUGHTS MARCUS MIGHT HAVE HAD

THE HOT THOUGHT, THE ONE MOST TIED TO HOW HE FELT

EVIDENCE FOR	EVIDENCE AGAINST	FEELS LIKE EVIDENCE BUT ISN'T

A MORE BALANCED THOUGHT

2 Questions to ask about a thought

Use these with a partner, or on your own.

- What are the facts, the things anyone who was there could confirm?
- Is there another way to see this?
- What would someone who cares about me point out?
- What's the worst that could happen, the best, and the most likely?
- What doesn't fit with the thought, or suggests it isn't the whole story?
- What would I tell a friend who had this thought?
- Am I treating a feeling as a fact?
- If the thought is true, what can I do about it?

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3 Thinking styles

Some thoughts follow familiar patterns. Naming the pattern can make a thought easier to question. Match each example to the style that fits best. Some fit more than one.

All-or-nothing thinking. Seeing things in only two categories, like a total success or a total failure.

Catastrophizing. Jumping to the worst possible outcome.

Discounting the positive. Deciding that good things don't count.

Emotional reasoning. Believing something is true because it feels true.

Fortune telling. Predicting that things will turn out badly.

Labeling. Calling yourself or someone else a name, like "loser," instead of describing what happened.

Magnifying and shrinking. Blowing up the bad and shrinking the good.

Mental filter. Focusing on one negative detail and missing the rest.

Mind reading. Assuming you know what someone else is thinking.

Overgeneralizing. Treating one event as a never-ending pattern.

Personalizing and blaming. Taking all the blame, or putting all of it on someone else.

Should and must statements. Rigid rules about how you or others ought to be.

THOUGHT	THINKING STYLE
"I messed up one question, so the whole interview was a disaster."	
"He didn't say hi. He must be angry with me."	
"I'll never get better at this."	
"I feel stupid, so I must be stupid."	
"They only said it went well to be nice."	
"I should be over this by now."	

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4 One of your own

Pick a recent moment when your mood shifted. Stick to what a camera would have caught.

THE SITUATION

FEELINGS, ONE WORD EACH, AND HOW STRONG EACH WAS, 0 TO 100

THOUGHTS AND IMAGES THAT WENT THROUGH MY MIND

THE HOT THOUGHT, THE ONE MOST TIED TO THE STRONGEST FEELING

HOW MUCH I BELIEVE IT, 0 TO 100 _____

5 Weighing it

Facts only, the things anyone who was there could confirm. Be fair to the thought, then look at what doesn't fit.

EVIDENCE FOR

EVIDENCE AGAINST

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6 A balanced thought

Not the opposite of the hot thought, and not a positive slogan. Something that takes both lists into account. Try “even though” or “and.” If the evidence mostly supports the hot thought, write what’s true and what you can do about it.

A BALANCED THOUGHT

HOW MUCH I BELIEVE IT, 0 TO 100 _____

FEELINGS NOW, THE SAME ONES RATED AGAIN

HOW MUCH I BELIEVE THE HOT THOUGHT NOW

WHAT I LEARNED

Keep going

The Thought Record has free printable worksheets and an online version at mythoughtrecord.com. Nothing you enter leaves your device.

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