

A PRINTABLE SELF-HELP PACK

CBT Thought Record Bundle

A Printable Workbook for Calmer, Clearer Thinking

Catch the thought. Check the facts. Choose what comes next.

INSIDE THIS PACK

- The CBT model, explained simply
- A guide to 12 common thinking traps
- Quick and full thought records (with a completed example)
- Reframing practice, evidence worksheets, and a core belief explorer
- A weekly activity planner and progress tracker

How to Use This Workbook

Welcome. This workbook teaches you a simple skill: noticing your thoughts, checking how accurate they are, and finding a fairer way to see things. It sounds small. Practiced regularly, it can change how you feel day to day.

Start here

Step 1 — Read the learning pages first. Pages 3 to 5 explain the CBT model and the 12 most common thinking traps. Everything else in the workbook builds on them.

Step 2 — Begin with the 3-column record. It takes about two minutes. Use it for a week or two until noticing your thoughts starts to feel natural.

Step 3 — Move up to the 7-column record. This is the full skill. Read the worked example on page 8 before your first try so you can see what a finished record looks like.

Step 4 — Add the extras when you are ready. The reframing page, evidence deep-dive, activity planner, and core belief explorer each build a different part of the skill. There is no required order.

Tips that make it work

- **Write it down.** Thoughts sound convincing in your head. On paper, they are easier to question.
- **Sooner is better.** Try to complete a record within a few hours of a difficult moment, while the details are fresh.
- **Aim for honest, not positive.** The goal is not to force cheerful thoughts. It is to find thoughts that are *accurate* — ones you can actually believe.
- **Print extras.** The worksheet pages are meant to be reused. Print as many copies as you need.
- **Expect it to feel clunky at first.** Like any skill, it gets faster and more natural with practice. Most people notice a difference after two to three weeks of regular use.

A gentle note

If writing about your thoughts ever feels overwhelming, pause and take a break. This workbook is a self-help tool, not a treatment. If difficult feelings persist or get worse, reaching out to a qualified mental health professional is a strong and sensible next step. Crisis resources are listed on the last page.

The CBT Model

The big idea

Situations do not directly cause our feelings. Our *interpretation* of the situation — the thought — sits in between. Two people can face the exact same moment and feel completely different, because they told themselves different stories about it.

CBT maps this with a simple triangle:

THOUGHTS □ **FEELINGS** □ **BEHAVIORS** (and BEHAVIORS □ THOUGHTS)

- **Thoughts** are the words and images that pass through your mind: interpretations, predictions, self-talk.
- **Feelings** are emotions (sad, anxious, angry, ashamed) and the body sensations that come with them (tight chest, heavy limbs, racing heart).
- **Behaviors** are what you do — including what you *avoid* doing.

Each corner feeds the others. A harsh thought stirs up a painful feeling. The feeling pushes you toward a behavior (often avoiding something). The avoidance then "confirms" the thought, and the loop tightens.

An everyday example

The situation: You wave at a neighbor across the street. They walk past without waving back.

Loop A:

- *Thought:* "They ignored me on purpose. I must have done something wrong."
- *Feeling:* Hurt, anxious. Stomach sinks.
- *Behavior:* You avoid the neighbor for the next two weeks. The awkwardness grows, which makes the thought feel even more true.

Loop B — same situation:

- *Thought:* "They probably didn't see me. People get lost in their own heads."
- *Feeling:* Neutral, maybe mildly amused.
- *Behavior:* You say hi next time you see them. They apologize — they were on a stressful phone call.

Same street, same wave, same neighbor. The only difference was the thought.

Why this matters

You cannot always control situations, and you cannot switch feelings on and off. But thoughts can be *examined*. When you slow down and check a thought against the facts, the feeling often shifts on its own — not because you forced it, but because the story changed.

That checking process is exactly what a thought record does. That is where this workbook goes next.

12 Thinking Traps — Part 1

Thinking traps (also called cognitive distortions) are habits of thought that bend reality in a negative direction. Everyone falls into them — they are shortcuts the brain takes under stress. The skill is not avoiding them forever. It is *catching* them.

As you read, tick the box beside any trap that feels familiar.

☐ 1. All-or-Nothing Thinking

Seeing things in only two categories: perfect or ruined, success or failure, always or never. There is no middle ground.

Example: You stick to your budget for 25 days, overspend on day 26, and decide, "The whole month is blown. Why bother?"

☐ 2. Overgeneralizing

Treating one event as proof of a never-ending pattern. Watch for the words "always," "never," and "every time."

Example: One awkward first date, and you conclude, "I'm never going to meet anyone."

☐ 3. Mental Filter

Zooming in on the one negative detail and letting it color the whole picture, like a drop of ink in a glass of water.

Example: Ten people compliment your cooking at dinner. One person leaves food on their plate. You spend the evening thinking about that one plate.

☐ 4. Discounting the Positive

Accepting the bad as real but explaining away the good — "that doesn't count," "they were just being nice," "anyone could have done it."

Example: Your manager praises your report. You think, "She says that to everyone," and the compliment slides right off.

☐ 5. Mind Reading

Assuming you know what others are thinking — and assuming it's negative — without any real evidence.

Example: A coworker is quiet in a meeting, and you decide, "He thinks my idea was stupid." (He was worrying about his sick dog.)

☐ 6. Fortune Telling

Predicting a bad outcome and treating the prediction as a fact that has already happened.

Example: Before a job interview you think, "I'm going to freeze up and embarrass myself," and you feel defeated before you walk in the door.

12 Thinking Traps — Part 2

□ 7. Catastrophizing

Jumping to the worst-case scenario and dwelling there. A small problem becomes a disaster in three mental steps.

Example: Your landlord asks to "talk this week," and within minutes you are picturing eviction, packing boxes, and moving back in with your parents.

□ 8. Emotional Reasoning

Using a feeling as evidence: "I feel it, so it must be true." Feelings are real, but they are not always accurate reporters.

Example: "I feel like a burden, so I must be one." The feeling is genuine — the conclusion is not proven.

□ 9. Should Statements

Running your life on rigid rules about how you (and others) "should," "must," or "ought to" be. When the rule breaks — and rules always break — the result is guilt (aimed at yourself) or resentment (aimed at others).

Example: "I should be able to handle this without help." So you don't ask, and you struggle twice as long.

□ 10. Labeling

Turning one action into a permanent identity. Instead of "I made a mistake," it becomes "I'm an idiot." Instead of "they were rude," it becomes "they're a terrible person."

Example: You forget a friend's birthday and spend the day telling yourself, "I'm a horrible friend" — a label, not a fact.

□ 11. Personalization

Taking responsibility for things that are not fully (or at all) in your control, or assuming other people's moods and actions are about you.

Example: Your friend is short-tempered on the phone, and you spend an hour reviewing what *you* must have done wrong. She'd had a parking ticket and a bad day.

□ 12. Blaming

The mirror image of personalization: putting all the responsibility for your feelings or problems on other people or circumstances, which leaves you powerless to change anything.

Example: "I'm miserable at work because my boss is impossible." Maybe partly true — but it skips every option still in your hands.

Quick reflection

The three traps I fall into most often are:

1.

2.

3.

A recent moment when one of them showed up:

Quick Thought Record

The two-minute version. Use this to build the habit of noticing.

How to fill it in: When you notice your mood shift, jot down three things: what was happening (**Situation**), what went through your mind (**Thought**), and what you felt (**Feeling**). Stick to one line each. No fixing or reframing yet — this page is only about catching the thought.

Example:

- Situation: *Sunday night, thinking about the week ahead*
- Thought: *"I'll never get everything done."*
- Feeling: *Overwhelmed*

Table structure

Situation — Where were you? What was happening?	Thought — What went through your mind?	Feeling — One or two emotion words
<i>Sunday night, thinking about the week ahead</i>	<i>"I'll never get everything done."</i>	<i>Overwhelmed</i>
(blank row 1)		
(blank row 2)		
(blank row 3)		
(blank row 4)		
(blank row 5)		
(blank row 6)		

Footer prompt (below the table):

Looking over this page — do any thinking traps from pages 4–5 show up more than once? Circle them in the table.

Full Thought Record

The complete skill. Allow 10–15 quiet minutes. See page 8 for a finished example.

The seven steps, in order:

1. **Situation** — Just the facts: who, what, where, when. No opinions yet.
2. **Emotion + intensity** — Name each emotion and rate its strength from 0–100%.
3. **Automatic thought** — What went through your mind? Underline the thought that stings most (the "hot thought").
4. **Evidence FOR** — Facts (not feelings) that support the hot thought.
5. **Evidence AGAINST** — Facts that don't fit the hot thought. Take your time here; this column is usually the hardest and the most useful.
6. **Balanced thought** — A new thought that honestly accounts for *both* evidence columns. Believable, not just positive.
7. **Re-rate emotion** — Rate the same emotions from step 2 again, 0–100%.

Table structure

Situation Who, what, where, when — facts only	Emotion + Intensity Name each emotion; rate 0–100%	Automatic Thought What went through your mind? Underline the hot thought	Evidence FOR Facts that support the hot thought	Evidence AGAINST Facts that don't fit the hot thought	Balanced Thought A fair thought that fits ALL the evidence	Re-rate Emotion Same emotions as column 2, rated again 0–100%

Footer tip :

The number in column 7 rarely drops to zero — and it doesn't need to. A drop from 80% to 45% means the skill is working.

Worked Example

Here is one completed record, start to finish, so you can see the skill in action.

Column 1 — Situation:

Saturday, 4 p.m. My friend texted to cancel our dinner plans two hours before we were supposed to meet. Second cancellation this month.

Column 2 — Emotion + Intensity:

Hurt — 75%. Anxious — 60%.

Column 3 — Automatic Thought:

"She keeps cancelling because she's tired of me. I must be boring to be around." (*hot thought underlined*)

Column 4 — Evidence FOR:

- She has cancelled twice this month.
- The cancellation was last-minute both times.

Column 5 — Evidence AGAINST:

- She texted right away to apologize and suggested a new date herself.
- She started a demanding new job three weeks ago and has mentioned being exhausted.
- Last month she planned my birthday dinner and stayed the latest of anyone.
- Other friends still invite me out regularly.
- "Boring" is a feeling I have about myself, not something anyone has actually said.

Column 6 — Balanced Thought:

"Her cancelling is most likely about her exhausting new job, not about me. Twelve years of friendship and a rebooked date are better evidence than one stressful month. I can tell her I miss her instead of assuming the worst."

Column 7 — Re-rate Emotion:

Hurt — 35%. Anxious — 15%.

What makes this record work

□ **The situation is facts-only.** Notice column 1 contains nothing about *why* the friend cancelled — no interpretations, just what happened. The interpretations belong in column 3, where they can be examined.

□ **The evidence columns hold only facts.** "I feel boring" did not qualify as evidence — that's emotional reasoning (trap 8). Facts are things a camera could record or a neutral observer would agree happened.

□ **The balanced thought is honest, not sugary.** It doesn't claim "everything is fine!" It accounts for the cancellations *and* the twelve years of friendship — and it ends with something doable. That's why the emotion ratings actually dropped.

Putting a Thought on Trial

For the stubborn thoughts — the ones that keep coming back. Give this page 15 unhurried minutes.

The thought I'm examining:

How much do I believe it right now?

When does this thought usually show up? (situations, times of day, around certain people)

The evidence

Rules of the courtroom: facts only. A fact is something a camera could record or a neutral bystander would confirm. Feelings, guesses, and mind reading are not admitted.

Evidence FOR the thought (facts only):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Evidence AGAINST the thought (facts only):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Cross-examination

Answer any two:

If my closest friend had this exact thought, what would I say to them?

Am I treating a feeling as a fact? Which one?

Am I ignoring anything — including things that went fine?

Will this matter in five years? In five weeks?

The verdict

Weighing all the evidence, a fairer and more accurate thought is:

How much do I believe the original thought now?

Reframing Practice

Warm up on someone else's thoughts before tackling your own. For each thought below: (a) name the thinking trap(s) you spot — use pages 4–5 as your guide — and (b) rewrite the thought so it is fair, accurate, and something you could actually believe.

Remember: a good reframe is not forced positivity. "Everything is great!" is just as distorted as "everything is ruined." Aim for the honest middle.

Thought 1: "I stumbled over my words in the meeting. I always ruin everything."

Trap(s) I spot:

A fairer, more accurate thought:

Thought 2: "They haven't replied to my message. They must be upset with me."

Trap(s) I spot:

A fairer, more accurate thought:

Thought 3: "If I can't do this perfectly, there's no point in doing it at all."

Trap(s) I spot:

A fairer, more accurate thought:

Thought 4: "I felt anxious the whole party, so it must have gone badly."

Trap(s) I spot:

A fairer, more accurate thought:

Thought 5: "I should be much further along in life by now."

Trap(s) I spot:

A fairer, more accurate thought:

Bonus — one of my own:

An unhelpful thought I've had recently:

Trap(s) I spot:

A fairer, more accurate thought:

Weekly Activity Planner

Why action comes before motivation

When mood is low, the natural urge is to wait until you *feel like* doing things. But research on behavioral activation shows the arrow usually points the other way: **action comes first, and motivation follows**. Doing small, meaningful activities — even without enthusiasm — reliably lifts mood over time.

This planner adds one powerful twist: you predict how enjoyable each activity will be *before* you do it, then rate it *after*. Most people discover their predictions run low. Seeing that gap on paper, week after week, teaches your brain to trust action again.

How to use it: Plan one small activity per day. Small means small — a ten-minute walk counts. Before the activity, rate your predicted enjoyment from 0–10. Afterward, rate what it was actually like.

Need ideas? Short walk outside · calling or texting someone you like · cooking one real meal · music (listening or playing) · stretching · a shower and fresh clothes · 15 minutes on a hobby · tidying one small area · sitting somewhere with sunlight · a show or book you enjoy

Table structure

Day	Activity (keep it small)	Predicted enjoyment (0–10)	Actual enjoyment (0–10)
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

End-of-week reflection

Compare your two number columns. What do you notice?

Which activity surprised me most, and why?

One activity worth repeating next week:

Core Belief Explorer

Automatic thoughts are the leaves. Core beliefs are the roots — old, deep assumptions about ourselves, usually formed long ago, that quietly generate our day-to-day thoughts. This page helps you trace one thought down to its root and begin loosening it.

A gentle heads-up before you begin: this exercise digs deeper than the others and can stir up strong feelings. Go slowly, be kind to yourself, and feel free to stop at any point. If what comes up feels heavy or connects to painful past experiences, exploring it with a qualified mental health professional is a wise next step — this kind of work is exactly what they are trained for.

Step 1 — Follow the thought down

A negative thought that keeps returning:

Now ask the same question three times, going one level deeper each time:

If that thought were true, what would it mean about me?

And if THAT were true, what would it mean about me?

And if THAT were true, what would it mean about me?

The belief at the root seems to be: (often short and absolute — e.g., "I'm not good enough," "I can't rely on anyone," "I'm unlovable")

How much do I believe it?

Step 2 — Examine the root

How old does this belief feel? When do I first remember thinking this way?

Is this belief 100% true, 100% of the time? What are the exceptions?

1.

2.

3.

Step 3 — Plant something new

A more balanced belief I would like to practice: (fair and believable — e.g., "I'm not good enough" might become "I have real strengths and real flaws, like everyone")

One small action this week that fits the new belief:

Core beliefs took years to form. They loosen through repetition, not one worksheet — revisit this page monthly and watch the percentage change.

Weekly Progress Tracker

Print one copy per week. Small, steady practice beats occasional marathons.

Week of:

Daily log — table structure

Day	Thought record done? (□ / –)	Strongest emotion today	Intensity before record (0–100%)	Intensity after record (0–100%)	One good moment today
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Note under table: the "before" and "after" columns only need numbers on days you completed a thought record. The "one good moment" column is for every day — it trains the mental filter (trap 3) in reverse.

Weekly review

The thinking trap that showed up most this week:

A situation I handled differently than I would have a month ago:

On average, did my emotion ratings drop after completing records? ☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not yet ("not yet" is normal in the early weeks — keep going)

One thing I'll do differently next week:

How I'd describe this week in three words:

Important Information

About this workbook

This workbook is an educational self-help resource. It is based on general principles of cognitive behavioral therapy, but it is **not psychotherapy, counselling, or medical or psychological advice**, and it is not a diagnosis or treatment for any condition.

Using this workbook **does not create a therapist–client or any other professional relationship** between you and the creator of this material.

This workbook is **not a substitute for care from a qualified professional**. Self-help tools work best alongside — never instead of — professional support when it is needed. If your low mood, anxiety, or distress lasts more than a few weeks, gets worse, or interferes with your daily life, work, or relationships, please reach out to a physician, a registered/licensed mental health professional, or a local community mental health service. Asking for help is a skill, too.

Everyone's situation is different. You are responsible for deciding whether this material suits your circumstances, and no specific results are promised or implied.

If you need support now

If you are in crisis, thinking about suicide, or worried about someone else — you deserve immediate, human support. Free, confidential help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- **Canada and the United States: Call or text 9-8-8** — the Suicide Crisis Helpline (Canada) and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (US). Available 24/7 in English and French (Canada) and English and Spanish (US).
- **Prefer texting? Text 988** in either country, or in the US you can also text **HOME to 741741** (Crisis Text Line).
- **If you or someone else is in immediate danger: call 9-1-1** (Canada and US) or go to your nearest emergency department.

You do not need to be suicidal to reach out. These lines are there for overwhelming stress, emotional distress, and worry about a loved one, too.

Thank you for spending this time on your own mind. Be patient with yourself — noticing is the skill, and every page you fill in is practice.