

COGNITIVE STRATEGY

This exercise is designed to examine “stinking thinking” as Stuart Smalley termed it. Thoughts often lead to feelings, thus bad thoughts make us feel crummy. Besides that, these types of thoughts tend to be somewhat inaccurate, overly critical &/or generalized.

1) Begin to name the challenging situation. Take time to put it into words:

2) Rate how distressed this problem makes you feel, on a scale of 1-5, with 5 the highest. Rate how confident you feel handling this issue, 1-5, again 5 the highest confidence.

3) Notice the thoughts you are having about this, the statements you are saying to yourself. Write them here. Extra points for worst case scenarios, use of ‘never’, ‘should’, and ‘always’. The extreme statements are often easier to work with.

4) Challenge the thoughts. Analyze the thoughts as a lawyer might – looking for holes in logic, faulty reasoning. While there might be a grain of truth evident, ask – is this thought accurate? Is it useful? What’s overstated, overblown, and/or framed more negatively? Name some of the ways the thoughts aren’t completely objective below.

5) Compose some alternative thoughts – thoughts that acknowledge the truth, while not jumping to any awful conclusions or future fears. This is called “reframing”. (*A quick example: a) I will fail the exam tomorrow – OR - b) I’m nervous about this challenging exam tomorrow.*) Pick the premiere alternative thought or “reframe”; and note it below.

6) Re-rate your levels of distress and confidence on the 1-5 scale. What do any different ratings tell you?

***) If helpful, track your feeling states for a week, backing up to catch any negative thoughts that could be contributing to feeling out of sorts. Use this strategy or on-the-spot reframing and notice if this is helpful for you. After some practice with writing things down, you can do it in your head on the spot.

***) Note any other things that are helpful to you in working with “stinking thinking”. Some find e.g., that REALLY EXAGGERATING the thoughts helps humor return.

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