

# Talking Back to the Thoughts That Make You Anxious

## Objective

To reduce irrational thoughts with fact-based logic to diminish your anxiety.

## You Should Know

Irrational thoughts fuel anxiety, and your irrational thoughts (also called cognitive distortions) are based on errors in thinking rather than in facts. When you learn to talk back to your irrational thoughts with fact-based logic, you will diminish your anxiety and it will be easier to face your fears.

This worksheet lists irrational thoughts commonly held by people who experience anxiety. Each statement is followed by a reality-based “talk back” statement.

Begin this exercise by reading all of these statements carefully, paying particular attention to the “talk back” arguments. Focus on the logic in each “talk back” statement and why these statements are true.

Then, review the irrational statements and write in a rational “talk back” statement. It does not have to be exactly the same – it just has to be logical and fact-based.

Finally, think of any other irrational thoughts you have that fuel your anxiety. Write them down and then identify rational, fact-based “talk back” statements.

## What to Do

Begin by reading the common thoughts that occur to people with anxiety and then read the rational “talk back” statements. Notice how they are grounded in fact rather than in fear.

1. My anxiety will cause me to have a heart attack.

Talk Back: Anxiety can simulate symptoms of a heart attack, but these symptoms are not dangerous and will soon pass. I do not have to be afraid.

2. If I am in a crowd I will faint.

Talk Back: If I feel lightheaded or dizzy, I can just breathe slowly and deeply to get more oxygen. I have never fainted in a crowd before.

3. I feel like I am going crazy.

Talk Back: Anxiety can play tricks on my mind, but these thoughts and feelings will soon pass. Being afraid does not mean I am going crazy.

4. People will think I am weird because I am so anxious about everything.

Talk Back: Lots of people have anxiety. Everyone knows what it feels like to be anxious.

5. People will think less of me because I am so anxious.

Talk Back: Most people do not judge others harshly. If someone does not like something about me, it does not affect me.

6. I will do something inappropriate in a crowded situation (*or other feared situation*) and people will think I am crazy – or I could even get into trouble.

Talk Back: The fear of doing something inappropriate in public is just a thought I am having now. I have never done anything inappropriate.

7. Something terrible will happen if I \_\_\_\_\_  
(*fill in a situation you are avoiding*).

Talk Back: This is an example of catastrophic thinking. It is a symptom of anxiety and not reality-based. The probability of this happening is almost nonexistent.

8. If co-workers find out I have anxiety I will not get positive evaluations or promotions.

Talk Back: Success at work is almost always based on work performance. If my anxiety ever interferes with my work performance, I can get feedback and help to stop this from happening.

9. If I feel really anxious, I must leave the room or people will think I am crazy.

Talk Back: I do not have to leave the room when I feel panicky. I know these feelings will soon pass and I can just let them go.

10. I cannot let anyone find out I have problems with anxiety; I must keep this a secret.

Talk Back: Many people suffer from problems with anxiety. Hiding my problem will not help. Facing my fears is the only way to get rid of them for good.

11. If I have an anxiety attack while at \_\_\_\_\_, I would be so embarrassed I would never be able to face anyone again.

Talk Back: The nature of my anxiety is I fear things that are not true. There is no shame in having a problem with anxiety.

12. I will always have problems with anxiety.

Talk Back: I can develop the skills to face my fears and get rid of my anxiety forever.

13. I cannot \_\_\_\_\_ because of my anxiety.

Talk Back: I am not going to give into my fears and restrict my life.

Now write down your own “talk back” statements arguing with these common irrational thoughts. You do not have to remember exactly what was said in the examples, just use your own words and make sure your thoughts are based in reality.

1. My anxiety will cause me to have a heart attack.

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2. If I am in a crowd I will faint.

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3. I feel like I am going crazy.

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4. People will think I am weird because I am so anxious about everything.

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5. People will think less of me because I am so anxious.

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6. I will do something inappropriate in a crowded situation.

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7. Something terrible will happen if I \_\_\_\_\_.

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8. If co-workers find out I have anxiety I will not get positive reviews.

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9. If I am anxious, I must leave the room or people will think I am crazy.

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10. I cannot let anyone find out I have problems with anxiety.

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11. If I have an anxiety attack while at \_\_\_\_\_,  
I would be so embarrassed I would never be able to face anyone again.

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12. I will always have problems with anxiety.

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13. I can't \_\_\_\_\_ because of my anxiety.

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Now write down other thoughts that make you anxious and how you will talk back to them using fact-based logic.

Irrational fear-based thought:

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Talk Back: \_\_\_\_\_

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Irrational fear-based thought:

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Talk Back: \_\_\_\_\_

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Irrational fear-based thought:

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Talk Back: \_\_\_\_\_

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Irrational fear-based thought:

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Talk Back: \_\_\_\_\_

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Irrational fear-based thought:

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Talk Back: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

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