



AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

A CBT GUIDE TO NOTICE, EXPLORE, AND CHOOSE A BALANCED RESPONSE

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WHAT CBT MEANS HERE

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) examines relationships among situations, thoughts, emotions, body responses, and behavior.
- Automatic thoughts can appear quickly and feel true before we deliberately examine them.
- CBT is collaborative: the goal is not to tell someone that a thought is “wrong,” but to examine how accurate, complete, useful, and context-sensitive it is.



NOTICE

- What happened? Describe the observable situation.
- What thought, image, memory, prediction, or rule flashed through my mind?
- What emotion did I feel, 0-100? What happened in my body?
- What did I do or feel urged to do?



EXPLORE

- What evidence supports the thought? What information does it leave out?
- Is it a fact, prediction, interpretation, memory, or rule?
- Could there be another explanation?
- Is the thought helping me respond effectively to what matters right now?



CHECK REALITY AND CONTEXT

- Not every painful thought is distorted.
- Trauma, racism, discrimination, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, religious discrimination, poverty, grief, danger, or another real condition may be relevant.
- Balanced thinking should never require explaining away abuse, exploitation, discrimination, or unsafe conditions.



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+ CHOOSE A BALANCED RESPONSE

- What is a fairer, fuller, and more believable way to understand this?
- Include what is painful AND what the original thought may be leaving out.
- Example: "This rejection hurt and I am disappointed. One rejection does not tell me what every future employer will decide."

+ RATE BELIEF

- How strongly did I believe the original thought, 0-100?
- How strongly do I believe the balanced response, 0-100?
- If the new thought is only slightly believable, that is useful information - not failure.
- A deeper belief, repeated experience, intense emotion, or current reality may still need attention.

+ TEST IT GENTLY

- If the balanced response were even 10% more true, what small action might I take?
- What happened when I tried it?
- Did the experience support the original thought, the balanced thought, or a more nuanced version of both?
- Companion guide: When the New Thought Doesn't Feel True Yet.

+ CBT FOUNDATION & REFERENCES

- Beck, J. S. (2020). Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond, 3rd ed. Guilford Press.
- Beck Institute: Thought Record Worksheet; Testing Your Thoughts Worksheet; Resources from Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond, 3rd ed.
- Beck Institute emphasizes identifying, evaluating, and responding to salient automatic thoughts using collaborative empiricism rather than simply declaring thoughts incorrect.