

MENTAL WELLBEING SERIES

Challenging Anxious Thoughts

Anxiety can be a healthy emotion—it forces us to focus on our problems, and work to solve them. But sometimes, anxiety grows out of control and does just the opposite. It cripples our ability to solve problems. When this happens, irrational thoughts often play a role.

In this exercise, we will practice noticing our irrational/anxious thoughts and replacing them with rational alternatives. With enough practice, this will become a natural process that can help you manage anxiety.

1. Awareness of Symptoms

Build awareness of your anxious thoughts and worries by identifying what you are feeling:

1. Stop and **pause** for a moment.
2. Pay attention to your **body** and **emotions**.
3. Identify emotions you **feel** (worry, fear, anxiety).
4. Identify **physical feelings** in the body (tension, numbness, pain).

2. Anxious Thoughts

Write down your worry or anxious thought. Your thoughts might start with:

- What if...
- I'm worried that...
- I'm afraid to...
- People are going to think...

3. Type of Thought

Identify the type of thought (cognitive distortion):

- Polarized Thinking
- Mental Filtering
- Overgeneralization
- Jumping to Conclusions
- Catastrophizing
- Personalization
- Blaming
- Labelling
- Always Being Right
- Should Statements
- Emotional Reasoning
- Control Fallacies
- Fallacy of Change
- Fallacy of Fairness
- Heaven's Reward Fallacy

4. Challenge Anxious Thoughts

Challenge the worry or anxious thought by asking yourself the following questions and writing down your answers:

What actually happened?

Has the thing I'm worried about ever happened before?

What have I done in the past to cope with it? What was the result?

How do I know it's true? What evidence is there that the thought is true? What's the probability of it happening?

If the probability is low, what are some of the likely outcomes?

How will worrying about it help me? How will it hurt me?

3. Identify Solutions to Your Worries

Brainstorm a list of solutions. Don't worry about finding the perfect solution, but rather focus on things you can control:

