

Peeling Back Your Thoughts: The CBT Banana Exercise

What to Know

The "CBT Banana" is used in *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)* to help teens understand how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected. Imagine that a banana represents your thoughts. Like peeling a banana, you can peel away layers of your thoughts to uncover beliefs and identify how they influence your emotions and behaviors.

Your thoughts affect how you feel and behave. By "peeling the banana" of your thoughts, you can start challenging unhelpful or negative thoughts and replacing them with healthier, more balanced ones.

Understanding and challenging negative thoughts is important because your thoughts can sometimes be distorted or irrational, leading to anxiety, anger, or frustration. The CBT Banana helps you take a step back, examine your thoughts, and decide whether they are helping or harming you.

What to Do

First, take a look at the banana on Page 3 of this worksheet. It illustrates how this works.

Then, think of a recent event or situation that triggered an intense or upsetting emotional response (like anger or sadness). Write about it below.

What thoughts were going through your mind at that moment? These thoughts are like the banana—the main focus ("core") you'll work with. Describe them below.

Now, peel the banana. break down your thoughts and identify any patterns. What assumptions or beliefs do these thoughts reflect? Are they based on facts or feelings? Peel back the layers of your thoughts by asking yourself these questions:

- Is this thought based on facts or assumptions?
- Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms?
- Am I focusing only on the negative?
- Is there any evidence that contradicts this thought?

Once you've peeled back the layers, question whether your thought is accurate, rational, and helpful. Are you jumping to conclusions? Is there evidence for or against this thought? Write down some evidence that challenges or disproves the thought. What is the actual situation? What are the alternative perspectives?

Tip: Following the chart, take a look at Sergio's example.



The Core: This is where your beliefs are located. "I'm a failure," "I always lose," or "No one likes me." Write down some of your unhelpful core beliefs:

The Peeled Part: These are "underlying assumptions," they may sound like, "If I mess up, everyone will hate me." Write down yours:

The Unpeeled Part: These are automatic negative thoughts, like, "I'm definitely going to fail the exam!" Write down yours:

In the chart that follows, write down the negative or unhelpful thoughts in the right column and replace them with more balanced, rational, and helpful thoughts in the left column. The right column can help you see the situation mor clearly. If you need help, ask an adult!

Negative, Unhelpful Thoughts	Balanced, Healthy Thoughts

Example

1. **Situation:** Sergio has an important presentation at school. It's 50% of his final Biology grade. Sergio feels extremely anxious and unprepared.

2. **Banana (Sergio's Thoughts):** "I'm going to mess up, and everyone will think I'm stupid," "I've worked really hard this year, and it's not fair that half my grade depends on this presentation!" "If I forget what to say, I'm going to fail."

3. **Peel Back the Layers:**

- Are Sergio's thoughts based on facts or assumptions? Assumptions.
- Is Sergio thinking in all-or-nothing terms? Yes, he assumes one mistake will make him look bad forever.
- Is Sergio focusing only on the negative? Yes, he's not considering that he actually *has* prepared well.
- Is there evidence against this thought? Yes, Sergio has done presentations before, and they've gone well.

4. **Challenge the Thought:** "I've done presentations before, and they've gone well. Even if I make a small mistake, it doesn't mean I'm stupid. Even if I stumble over my words or forget what to say, it doesn't mean my teacher will fail me."

5. **Replace the Thought:** "I've prepared well, and I can handle this. Even if something goes wrong, I can recover."

How did peeling the layers of your "banana" change how you feel about the situation? Write down any insights or observations you had during the exercise:

Practice this activity whenever you feel overwhelmed by negative thoughts; over time, you'll develop a more balanced, rational way of thinking.

This worksheet can be revisited anytime you find yourself stuck in unhelpful thought patterns, allowing you to continue building mental resilience and emotional regulation.