

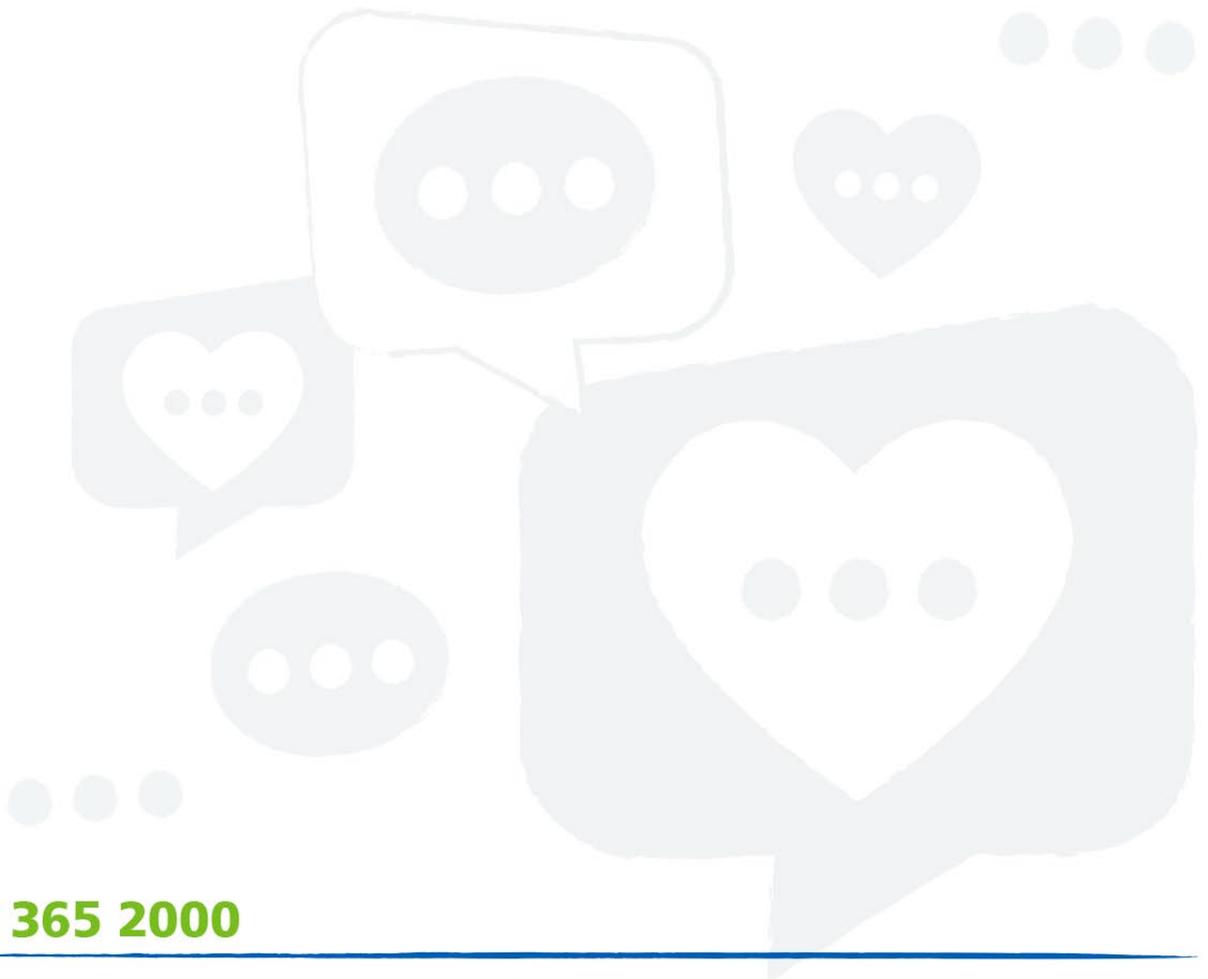


Talking Therapies
Workbook...

Workbook 6

Thoughts

A cognitive restructuring self-help guide



 **0300 365 2000**

Contents of this booklet

<input type="checkbox"/> What affects our thinking.....	3
<input type="checkbox"/> The vicious cycle of anxiety.....	4
<input type="checkbox"/> How can low mood affect our thoughts?.....	5
<input type="checkbox"/> The vicious cycle of low mood.....	6
<input type="checkbox"/> Common negative thinking styles.....	7
<input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive restructuring.....	8
<input type="checkbox"/> Thought diary.....	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Thought challenger worksheet.....	11
<input type="checkbox"/> What if it isn't working?.....	16
<input type="checkbox"/> Three helpful techniques.....	18
<input type="checkbox"/> Notes.....	20
<input type="checkbox"/> Further resources.....	23
<input type="checkbox"/> Useful contacts.....	24



Work through the above and tick once completed.

What affects our thinking?

We can sometimes find ourselves stuck in a vicious cycle with our thoughts when we are feeling overwhelmed. When we don't feel this way, usually we can see things in a more factual and balanced way.

What is a thought?

A thought is not a fact. Our thoughts are often influenced by a number of factors such as mood and experiences. We often have **negative automatic thoughts (NATs)** that pop into our head in a situation. NATs are driven by how we feel, not always by evidence.

How can anxiety affect our thoughts?

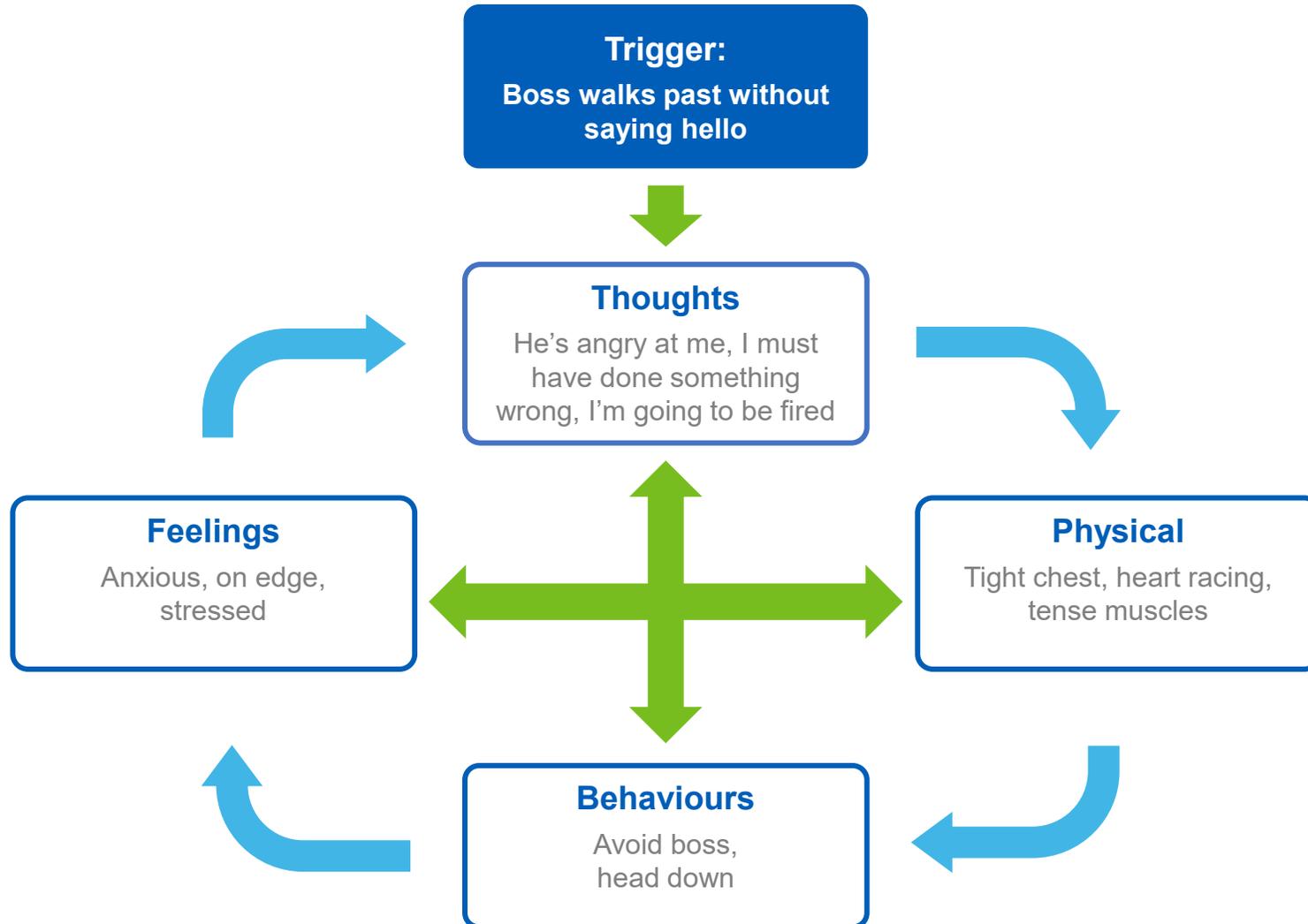
When we feel anxious we tend to make negative and often catastrophic predictions about what will happen to ourselves or others. The cycle on [page 4](#) shows an example of how this can impact our emotions, body and actions. This cycle often causes our anxiety to worsen.

Reflect

Can you think of an example of a time when you noticed this cycle? What were you thinking in that situation?



Vicious cycle of anxiety



How can low mood affect our thoughts?

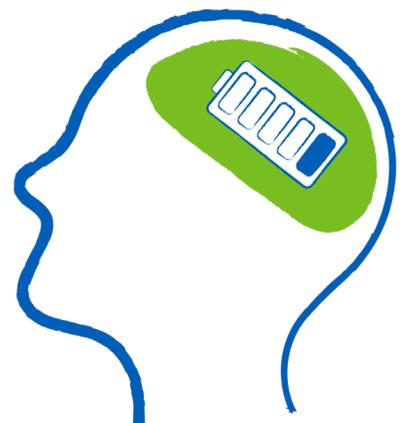
When we are looking at making changes to our mood, we tend to start with our motivation as we can sometimes change the low mood cycle by starting with increasing activity (see page 6).

If this is something you are interested in, please ask your therapist for our **Behaviours and low mood guide**.

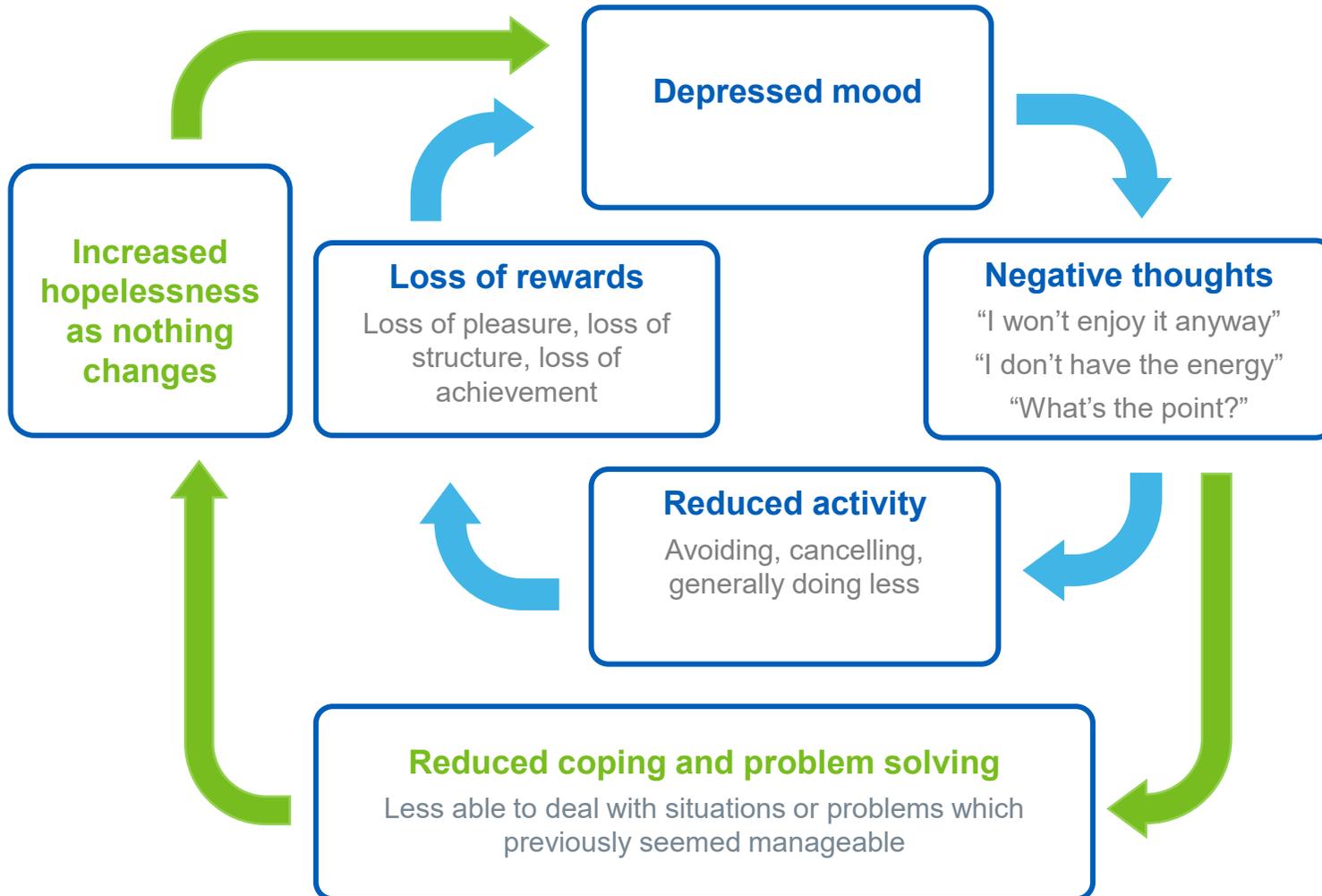
When we are focusing on the thoughts in the cycle, however, there is another aspect we may need to consider. This is that we not only find our activity reducing because of NATs, but also our ability to cope with problems or situations that arise. This can then feed back into feelings of hopelessness when we're not seeing changes, again impacting our mood.

Reflect

- Have you noticed this cycle in yourself?
- Can you recognise any specific thoughts you have as you experience this cycle?



Vicious cycle of low mood



Common negative thinking styles

There are many different negative thinking styles. Read the different types we have listed below and tick the ones you recognise in yourself.

Tick	Negative thinking style	Definition
	Negative filter	Picking out a negative feature and focusing on that without letting anything positive influence it. The opposite of rose-tinted glasses.
	Catastrophising	Believing that disaster is always around the corner and predicting the worst will happen.
	Magnification and minimisation	Exaggerating the importance of negative events and underestimating the importance of positive ones.
	Emotional reasoning	Thinking that what you're feeling must be true about yourself.
	Mind-reading or jumping to conclusions	Assuming that others are thinking the worst of you and reacting to what you believe they are thinking. Ignoring the facts that might indicate otherwise.
	Labelling	Calling yourself unhelpful names such as 'stupid' or 'useless' and thinking that this accounts for who you are.
	Black or white thinking	Seeing things as completely one way or the other (e.g. good or bad), ignoring the grey areas and other possibilities in-between.
	Unrealistic expectations	Thinking about how you 'should' and 'ought' to be and placing unrealistic expectations on yourself.
	Ignoring the positive	Acknowledging something positive about you, such as an achievement, and then using something negative to put yourself down and dismiss it.
	Self-blame	Thinking that everything is your fault and ignoring other contributing factors.



When you notice any of the negative thinking styles, name them e.g. "Stop, I'm catastrophising". You can also add these to your thought diary on [page 10](#).

Cognitive restructuring

How do I start to make changes?

There are many different techniques we use in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) but when we want to make changes to our negative thought patterns, we challenge these thoughts using cognitive restructuring.

Identifying your thoughts can be difficult to begin with, but once we have started to increase our awareness of the thoughts we have and how they impact us, we are then able to begin challenging them.

Cognitive restructuring is a process involving five steps to help us work towards more balanced thinking.

- Step 1** – Record your thoughts
- Step 2** – Identify the “hot thought”
- Step 3** – Find evidence for and against
- Step 4** – Find a more balanced thought
- Step 5** – Review and continue

We will work through the five steps within the next pages.



Even if we don't usually find it helpful to write things down, this can be a form of avoidance. We cannot tackle thoughts without clearly seeing what they are first. Try and write them down at least once and see how it goes.



Cognitive restructuring

Step 1 – Record your thoughts

The first step is to write down the thoughts that we have. You can use the thought diary on the next page.

Here is an example of recording your thoughts. You can see that the first column recognises the trigger or situation you are in. The second column is where you then list the thoughts that went through your mind in that example. The third column is where you note down what you were feeling and rate your emotion in terms of how strong it was at the time, as a percentage (0-100%).

Situation	Automatic thoughts/predictions (Belief 0-100%)	Mood (0-100%)
I haven't met my targets at work	"I'm a failure" (80%) "I'm going to be fired" (60%) "This is all my fault" (80%) "Everyone will think I'm an idiot" (90%) "I am no good at my job" (100%)	Low (80%) Anxious (60%) Frustrated (50%)

You may want to think about a few recent situations you have been in and use the thought diary to record your thoughts. Choose one of the situations you recorded in your thought diary and start to complete the worksheet on [page 11](#).



Thought diary

Situation	Automatic thoughts/predictions (Belief 0-100%)	Mood (0-100%)	Negative thinking style
e.g. Didn't meet target at work	"I'm a failure" (80%)	Anxious (70%)	Labelling

Thought challenger worksheet

Situation	Automatic thoughts (Belief 0-100%)	Mood (0-100%)	Negative thinking style	Evidence that supports that thought (for)	Evidence that does not support the thought (against)	Balanced thought (Belief 0-100%)	Mood (0-100%)

Cognitive restructuring

Step 2 - Identify the “hot thought”

Now we have recorded our thoughts, the next step is to identify which of these is causing the most distress.

We call this the “hot thought” and it is often the thought that is having the most impact on your mood. It is not always the thought that you believe the most but is more the thought that is causing the greatest emotional response in you. Once you have recognised it, circle it on your thought challenger worksheet.

If we use the same example as in **Step 1**, the first three columns may now look like this:

Situation	Automatic thoughts/predictions (Belief 0-100%)	Mood (0-100%)
I haven't met my targets at work	<p>"I'm a failure" (80%)</p> <p>"I'm going to be fired" (60%)</p> <p>"This is all my fault" (80%)</p> <p>"Everyone will think I'm an idiot" (90%)</p> <p>"I am no good at my job" (100%)</p>	<p>Low (80%)</p> <p>Anxious (60%)</p> <p>Frustrated (50%)</p>



Cognitive restructuring

Step 3 – Find evidence for and against

The next step is to identify which of these thoughts is causing the most distress.

The next two columns on the thought challenger worksheet start to look at finding evidence for and against the “hot thought”. We call this “taking your thought to court” because we need to find the factual evidence for and against this thought, challenging it in the way you would in a court room.

The same as in a courtroom, opinions are not valid evidence. For example: “because I feel like a failure” wouldn’t stand up in court.

We have already seen how many common negative thinking styles there are on [page 7](#) and we know that our thoughts aren’t always reliable.

If we use the same example with the hot thought “I’m a failure” these columns could look like this:

Evidence that supports that thought (for)	Evidence that doesn’t support that thought (against)
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I didn’t meet my target2. I haven’t met my target before	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I have met my targets most of the time2. Quite often people don’t meet the targets3. I meet targets more than other people4. My boss told me I do a good job

Now fill in these columns on your thought challenger worksheet.



Only expert opinions count just as they would in court. So, in this example your boss could be considered an expert on your work but a family member probably wouldn’t be.

Cognitive restructuring

Step 4 – Find a more balanced thought

As you can see from finding both evidence for and against, we are not trying to ignore the negative or the evidence we have for our thoughts; ignoring the areas that could be improved or are especially difficult can be just as unhelpful as ignoring the positive. We are looking for a balanced view, allowing us to see both sides.

The final two columns look at using the evidence to find a more balanced thought. Once we have done this, we can rate our mood again and see if anything has changed.

If we use the same example, these columns could look like this:

Balanced thought (Belief 0-100%)	Mood (0-100%)
“I didn’t meet my target but that doesn’t mean I’m a failure. I have met targets in the past when a lot of people haven’t met the targets. My boss told me I am doing a good job.”	Low 30%

Now fill in these last columns on your thought challenger worksheet.



It can be helpful to now rate your belief in your “hot thought” again and see if that belief has changed.

Cognitive restructuring

Step 5 – Review and continue

Once you have found your balanced thought, see how much impact it has on your mood at the time.

The expectation is not to reach a “0%” rating on our mood but to reduce the impact that the thought has. If you didn’t notice a change in your mood, the next section has some advice which you may find helpful. Then try reviewing the process and try again.

Now that you have used the technique, you need to practice it using either the worksheet or on paper until you are able to challenge thoughts more naturally, applying the process without needing to write it down.



What if it isn't working?

Changing how we feel is a slow process but is something that can be helpful if we put in our time and effort. The below tips may be helpful if you're struggling with thought challenging.

I can't find enough evidence

If you're **struggling to find evidence to support the hot thought**, try to:

- Stick to factual information rather than further negative automatic thoughts or assumptions;
- Think about the experiences you have had that back up this thought.

If you're **struggling to find evidence against the hot thought**, try to:

- Imagine it is your best friend who is having this thought. What might you say to them?
- Think about what your best friend would say to you if they knew you were having this thought;
- Think about any experiences you have had that contradict this thought;
- Think about times in the past when you have been in this situation and what happened;
- Imagine you are in a good mood – how would you think about this situation?
- Look at the common unhelpful thinking styles on [page 7](#) Does your hot thought reflect any of these? Do you have a habit of thinking in this way?

What if it isn't working?

Is it the right thought?

If you're **struggling to find the hot thought, make sure:**

- Your hot thought is specific and relates to the mood you want to change.

Is it balanced?

If you're **struggling with writing a balanced thought:**

- Look at both evidence columns and think about the evidence you have in front of you;
- Try to sum up the evidence in one statement. The statement should include evidence from both columns;
- Think about your hot thought. If it is true, then what is the worst that can happen? How much does it really matter if it is true?
- Remember this is not just about positive thinking. It's about realistic and balanced thinking. It is important that you believe in your alternative thought.



It could be more helpful to focus on finding solutions to current problems, ask your therapist for our problem solving guide.



Three helpful techniques

Here are three more techniques which you might find helpful to try for challenging your unhelpful thoughts.

1. Thought stopping

This is a simple technique which can be quite helpful. Like when we discussed using the common thinking styles to label the thoughts when we notice them; people can also find it helpful to shout “STOP” either out loud (if appropriate) or in their head.

This can sometimes help with stopping the thought process from continuing and gives you a moment to question or check in with yourself.

2. Cost benefit analysis

This is something we can use when we find it difficult to challenge our thoughts because we think that they are beneficial to us in some way.

A way of looking at the evidence of this is to weigh the benefits against the costs and see whether these thoughts are more of a benefit or a cost.

For example, the below could show the costs and benefits of the thought “People aren’t going to want to spend time with me if I am myself”.

Benefits	%	Costs	%
I try hard to win people’s approval, which sometimes works	10%	This thought makes me shy and anxious around people and lowers my self esteem This thought prevents me behaving the way that I want	90%

Three helpful techniques

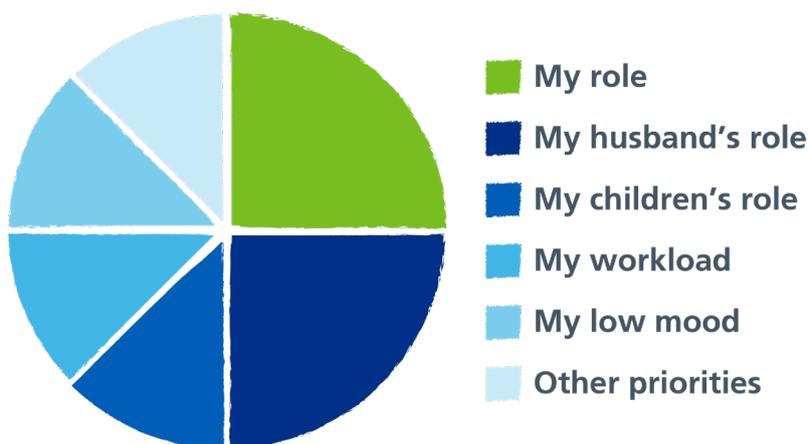
3. Responsibility pie chart (for self-blame)

This can be helpful when we find it hard to consider other things that could have contributed to something going wrong or not in the way that we had hoped.

We tend to find that we are more likely to have self-blame thoughts than take into consideration other things that could have contributed to problems.

The pie chart is something that you could do using Excel or just on paper to consider a range of contributions to a problem.

The below shows the example of a Mum who has an untidy house and has been blaming herself for it. You can see that although she did have a role, she may have assumed before this exercise that this was 100% her fault which doesn't appear to be true.



Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

Further resources



Workbooks

Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI) - <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>

A range of detailed resources and PDF workbooks available to download for free focusing on a range of depression and anxiety related difficulties

Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS – <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>

Self-help guides free to download by PDF and print on a range of difficulties including anxiety and depression

Smartphone apps (found on Apple and Google Play store)

WRAP – Wellness recovery action app

Mood Tools – Depression aid

Fear Tools – Anxiety kit

Insight Timer – meditation app

Websites

Mind – <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Mental Health Foundation - <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

Useful contacts...



Talking Therapies:

0300 365 2000

(Open 8am to 8pm Monday to Thursday
8am to 5pm Friday)

Email:

talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk

Other contacts:

Berkshire Crisis Team:

0800 129 9999

(24 hours, specialist service for
immediate mental health crisis)

Samaritans:

116 123

(24 hours, confidential listening service)

NHS Direct / out of hours:

111

(24 hours, physical and mental
health concerns)

In an emergency always call 999

