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Self-Defeating Thoughts Clinical Practice Workbook

A clinically branded, function-preserving edition retaining the original exercises, psychoeducation, checklists, logs, planning tools, and response space.

DSM-5-TR · ICD-11 CLINICAL ALIGNMENT

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How to use this workbook

- Use this workbook selectively and collaboratively; it is educational and does not replace individualized assessment, diagnosis, treatment, medical care, or crisis services.
- Skip, pause, or modify any activity that increases distress, danger, shame, or loss of functioning. Adapt language for culture, disability, neurodivergence, health, resources, and lived context.
- Ratings in this workbook are reflection tools unless a named, validated measure and interpretation are explicitly provided.

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Self-Assessment

The following statements represent signs of self-defeating thoughts. Rate how frequently these thoughts occur for you on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being rarely and 5 being frequently).

Statement	Rate
"I often find myself doubting my abilities."	1 2 3 4 5
"I tend to focus on my past mistakes rather than my accomplishments."	1 2 3 4 5
"I frequently compare myself unfavorably to others."	1 2 3 4 5
"I often believe that things will go wrong no matter what I do."	1 2 3 4 5
"I frequently engage in negative self-talk and criticize myself."	1 2 3 4 5
"I often feel like a victim of circumstances beyond my control."	1 2 3 4 5
"I tend to blame myself excessively for things that go wrong."	1 2 3 4 5
"I often feel unworthy or undeserving of good things in life."	1 2 3 4 5

Score: ____/40

Identifying Triggers

The following is a list of common self-defeating thoughts triggers. Check off the ones you relate to or add more to the list:

- ☐ Receiving criticism or negative feedback.
- ☐ Comparing yourself to others.
- ☐ Making a mistake or failure.
- ☐ Facing a challenging task or situation.
- ☐ Feeling rejected or excluded.
- ☐ Financial difficulties.
- ☐ Relationship conflicts.
- ☐ Physical appearance insecurities.
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed with responsibilities.
- ☐ Not meeting your own expectations.
- ☐ Being in a competitive environment.
- ☐ Feeling stuck or lacking progress in life.
- ☐ Feeling out of control.
- ☐ Fear of making decisions.
- ☐ Feeling like a fraud or imposter.
- ☐ Experiencing a conflict between your values and actions.
- ☐ Perfectionistic tendencies.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

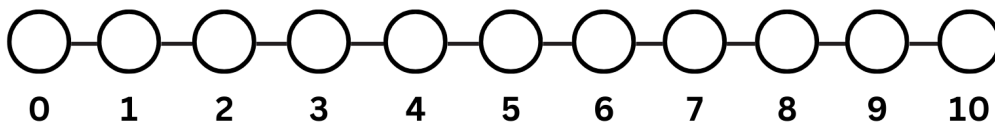
Challenge Catastrophizing Thinking

1. Identifying Catastrophic Thoughts

- Write down a recent situation where you experienced strong negative emotions.

- Identify the thoughts that were running through your mind during that situation. Look for any catastrophic thoughts, such as "This is a complete disaster" or "I will never recover from this."

- On a scale of 0-10, rate the intensity of your emotional distress related to the catastrophic thought.



2. Determine the Severity of the Outcome:

Explore different scenarios and their severity.

Questions to Ask Yourself	Your response
What am I afraid will happen?	
And, so what will happen next, if that occurs?	
Would anything else happen?	

3. Identify Your Coping Strategies

Brainstorm a list of coping strategies that could help you navigate the worst-case scenario. Consider both practical and emotional strategies.

Questions to Ask Yourself	Your response
Has this [worst-case outcome] ever happened before? If, so what did I do before?	
What can I do now if this happens?	

What advice would a loved one or trusted friend or family member give?	
--	--

4. Evaluating the Evidence:

- Take one of the catastrophic thoughts you identified and ask yourself, "What evidence do I have to support this thought?" Then ask yourself, "What evidence do I have against this thought?"

Evidence For	Evidence Against

5. Generating Alternative Perspectives:

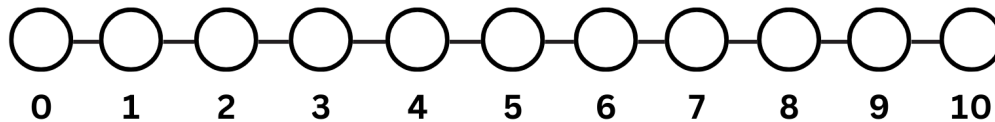
- Take the catastrophic thought you wrote down and think of alternative, more realistic perspectives.

For example, if the catastrophic thought was, "I will never be able to find another job," an alternative perspective could be, "Finding a new job may take time and effort, but with my skills and experience, I have been successful before and can do it again."

- Write down at least three alternative, more balanced perspectives.

6. Rate Emotional Distress:

- After evaluating the evidence and generating alternative perspectives, is there any change in the intensity of your distress?



7. Reappraising the Catastrophic Thought:

- Revisit the original catastrophic thought and consider the evidence for and against it, along with the alternative perspectives.

- Write down a more balanced and realistic version of the thought that acknowledges both positive and negative aspects of the situation.

For example, instead of "This is a complete disaster," it could be modified to "This situation has its challenges, but I can learn and grow from it."

Challenge Negative Self-Talk

Reflect on situations or circumstances that often lead to negative self-talk. It could be related to work, relationships, appearance, or any other aspect of your life.

Situation:

e.g. Receiving constructive criticism at work

Negative self-talk:

e.g. "I'm such a failure. I can't do anything right."

1. Identify the evidence:

Look for concrete evidence that supports or refutes your negative self-talk. Ask yourself, "What facts do I have to support or disprove this thought?"

Evidence that supports the negative self-talk	Evidence that refutes the negative self-talk
<i>e.g. "I made a mistake on that project last month."</i>	<i>e.g. "I have successfully completed many projects in the past."</i>

2. Alternative perspective:

Consider alternative interpretations of the situation. Ask yourself, "Are there any other ways to view this situation that are more objective and balanced?"

e.g., "Constructive criticism helps me improve my skills and grow professionally. It doesn't define my worth as a person."

Alternative perspective:

3. Compassionate thought:

Develop a more balanced and compassionate thought that takes into account the evidence and alternative perspectives.

e.g., "Receiving constructive criticism is an opportunity for growth. It doesn't diminish my abilities; instead, it helps me become better at what I do."

Compassionate thought:

4. Practice and affirm:

Encourage yourself with compassionate and supportive statements.

e.g., "I am open to feedback and committed to continuous improvement. Constructive criticism helps me learn and excel in my work."

Affirmation:

Self-Talk Log

Keep a journal or log of your negative self-talk throughout the day. Write down the thoughts, situations triggering them, and any emotions associated with them. Then try to think of a more compassionate thought to replace the negative one:

Situation	Emotions	Negative Self-talk	Compassionate Thought
e.g. Receiving feedback on a presentation I gave at work.	Disappointment, frustration	"I knew I would mess up. I'm so awful at public speaking."	"It's understandable to feel disappointed, but everyone has room for improvement. I can learn from this experience and work towards improving my public speaking skills."

Compassionate Letter to Yourself

Date: [Insert date] _____

Dear [Your Name] _____,

Start the letter by acknowledging that you are writing to offer yourself compassion and understanding.

Reflect on any recent challenges or difficult experiences you have faced. Acknowledge the impact these situations may have had on you emotionally.

Offer yourself words of kindness and reassurance. Remind yourself that you are doing the best you can and that it's okay to make mistakes.

Reflect on your strengths and resilience. Recall past experiences where you have overcome obstacles and grown stronger.

Acknowledge that the journey of self-compassion is ongoing, and it's okay to have setbacks or moments of self-doubt. Embrace these moments as opportunities for growth and practice self-forgiveness.

Conclude the letter with warmth and understanding. Remind yourself that you are deserving of love, acceptance, and compassion.

[Your Name]_____

Note: Remember, this compassionate letter is for your eyes only, so feel free to be open and honest with yourself. If you find it difficult to offer yourself compassion, imagine you're addressing a friend in the same situation.

Role Reversal

1. Choose a specific situation or challenge that you are currently facing and feeling distressed about. Write a brief description of the situation.

e.g., Situation: I recently had a falling out with a close friend, and it has been causing me significant distress and sadness.

2. Imagine yourself as an impartial observer or a trusted friend looking at this situation. Picture yourself stepping outside of your own perspective and viewing it from a more objective standpoint.

3. Write down what advice or support you would offer to yourself as this impartial observer or trusted friend. Consider what insights or suggestions you would provide to help yourself feel better or navigate the situation more effectively.

e.g., As an impartial observer or trusted friend, I can see that conflicts happen in relationships, and it's normal to experience ups and downs. Take some time to reflect on the situation from both perspectives - yours and your friend's. Consider the possible reasons behind the disagreement and try to empathize with your friend's feelings and motivations. Focus on finding a resolution and rebuilding the relationship.

4. Reflect on the advice or support you offered. Consider how adopting this alternative perspective might change your thoughts, feelings, or behaviors in relation to the situation. Imagine applying this advice or support to yourself.

5. Write down any specific actions or steps you can take based on the advice or support you provided to yourself. Think about small, realistic actions that align with this alternative perspective.

e.g. Reach out to your friend to express your willingness to discuss the situation calmly and without blame. Schedule a time to have an open and honest conversation where both parties can share their thoughts and feelings. Practice active listening and validate each other's perspectives.

6. Commit to implementing at least one of these actions in the near future. Set a specific timeline or deadline for yourself.

This exercise is designed to help you gain a fresh perspective and offer yourself the support and guidance that you may need.

Engage In Problem-Solving Strategies

1. Start by defining the problem clearly and specifically. Write down a brief description of the problem you are facing.

e.g., Feeling overwhelmed and stressed due to a heavy workload.

2. Break down the problem into smaller, more manageable parts. List the different aspects or factors contributing to the problem.

e.g., Factors contributing to the problem could include tight deadlines, excessive workload, lack of time management skills, and difficulty prioritizing tasks.

3. Generate multiple possible solutions or strategies to address each aspect of the problem. Write them all down, without evaluating them at this stage.

e.g., Some possible strategies could be delegating tasks, seeking help or support from colleagues, improving time management skills, and practicing stress management techniques.

4. Evaluate the pros and cons of each solution. Consider the potential benefits, risks, and feasibility of implementing each one. Use rational thinking rather than relying solely on emotions.

Solution	Pros	Cons
<i>e.g., Delegating tasks</i>	<i>May free up time</i>	<i>It requires trust in others' abilities.</i>
<i>e.g., Improving time management skills</i>	<i>Could result in better efficiency overall.</i>	<i>Might involve learning new techniques</i>

5. Select the most viable solution(s) based on your evaluation. Consider which option provides the greatest likelihood of achieving your desired outcome.

e.g., Prioritize improving time management skills to better handle your workload.

6. Create an action plan for implementing the selected solution(s). Break it down into specific steps with clear timelines. This will help you stay organized and motivated.

e.g., attending a time management workshop, setting clear goals and deadlines, and using productivity tools.

7. Put your plan into action. Start working on the steps you outlined, beginning with the first one. Remember, taking action is crucial for progress.

8. Monitor your progress and make adjustments as needed. Reflect on how well the chosen solution(s) are working. If necessary, modify your approach or try an alternative solution.

Set Realistic and Achievable Goals

By establishing clear objectives, you can work towards a more positive mindset.

Step 1: Identifying Self-Defeating Thoughts

Take a moment to reflect on the self-defeating thoughts that often hinder your progress or well-being.

Example self-defeating thoughts:

1. "I'll never be able to succeed in my career."
2. "I'm not smart enough to achieve my goals."
3. "I always mess things up, so what's the point of trying?"

Step 2: Setting Realistic and Achievable Goals

Now, let's focus on identifying specific goals that counteract your self-defeating thoughts. Remember, these goals should be measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

Example goals:

1. Complete a professional development course to enhance my skills and increase my career opportunities within the next six months.
2. Allocate at least 30 minutes each day to study and improve my knowledge in areas related to my personal and professional goals.

3. Seek guidance from a mentor or coach to develop strategies and action plans to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

Step 3: Breaking Down Goals into Actionable Steps

To make your goals more manageable and achievable, break them down into smaller actionable steps.

Example actionable steps:

Goal: Complete a professional development course within the next six months.

Actionable steps:

1. Research and identify relevant courses or training programs.
2. Determine the cost and availability of the selected courses.
3. Allocate time in my schedule to attend the course or complete it online.
4. Register for the course and commit to completing all required assignments and assessments.

Focus On Your Strengths

Step 1: Identifying Your Strengths

1. Reflect on your personal qualities, skills, and experiences that you consider to be strengths. Write down at least five strengths that you possess. These can be related to various aspects of your life, such as personal, professional, or social.

e.g., self-awareness, empathy, resilience, optimism, open-mindedness, perseverance, communication skills, leadership, problem-solving, adaptability, creativity, etc.

Step 2: Harnessing Your Strengths

1. Choose one of the strengths you listed. Reflect on how you can apply this strength to overcome a current challenge or enhance an aspect of your life. Write down specific actions or strategies that you can pursue to harness and maximize this strength.

Strength: _____

How can I apply this strength to overcome a challenge or enhance my life?

Actions/Strategies:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 3: Building Confidence with Success Stories

1. Recall a time in your life when you successfully utilized one of your strengths. Reflect on the details of that experience, including the challenges you faced, the actions you took, and the positive outcome you achieved.

Strength: _____

Success Story:

Describe a situation where you successfully applied this strength. Include details such as the challenge, actions taken, and positive outcomes.

Remember to regularly revisit this worksheet as a way to refocus your attention on your strengths.

Visualization

Use visualization techniques to imagine success and overcome self-doubt.

Step 1: Relaxation

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Take a few deep breaths, allowing your body to relax with each exhale. Close your eyes and focus on releasing any tension in your muscles, starting from your toes and working your way up to your head.

Step 2: Creating a Mental Image

Imagine yourself in a peaceful and serene setting, such as a beautiful beach or a tranquil forest. Visualize the details of this location - the colors, textures, and sounds. Allow yourself to fully immerse in this environment.

Step 3: Feeling Self-Doubt Fade Away

Now, visualize the presence of self-doubt as a separate entity from yourself. Picture it as a dark cloud or fog that surrounds you. As you continue to visualize, see this cloud gradually dissipating and fading away, revealing clear and bright skies.

Step 4: Embracing Confidence

In this serene setting, imagine yourself radiating confidence and self-assurance. Visualize yourself standing tall, with a sense of inner strength and belief in your abilities. See the light shining from within you, symbolizing your unwavering confidence.

Step 5: Affirmations and Positive Self-Talk

Repeat affirmations and positive statements to yourself throughout this visualization. Some examples include:

- "I am capable of achieving my goals."
- "I have unique strengths and talents."
- "I am deserving of success and happiness."
- "I trust myself to make wise decisions."
- "I am resilient and can overcome challenges."

Step 6: Engaging in Success

As you bask in this confident state, visualize yourself engaging in activities that align with your goals and aspirations. Imagine accomplishing tasks with ease, enjoying a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Picture yourself celebrating small victories along the way.

Step 7: Coming Back to the Present

Slowly bring your attention back to the present moment. Take a few deep breaths, feeling the relaxation in your body. Gradually open your eyes, allowing yourself to acclimate to the present surroundings.

Repeat this visualization exercise regularly to reinforce positive beliefs and overcome self-doubt.

Activities That Bring You a Sense of Mastery

Engage in activities that bring you a sense of accomplishment and mastery. The following are some examples. Check off the ones you want to try:

- ☐ Cooking a new recipe from scratch
- ☐ Learning to play a musical instrument
- ☐ Painting or drawing a picture
- ☐ Writing a short story or poem
- ☐ Gardening and growing your own plants
- ☐ Building a piece of furniture
- ☐ Learning a new dance routine
- ☐ Learning a new language
- ☐ Crafting and DIY projects
- ☐ Learning to code or program
- ☐ Tackling a home improvement project
- ☐ Becoming skilled at public speaking
- ☐ Training and completing a marathon or triathlon
- ☐ Knitting or crocheting a complex pattern
- ☐ Creating a unique piece of jewelry
- ☐ Training and participating in a martial art
- ☐ Learning to write calligraphy or hand lettering
- ☐ Becoming skilled at woodworking or carpentry
- ☐ Learning to sew and creating your own clothing
- ☐ Developing advanced computer skills, like graphic design or video editing
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Think about times in your life when you felt a sense of mastery or accomplishment. What specific activities were you engaged in during those moments? Write down at least three examples.

Choose an activity and identify specific goals related to that activity. These goals should be challenging yet attainable.

Activity : _____

Goals:

Surround Yourself With Supportive And Positive People

Think about the people in your life who are supportive, encouraging, and positive. These individuals can include family members, friends, mentors, or even professionals. Write down the names of these individuals in the space provided below.

Consider how you can strengthen and expand your network of supportive and positive individuals. Reflect on the following questions and write down your answers.

1. Who among the people you listed can you reach out to for support when you're feeling down or struggling with self-defeating thoughts?

2. How can you effectively communicate your needs and express your feelings to your support network? Consider the best ways to seek assistance and encouragement from these individuals.

3. Are there any group activities or communities you can join to connect with like-minded individuals who promote positivity and personal growth? Write down any ideas that come to mind.

Now, it's time to take action and incorporate these supportive individuals into your life. Write down two actionable steps you can take to surround yourself with supportive and positive people.

Example actionable steps:

1. Reach out to Sarah and plan a coffee date to discuss my challenges and seek her advice and support.
2. Contact a local wellness center to inquire about any group workshops or activities where I can connect with positive and like-minded individuals.

Keep a Gratitude Journal

The purpose of this gratitude journal is to help shift your focus towards positivity and appreciation.

Date: _____

1. Three things I am grateful for today:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. How did these things make me feel? (e.g., happy, content, peaceful)

3. Additional positive aspects of my life

4. How can I express gratitude for these positive aspects?

5. Challenges or difficulties I faced today:

6. How can I find gratitude even in challenging situations?

Practice Forgiveness Towards Yourself

1. Write down the specific situation or event that you find it difficult to forgive yourself for.

2. Reflect on the emotions associated with this situation. What emotions do you feel when you think about it? Write them down.

3. Acknowledge that making mistakes is a part of being human. Remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes and that it is an opportunity for growth and learning. Imagine saying this to a close friend in the same situation.

4. Contemplate the lessons you have learned from this situation. What insights or personal growth have you gained as a result? Write them down.

5. Write a letter to yourself, addressing the younger version of yourself who was involved in the situation. Apologize for any pain or harm caused, express your understanding and compassion, and assure them that you have learned and grown from the experience.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

6. Take a moment to visualize the younger version of yourself receiving this letter and accepting your apology and forgiveness. Imagine their expression, body language, and any changes that indicate acceptance and relief.

7. Reflect on how you feel after completing this exercise. Notice any shifts in your emotions or self-perception.

Repeat this exercise as often as needed. Forgiveness towards oneself can be a process that takes time and practice. Be patient and kind to yourself throughout the journey.

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: No diagnosis under this title · not a DSM-5-TR diagnosis
- ICD-11 CDDR: · not an ICD-11 mental disorder diagnosis
- This workbook is non-diagnostic. A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- The audit identified source pages 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 14, 16, 17, 22, 24, 25, 33, 34. The statements below supersede incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or resource wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- Do not infer a disorder from worksheet endorsement. Assess duration, severity, distress or impairment, medical/substance causes, cultural context, and relevant differentials when symptoms warrant evaluation.

Document-specific corrections

- Replace the global label ·self-defeating· with function-based descriptions of thoughts in context.
- Distinguish cognitive reappraisal from disputing accurate concerns about discrimination, poverty, disability, abuse, or unsafe work.
- Present gratitude, visualization, forgiveness, and positive support as optional strategies rather than required recovery steps.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- Pages [1, 3, 4, 6]: identify each measure and rights holder; verify intended population, reliability/validity, scoring and cutoffs, reproduction permission, and current license. If these are author-created items, label them informal, remove diagnostic cutoffs, and do not claim validation.

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Pages [2]: require topic-qualified clinical review for consent, readiness, contraindications, escalation thresholds, and whether clinician-guided use is necessary.

Crisis and current resources

- NICE guidance on anxiety interventions and collaborative treatment planning.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>
- <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg113>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>
- <https://988lifeline.org/>