

HELPING RESISTANT CLIENTS

**36 PRACTICAL TOOLS TO ENGAGE
DIFFICULT & CHALLENGING CLIENTS**



ANGELA M. DOEL, M.S.

Between Sessions Resources, Inc.

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36 Practical Tools to Engage Difficult & Challenging Clients

By Angela M. Doel, M.S.

Between Sessions Resources, Inc.
Coral Gables, FL

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Introduction

Regardless of experience, every therapist will inevitably encounter resistance in the therapeutic process. Resistance is a common phenomenon that reflects the tension between a client's desire for change and the underlying fears, defenses, or ambivalence that stand in the way.

Resistance may manifest in many forms—missed appointments, reluctance to engage in meaningful conversation, denial of problems, avoidance of specific topics, refusal to complete homework assignments, or outright rejection of the therapist's insights. In more challenging cases, resistance may present as overt hostility, lying, manipulation, or subtle testing of the limits of the therapeutic relationship.

As frustrating as these moments can be for therapists, resistance can provide valuable insight into the client's inner world. It can signal fear of change, unresolved trauma, mistrust of the therapeutic process, or even difficulties in the client's past relationships with authority figures. Recognizing resistance as part of the therapeutic journey—and not a personal affront—allows therapists to stay attuned and curious rather than reactive or discouraged.

This workbook takes a two-pronged approach to addressing client resistance. In the first section, you'll find assignment worksheets that address personality factors that can lead to resistance in the therapeutic process. These factors can range from clients who are oversensitive to criticism to clients who are argumentative and even intimidating.

The second section of the workbook includes assignments that help clients build psychological skills to overcome the causes of their resistance. These could include a negative and pessimistic attitude, self-sabotaging behaviors, lack of motivation, and more.

All the tools are derived from evidence-based therapies, including Behavioral Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

You will want to review all the worksheets in this book for the most effective results when considering each client's resistant behavior and the possible factors that underlie these behaviors. Before selecting the right assignment worksheet for each client, I recommend you have a frank and open discussion about the nature of resistance and the importance of addressing it.

Once you have determined which assignment would be best, go over it with your clients, going into as much detail as possible about when the client will work on the assignment, when the assignment will be returned to the therapist, what to do if the client procrastinates completing the assignment, and so on. Assigning therapeutic homework is always more successful when there is collaboration between the therapist and the client and when expectations are realistic.

It is also important to minimize pressure on the client. You can do this by focusing on the assignment's benefits, encouraging reflection rather than perfection, and, of course, offering positive reinforcement for the client's efforts.

It's always worth remembering that progress in therapy is not linear, and resistance is just part of the process. Success will come with being patient, adaptive, and nonjudgmental. Each moment of resistance—whether subtle or overt—is an opportunity for growth, both for the client and for you! With thoughtful exploration and the right tools, you can transform resistance into meaningful growth and help your clients move toward the change they seek, even when the path feels challenging.

Angela M. Doel, M.S.

Section I:
**Addressing Personality Factors That
Inhibit the Therapeutic Process**

Are You Difficult to Get Along With?

Objective

To identify ways to respect others and improve your relationships.

What to Know

Relationships can be hard work, and ideally each person is capable of compromising, communicating clearly, listening attentively, trusting fully, and being kind. Unfortunately, not everyone is capable of healthy, balanced relating. You may find it difficult to trust others, or you might withdraw when you find yourself getting too emotionally involved. Maybe you have a hard time understanding and listening to the needs and feelings of others.

Which of the following statements describes you? Check all that apply.

- People use what I say against me.
- I have difficulty considering other peoples' points of view.
- People have told me I am self-absorbed or selfish.
- Most people are untrustworthy.
- I never feel like I am good enough.
- I often consider revenge when I have been treated unfairly.
- People have told me I am argumentative and confrontational.
- I am much more interesting and important than other people.
- I sometimes use passive-aggressive behavior to get my needs met (for example, I use "the silent treatment" or frequently blame others for my mistakes).
- I sometimes use attention-seeking behavior to get my needs met (for example, threatening to harm or kill myself or exaggerating stories to gain sympathy).
- I feel threatened when my partner/friend/family member spends time with others and gives them attention.
- I have a difficult time listening when other people talk unless it somehow affects me.

Review the statements you checked off, and describe how these behaviors might negatively impact your relationships.

Are there any behaviors you might consider changing? If yes, which ones? If no, why not?

What to Do

In healthy relationships, your feelings – and those of others – are equally respected. You are comfortable saying say “no” to each other, and you are able to ask for what you want and need. You treat each other with respect and dignity. You are able to see other peoples’ points of view and to understand their feelings.

The letters G–I–V–E are an easy way to remember steps you can take to improve your relationships:

G: Be **Gentle** in your interactions with others. Avoid critical comments, attacks, and threats when you are angry or uncomfortable.

I: Show **Interest** in others. Be attentive and listen to others. Do not interrupt or change the subject.

V: Validation. Show a nonjudgmental understanding of what the other person is feeling, thinking, or experiencing. You might say, “I understand how you must feel,” or “I can see this is very important to you.”

E: Use an **Easy** manner with others. Try to be easy-going and use humor. Avoid bullying others or making them feel guilty.

Now, try incorporating one or more of the GIVE techniques next time you are with someone who frustrates, upsets, or annoys you. Use the chart below to track what happens.

Situation	The GIVE Technique You Used	How You Used the Technique (what you said/did)	How the Person Reacted	How it Made You Feel

Which of the GIVE techniques was most difficult for you? Explain.

What can you do the next time you are faced with a challenging situation? Which GIVE technique(s) will you most likely use?

Describe other situations where the GIVE method could be useful (for example, the workplace, a family gathering, or a phone conversation with a friend)?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Are People Out to Get Me?

Objective

To identify ways to relate to people to decrease paranoia regarding their intent and increase positivity through the pronoia approach.

What to Know

Some people feel that others are deliberating trying to influence or control their lives. In some cases, this might actually be true; in other cases, it might be exaggerated or even imagined in the person's mind. In understanding your own worries about other people being "out to get you," the most important first step is to notice what is happening and understand to what extent your symptoms are interfering with your life and your ability to function normally.

According to experts, there are a number of possible causes of these worrisome thoughts, some of which fall into a category called "paranoid thinking":

- genetic (family history)
- substance abuse or misuse (cocaine, marijuana, amphetamines, alcohol, hallucinogens)
- medication side effects
- underlying biochemical disorder of the brain
- trauma history such as war, physical or sexual abuse
- history of domestic violence/controlling-type relationship
- stress reaction to overwhelming physical or psychological events (disaster, accident, threats, losses)
- combination of the above factors

If you are so preoccupied with such thoughts that you are having difficulty functioning, or if you are hearing voices in your head that are telling you that people are out to get you, please seek help immediately from a mental health professional who can assess your symptoms and offer treatment, including possible helpful medications.

If, however, you are experiencing a more generalized sense that people do not understand you, are trying to manage or undermine your activities or goals, and you sense that you are somehow a "victim," but you are basically open to the idea that these are "just thoughts," then this worksheet is designed to help you develop some new strategies. You can assess more accurately what is happening and learn to let go of your fears and worries; you can also learn how to give people the "benefit of the doubt" before you judge their behavior as malicious.

What to Do

Below is a list of some attributes that can be present for people who believe that someone is "out to get them." These symptoms can range from mild to severe. Put a checkmark next to the items that you relate to. Then, next to each item you checked, rate the severity of those

symptoms according to the following scale: 0 = never, 3 = rarely, 5 = sometimes, 7 = often, 10 = always.

Symptom	Severity
• Offended easily	_____
• Difficulty trusting others	_____
• Not able to cope with any type of criticism	_____
• Assign harmful meanings to other people's remarks	_____
• Always on the defensive	_____
• Hostile, aggressive, argumentative	_____
• Unable to compromise	_____
• Difficult, if not impossible, to "forgive and forget"	_____
• Assume that people are talking ill of them behind their back	_____
• Overly suspicious; think that other people are lying or scheming to cheat them	_____
• Unable to confide in anyone	_____
• Find relationships difficult	_____
• Consider the world to be a place of constant threat	_____
• Feel persecuted by the world at large	_____
• Believe in unfounded "conspiracy theories"	_____
• Hearing persecutory voices	_____

Note: If your answers consistently fall into the 6-10 range, please seek medical or psychiatric attention to obtain a proper assessment, diagnosis, and treatment plan from a trained professional.

If your answers fall in the more mild-to-moderate range, please continue.

Now that you have identified some of the ways in which your worried thoughts are interfering with your life, on the lines below, write down several situations that you have encountered recently that have made you feel that people are out to get you, or have it in for you. Specify who the people involved are and what the situation is.

1.

2.

3.

Next, take each situation and reflect on your role in the interaction. Are you overly sensitive to that person in particular? Is it possible you are exaggerating their behavior because of your sensitivity versus assessing realistically what they're actually doing or saying? What would it be like to give that person the benefit of the doubt? What can you say out loud (or think inside yourself) to reassure yourself that a person might not have negative intentions? What could you say or ask that person to help you understand their intentions before you jump to any conclusions? Write your thoughts below for each situation.

1.

2.

3.

According to psychiatrist Samantha Boardman, MD, it is hard to get unstuck from the “me against the world” mindset. She recommends shifting the “paranoia” mindset to one she calls “pronoia”—the definitive belief that others are actually out to *help you*, and a belief in the goodness of the world and others in it. Many people, she suggests, are trained to be suspicious of strangers and of others’ intent, especially under stress. She cites studies that show that if one

assumes a positive intention on the part of another person, one has a much more pleasant, less hurtful experience.

So, give it a try and let go of the worry and see if your positive approach toward other people yields more positivity in your life.

Reflections on This Exercise

1. Name two people with whom you would like to experiment trying the “pronoia” approach to dealing with your worrisome thoughts.

2. Pick one situation you might be anticipating having with that person in the coming days and weeks and commit to experimenting with this new approach. Record your experience below.

3. Write down three reassuring things you can say to yourself anytime you notice you are having thoughts that people are out to get you.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

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

Are You Oversensitive to Criticism?

Objective

To help you identify situations where you are oversensitive to criticism and develop strategies for countering that pattern.

What to Know

Nobody likes to be criticized, but some people let their fear of criticism dominate their lives. In some cases, that fear can keep them from trying new things, taking risks, and getting close to others. It is painful to be oversensitive to criticism and it is often based on an internalized negative self-view. Perhaps you were shamed or overly criticized as a child and still experience yourself as “small” in relation to others, especially those in authority. For instance, if you have a performance review at your job, do you tend to hear only the negative parts and tune out the positive? Do you shut down, or lash out, when your partner offers a constructive suggestion to you about a particular behavior?

If you are already aware that you tend to magnify what might be a mildly negative appraisal of you into a huge personal attack, that’s a positive thing. Awareness is the first step toward change! In life, it might not be possible to avoid people’s criticisms of you, but you can learn to react and respond in more helpful, less damaging ways. This worksheet offers you an opportunity to reflect on the situations that trigger your oversensitivity and learn better coping skills.

What to Do

On the lines below, write down five situations when you notice you are oversensitive to criticism. Specify who the people involved are and what the situation is. Then note in each case what the consequences are of your oversensitivity (isolation, low self-esteem, irritability, avoidance, etc.).

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Next, repeat this statement three times aloud: “Criticism can help me in life.” How does that feel? Yes, criticism, when it is given in a constructive and well-meaning way, offers you the opportunity to improve in different areas of your life—at home, on the job, and in your community. Learning how to lower your reactivity to criticism can take time.

Be kind and patient with yourself as you think about and practice the following strategies:

- Notice objectively what someone is saying.
- Notice your “automatic” negative, self-critical voice and ask it to soften the volume.
- Think this affirmation: “I am seeking improvement not approval.”
- Be assertive—if you feel you’ve been wrongly criticized, step back, take a breath, and say so.
- Be proactive—if you’ve made a mistake, approach the other person before they approach you. Ask what you might have done differently to improve the situation.
- Let go. Interrupt your ruminating and obsessing with reassuring statements and/or an activity.
- Open yourself up to the value of another’s criticism, even though it may feel hard.
- Learn to listen with an open mind.
- Try not to become defensive in the moment. If you feel the urge to snap back, step away and rethink your response.
- Forgive yourself. Repeat phrases such as “I did the best I could,” “My intentions are positive,” “I can’t always be perfect,” “I let that person down, but I forgive myself,” “I’m going to make mistakes sometimes; everyone does,” “I’m not a bad person just because I made a mistake,” etc.
- Practice self-compassion. Change your inner talk to match what you would say to a friend or loved one whom you care about.
- Take a deep breath. Breathing is always a good strategy when you find yourself caught up in anxious thoughts.
- Try to understand the other person’s perspective.
- Directly ask for constructive criticism.
- If you find yourself getting upset, postpone the conversation until you’re calmer.
- Ask for specifics if you receive a vague or fuzzy critique.
- Think about what you might get out of learning to do something differently, including learning a new skill, instead of talking yourself out of it.
- Thank the person offering you feedback, even if it was not constructive or helpful.
- Resist the urge to offer a “counter critique” if you are upset or angry.

If you find that these strategies aren’t working for you and that you continue to suffer from oversensitivity to criticism that might be causing you anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, or shame, consider working with a therapist or other mental health professional to better understand and overcome this pattern.

More to Think About

1. Which three of the above strategies are you willing to try in the coming week or so? Pick at least one that feels “very hard” to do to push yourself out of your comfort zone a bit.

2. Write down three things you can say to yourself next time you notice you’re reacting to criticism with oversensitivity.

3. Pick one situation from your list in the beginning of this exercise. Write down how you would like to approach that type of situation differently in the future.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

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

Are Your Judgments Causing You Problems?

Objective

To recognize and address negative judgments about yourself and others, understand their impact on your emotions and behaviors, and practice replacing these judgments with more constructive and compassionate thoughts.

What to Know

Judging yourself and others is natural. We all have preferences and opinions about people, situations, and ourselves. However, when negative judgments dominate your thinking, they can lead to problems like social isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

Negative judgments about others can create barriers in relationships and prevent you from forming meaningful connections. On the other hand, harsh judgments about yourself can magnify negative emotions, leaving you stuck in a cycle of self-criticism and self-defeating behaviors.

The good news is that by becoming aware of your judgments and their effects, you can begin to replace them with more constructive and compassionate thoughts. This worksheet will guide you through identifying and addressing judgments that may be causing you unnecessary problems.

What to Do

Step 1: Identifying Your Judgments. Over the next few days, pay attention to the judgments you make about yourself and others. Use the chart below for one week to document these thoughts. Note the date, describe the situation, and explain whether this was a judgment about someone else or yourself. Describe your feelings and this outcome. Review the example for help.

Date	Situation	Judgment About Others	Judgment About Yourself	Emotions	Outcome
5/4	A friend canceled plans.	"They're unreliable."	"Maybe I'm not worth their time."	Frustration, sadness	Avoided texting them.

Date	Situation	Judgment About Others	Judgment About Yourself	Emotions	Outcome

Step 2: Analyzing the Impact of Judgments. After documenting a few situations over the week, answer the following questions.

What patterns do you notice in your judgments about others? *Example: "I often assume people don't care about me when they cancel plans."*

What patterns do you notice in your judgments about yourself? *Example: "I frequently blame myself for things outside my control."*

How do these judgments affect your emotions and behaviors? *Example: "Judging others makes me feel angry and distant. Judging myself makes me feel sad and avoid people."*

What are the consequences of these judgments on your relationships and well-being? *Example: "I miss out on connecting with others because I assume the worst about them or myself."*

Step 3: Replacing Negative Judgments. Use the steps below to challenge and reframe your judgments into more constructive thoughts:

Identify a Judgment: Choose one judgment you wrote down. *Example: "They're unreliable."*

Challenge the Judgment: What evidence supports this judgment? Could there be another explanation for their behavior? *Example: "Maybe they had a legitimate reason for canceling, like an emergency."*

Reframe the Judgment: Replace the negative thought with a more understanding or neutral one. *Example: "They might be going through something difficult, and it's not about me."*

Practice Self-Compassion: If you judged yourself negatively, consider how you would speak to a friend in a similar situation. Replace self-criticism with kindness. What would you say? *Example: "It's not my fault they canceled. I'm still a good friend."*

Step 4: Practicing Constructive Thinking. At the end of each day, take five minutes to reflect on:

1. A judgment you made that day (about yourself or someone else).
2. How you challenged or reframed it.

3. How it felt to replace the judgment with a more compassionate thought.

Tips for Reducing Negative Judgments

1. **Pause and Observe:** When you notice a judgment, pause and take a deep breath before reacting. Ask yourself, "Is this judgment helping or hurting me?"
2. **Practice Empathy:** Try to understand the other person's perspective or situation. Remind yourself that everyone has struggles you may not see.
3. **Be Kind to Yourself:** Replace self-criticism with encouragement. Celebrate your efforts, even when things don't go perfectly.
4. **Focus on Facts:** Stick to observable facts rather than interpretations. For example, instead of thinking, "They ignored me," think, "They didn't respond to my text today."
5. **Seek Positives:** Actively look for something positive in the situation or person you're judging.

Reflection Questions

How has this exercise helped you become more aware of your judgments?

What changes have you noticed in your emotions or behaviors due to challenging and reframing your judgments?

How can you continue to practice constructive thinking moving forward?

Judging yourself and others is a habit that can be unlearned with practice and self-awareness. Replacing negative judgments with compassion and understanding can improve your relationships, boost your self-esteem, and create a more positive outlook on life.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Do You Use Manipulation in Your Relationships?

Objective

To identify ways to be less manipulative within your relationships.

What to Know

Manipulation is more common than you might think—from the occasional passive-aggressive comment to regularly gaslighting someone—many of us can be manipulative to some degree, and we may not even realize it.

What does manipulation look like in relationships? It is a tactic used to trick others into behaving in a certain way, whether it is giving you something or doing something for you. You may not be direct or entirely honest.

Many types of behaviors can be considered manipulative, with varying degrees of severity. Instead of simply expressing what it is you are thinking, feeling, wanting, or needing, you fail to take responsibility for your own feelings and handle them in a mature way.

Here are nine ways you might be manipulative without even realizing it.

- 1. You try hard to get a certain outcome.** You may do whatever it takes to get what you want, even at the expense of other people. Rather than taking no for an answer, you maneuver the situation to go your way.
- 2. You have a hard time directly expressing your needs.** You may be unable or reluctant to say what you feel or need.
- 3. You project insecurities or self-loathing onto others.** *Projective identification* is an unconscious form of manipulation, and people may internalize your assessment of them and believe it is true.
- 4. You lie.** You may stretch, avoid, or ignore the truth.
- 5. You attempt to make people feel guilty.** It is okay to express hurt and disappointment, but if you do so to get something out of it, it is manipulation.
- 6. You fail to keep promises.** Promises without follow-through is manipulative behavior.
- 7. You do nice things—with expectations.** You may be skilled at “reading” people to see what you need to do for them so they will do what you want. You may rarely do things for others unless there is something you can get out of it. If you are only doing things because you expect it to come back to serve you, that is manipulation.
- 8. You punish others if you fail to get your way.** Maybe you punish others by withholding affection or making a passive-aggressive social media post. If you respond negatively to things not going your way—and take it out on others by punishing them—that is manipulation.

9. You are extremely persuasive. Do you try to persuade people to do what you want or to behave in a certain way? Manipulative people have a keen understanding of the tactics that wear people down.

10. You always get your way. Do things always seem to go your way? If you disagree with someone, do you walk away getting what you want out of it? Do people seem to do what you want them to do? If you are unaware that this is what you are doing, you may think this is just what naturally happens. But you may be behaving in a way that is manipulating others to do what you want to keep you happy.

11. You change your behavior to connect with others. If you change the way you dress, talk, or act when around certain people to fit in with them and get them to do what you want, that is manipulative behavior.

12. You purposefully confuse people. You know that if you can talk quickly or use other techniques, others may not understand exactly what is happening. If they are too insecure to admit it, you might be able to get them to agree to something that they did not mean to.

Manipulation is damaging to relationships because when you manipulate people, you are taking advantage of them. It can also be a form of abuse, especially when practicing emotional manipulation. Others may not want to continue developing a relationship with you, or they may begin to resent you.

If you manipulate people, you can increase your awareness of your actions, conversations, and intentions. Changing behavior is not an easy task, but it's possible if you are determined. Here are some things that you might consider doing:

- **Focus on Repairing Your Relationships** – If you realize you manipulate people that you are still in some form of a relationship with, sincerely apologize. Let them know you do not like how you acted in the past and you are working on making improvements. Ask them to be honest with you if they feel you are manipulating them in the future. They may need to see your behavior is changing before they trust what you say.
- **Identify When You Manipulate Others** – Become aware of the behaviors you typically use. You might need to stop yourself when you start blaming others or stop yourself when you prepare to lie to get your way.
- **Control Your Emotions and Thoughts** – You can learn how to control your thoughts and regulate your emotions.

This worksheet is designed to help you develop self-awareness around manipulative tendencies and learn how to reduce them. Recognizing and addressing manipulative behavior is essential for building healthier and more authentic relationships.

What to Do

Reflect on past situations in which you may have exhibited manipulative behaviors. Manipulation can manifest in various ways, including lying, deception, guilt-tripping, passive-aggressiveness, or emotional manipulation.

List specific instances below:

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

Situation 3: _____

For each situation listed above, provide a detailed description of the manipulative behaviors you engaged in. Describe what you said or did that you now recognize as manipulative.

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

Situation 3: _____

Reflect on the motivations that drove you to employ manipulative tactics in the situations above. Common motivations include a desire for control, fear of rejection or conflict, or the pursuit of a specific outcome. Describe the motivations behind your actions in each situation.

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

Situation 3: _____

Identify the specific manipulative tactics or strategies you used in the situations listed above. This may include tactics like gaslighting, playing the victim, or withholding information. Write down the tactics you employed in each situation.

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

Situation 3: _____

Consider alternative responses and communication strategies that could have been more honest, direct, and respectful in the situations mentioned. How could you have expressed your needs or feelings without resorting to manipulation?

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

Situation 3: _____

Reflect on how your manipulative behavior affected both your own emotions and the emotions of others in those situations. Did it lead to mistrust, resentment, or damage to your relationships? Describe the emotional consequences.

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

Situation 3: _____

Recognizing and addressing manipulative tendencies is an essential step toward building healthier relationships. By gaining insight into your motivations and practicing alternative, healthier communication strategies, you can work to reduce manipulative behavior and improve your connections with others.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help you become less manipulative? Why or why not?

What was challenging about this exercise? Be specific.

Did anything surprise you about this exercise? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Do You Intimidate Others?

Objective

To assess if you intimidate others and learn steps to reduce this controlling behavior.

What to Know

Although you may not consider yourself an intimidating person, you might notice some people seem afraid of you. Or perhaps you intentionally intimidate others to get your own way. You might believe it is advantageous for you to be intimidating (especially in certain situations), but perhaps your relationships are suffering if people close to you fear you.

Someone who is intimidating:

- uses power or control to get others to do what they want them to do.
- uses coercion or force to get what they want.
- makes others believe they are more powerful than what they really are.
- exhibits verbally, physically, sexually, or emotionally abusive behaviors.
- uses physical size, stature, and strength to get others to respect and obey them.
- bullies or gets into physical fights to get people to do what they want.
- rejects or disapproves to get others to comply with requests.
- uses anger or rage to control others.
- holds knowledge, level of education, or number of degrees over the heads of others.
- convinces others they are the only one with enough experience, wisdom, intellect, and insight to offer direction or have the correct answers.
- uses money, wealth, or status to put others into their place.
- threatens to withdraw support, love, caring, interest, or approval.
- uses dictatorial or autocratic behaviors.

There are many negative consequences to using intimidation to control others. If you continue, you may:

- find people have emotional barriers so they no longer feel vulnerable.
- be accused of emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse.
- find the costs of getting your way are greater than you expected.
- become consumed with acquiring power, control, position, and status.
- become lonely and isolated with few close relationships.
- experience reduced self-esteem due to the lack of acceptance by others.

This worksheet will help you follow the steps to reduce intimidating behavior.

What to Do

To identify if intimidation is a problem, rate the following factors. Write down the correct number for each one. How true is each factor for you?

1 = never intimidating

2 = rarely intimidating

3 = frequently intimidating

4 = almost always intimidating

5 = always intimidating

_____ loud gruff voice

_____ body size

_____ height

_____ physical strength

_____ highest educational achievement

_____ profession, career, or job title

_____ salary or financial worth

_____ where you live / size of your home / vehicle you drive

_____ IQ, knowledge, skills, or abilities

_____ age / life experience

_____ the people you know

_____ groups or clubs you belong to

_____ religious beliefs or convictions

_____ clothes you wear

_____ political beliefs / persuasions

_____ when you are angry

_____ when you are assertive

_____ when you are aggressive

_____ when you threaten or warn others

_____ when you yell, rant, and rave

_____ when you lecture others

_____ when you threaten to cut off financial support

_____ when you threaten to cut off emotional support

_____ other? _____

_____ other? _____

_____ Total

Add up the total of your score. If you scored between:

23-50 = Intimidation and overly controlling behavior are not a problem for you.

51-75 = You may sometimes use intimidation to control others.

76-100 = Intimidation and control might negatively impact your relationships.

101+ = Intimidation and control are a problem for you and probably negatively impact your relationships with others.

Step 1. Seek input from others about whether you intimidate them and how you do it. You might ask spouse(s) (current and former), children, parents, in-laws, siblings, extended family members, friends, co-workers, supervisees, bosses, and so on. These may not be easy conversations, but it is an important part of eventually eliminating intimidation. Who can you ask? How did they respond?

Which category of people do you intimidate the most? _____

Which people do you intentionally intimidate? _____

What factors do you use when you intimidate others?

Which people do you unintentionally intimidate? _____

What factors cause others to be intimidated by you when you do *not* intend to do it?

Why do you intentionally intimidate people? Be honest!

How does this impact your relationships?

Are the problems caused by your intimidating behaviors different if your behavior is intentional or not? Explain.

Step 2. Identify what about you is intimidating. Make an inventory of your behaviors, attitudes, nonverbal cues, appearance, educational level, wealth, position of leadership, or sexual attitudes, and so on – anything that may be intimidating to others.

Step 3. Do you think you are *intentionally* or *non-intentionally* intimidating? Be honest and realistic. You might be intimidating to others – even if you do not intend to be.

Step 4. Honestly assess the negative impact and consequences of your intimidation on others. How are your relationships impacted? How do people respond to you?

Step 5. Are there irrational, unhealthy, or unrealistic thoughts or beliefs that contribute to your intimidating behaviors? If you have a difficult time answering this question, seek help from your counselor or therapist.

Step 6. Identify healthy, rational, and reality-based thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that will help you reduce your need to intimidate others.

Step 7. Identify what you can do to reduce non-intentional intimidation, such as educational level, intellect, wealth, career status, physical size or attractiveness, religious beliefs, gender, or status in the community.

Step 8. Now you can inform each person that you want the control, power, dominance, and coercion to stop. Ask them to continue giving you feedback. What happened?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did you experience any challenges while completing this activity? What was hard? Easy?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn during this exercise?

Do You Always Have to Be Right?

Objective

To increase the use of healthier communication patterns when you have the compulsion to always be right.

What to Know

The need to always be right is a common behavioral pattern that strains relationships, limits personal growth, and creates unnecessary stress. You may find it challenging to accept differing viewpoints, leading to conflicts in personal and professional relationships.

Addressing this issue involves developing self-awareness and emotional intelligence. You can work toward humility and openness by recognizing the underlying motivations for this behavior. This shift enhances interpersonal relationships and cultivates personal growth and resilience.

The need to always be right often involves cognitive distortions—irrational thought patterns reinforcing negative beliefs. Common distortions include all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, and personalization.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

- This distortion involves seeing things in extremes, with no middle ground.
- Example: *“If I don’t succeed completely, I’ve failed entirely.”*
- Leads to perfectionism or a sense of failure when outcomes aren’t ideal.

Overgeneralization

- This occurs when a single adverse event is seen as a never-ending pattern.
- Example: *“I messed up this project, so I’ll never succeed at anything.”*
- Creates a cycle of pessimism and limits personal growth.

Personalization

- Involves taking excessive responsibility for external events, assuming everything is your fault.
- Example: *“They looked upset—what did I do wrong?”*
- Leads to guilt, self-blame, and stress, even when the situation isn’t under your control.

This worksheet will help you understand the roots of this compulsion and provide ways to enhance healthier communication patterns and more fulfilling relationships.

What to Do

Reflect on recent situations where you felt the need to assert your correctness. Describe one such instance in detail.

How did you feel? Describe the emotions you experienced during this interaction.

What was the outcome of the interaction?

What drove your need to be right in this situation? Note fears or insecurities, if possible.

Identify any cognitive distortions in this situation.

Challenge and reframe the distorted thoughts.

Original Thought	Reframed Thought
------------------	------------------

<p><i>Example: "They looked upset—what did I do wrong?"</i></p>	<p><i>"They looked upset, but their emotions might not have anything to do with me. I'll check in with them if I feel it's appropriate, but I won't assume responsibility without understanding the situation."</i></p>

Active listening involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and remembering what is being said. It builds empathy and reduces the impulse to assert your own correctness. Choose a trusted friend or family member with whom to have a conversation. Focus on listening without planning your response or interjecting your opinions.

After the conversation, reflect on the following:

What did you learn about the other person's perspective?

How did it feel to listen without asserting your viewpoint?

Cultivating cognitive flexibility allows you to adapt your thinking and consider multiple viewpoints.

Think of a recent disagreement. Write it down.

List at least two alternative perspectives to your own.

What valid points do these perspectives offer?

How can acknowledging these perspectives enhance your understanding?

Establishing specific goals can help you reduce the need to always be right.

Identify a Goal.

Example Goal: "In the next week, I will practice acknowledging others' viewpoints without immediately asserting my own."

Your Goal:

Implementation Plan

What steps will you take to achieve this goal?

How will you measure your progress?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Taking Responsibility for Your Choices

Objective

To help you reflect on their personal choices, understand their impact, and take responsibility for your actions.

What to Know

Taking responsibility is essential for personal growth and empowerment. It involves recognizing the role your choices play in shaping your life, acknowledging the impact of your actions, and taking ownership of the outcomes. While external factors may influence situations, how you respond and act remains within your control. This concept is not about assigning blame to yourself or others; instead, it's about stepping into a position of agency and building a mindset that cultivates learning, accountability, resilience, and growth.

You may find it challenging to take responsibility for your choices due to various psychological, emotional, or societal factors, including:

- 1. Fear of Failure or Rejection.** You may equate mistakes with personal inadequacy, fearing that admitting responsibility will lead to judgment, rejection, or loss of status. For example, a professional might blame external circumstances for a missed deadline to avoid appearing incompetent in front of colleagues or supervisors.
- 2. Ego and Pride.** A strong ego can make it difficult to acknowledge mistakes, as doing so may feel like admitting weakness. This is especially true if you have perfectionistic tendencies or a success-driven identity. For example, someone might refuse to take responsibility for an argument, insisting they were entirely justified, even when their actions contributed to the conflict.
- 3. Learned Behavior.** Perhaps you grew up in an environment where blame-shifting was normalized or taking responsibility was met with excessive punishment, leading to avoidance behaviors. For example, a person raised in a highly critical household might develop a habit of denying mistakes to protect themselves from shame.
- 4. Fear of Consequences.** Admitting responsibility may bring tangible consequences, such as disciplinary action, loss of trust, or financial penalties, leading to a defensive reaction. For example, a business owner might hide their role in a project failure to avoid losing a client or damaging their reputation.
- 5. Lack of Self-Awareness.** If you struggle with self-awareness, you may not fully understand how your choices contribute to a situation, leading to an inability to take responsibility. For example, someone may not realize that their procrastination, rather than external distractions, caused a missed opportunity.

Failing to take responsibility for your choices has significant personal and relational consequences. Over time, this avoidance creates patterns of behavior that undermine trust, self-esteem, and personal growth.

Taking responsibility is not about self-blame or wallowing in guilt. Instead, it is a transformative act that allows you to reclaim control over your life and make meaningful changes. Here are some benefits:

1. Promotes Self-Esteem. When you take responsibility, you demonstrate to yourself and others that you can own your choices and grow from them – fostering confidence and self-respect.

2. Strengthens Relationships. Accountability builds trust and respect in relationships. When others see you taking responsibility for your actions, they are more likely to collaborate and engage with you.

3. Facilitates Learning and Growth. Acknowledging mistakes allows you to analyze what went wrong and develop strategies to improve. Every mistake becomes an opportunity for growth.

4. Enhances Decision-Making. When you take responsibility for past choices, you become more intentional about future decisions, reducing the likelihood of repeating mistakes.

5. Builds Resilience. Taking responsibility helps you develop a mindset that sees challenges as opportunities to adapt and overcome rather than insurmountable obstacles.

Taking responsibility means owning your role in your life's outcomes, learning from your mistakes, and using those lessons to grow. It's not about assigning blame—it's about empowering yourself to create positive changes. By addressing the fears and barriers that prevent accountability, you can build stronger relationships, achieve personal growth, and foster a greater sense of control over your life.

What to Do

Think about a recent decision you made. Describe it. How much of the outcome was within your control? Explain.

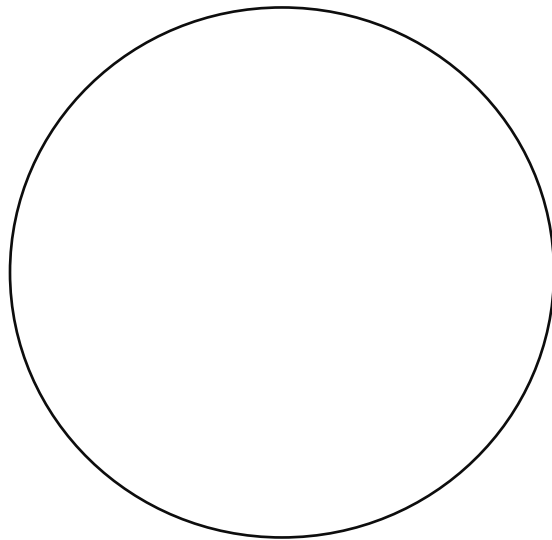
Activity: The Ownership Pie

Sometimes, it's hard to discern what portion of an outcome is within our control. Use the "ownership pie" to visualize it.

Instructions:

1. Divide the circle into sections representing factors contributing to a situation (e.g., your choices, external circumstances, others' actions).
2. Shade the portion that represents your actions and decisions.

Example: If a conflict arose with a friend, part of the pie might include your words or tone, while other parts may represent the friend's behavior or external stressors.



What portion of the situation was influenced by your actions? _____

How could you have responded differently to create a better outcome?

How does taking responsibility strengthen your relationships?

How might avoiding responsibility hold you back?

Reflect on a situation where you initially blamed someone or something else for the outcome.

Original Narrative: "I missed the deadline because my boss didn't remind me."

Rewritten Narrative: "I missed the deadline because I didn't set a reminder for myself, even though I knew the due date."

Write a brief description of the situation.

Identify the choices you made and their impact.

Rewrite the narrative, focusing on how taking responsibility could have changed the outcome or your perspective.

Strategies for Taking Responsibility

1. **Pause Before Reacting:** Take a moment to reflect before responding in emotionally charged situations.
2. **Practice Self-Reflection:** Ask yourself: “What role did I play in this situation?”
3. **Apologize When Necessary:** Owning your actions includes offering a genuine apology when appropriate.
4. **Set Goals for Improvement:** Identify areas where you can make better choices and take action.

Use the table below to map out how you will take responsibility in a specific area of your life. Review the examples and then add your own.

Area of Life	Situation to Address	My Role	Action Steps for Improvement
<i>Work</i>	<i>Missed a meeting deadline</i>	<i>I procrastinated and didn't prioritize it</i>	<i>Use a planner and set reminders</i>
<i>Relationships</i>	<i>Argument with a partner</i>	<i>I raised my voice and didn't listen</i>	<i>Practice active listening in future talks</i>
<i>Health</i>	<i>Skipped exercise</i>	<i>I stayed up too late the night before</i>	<i>Create a consistent bedtime routine</i>

Area of Life	Situation to Address	My Role	Action Steps for Improvement

How will these actions improve the outcomes in each area?

Taking responsibility does not mean carrying guilt indefinitely. It is essential to forgive yourself for past mistakes and focus on what you can do better moving forward.

Self-Forgiveness Exercise

Write down one choice you regret. Acknowledge your role and what you have learned from it.

Write a self-forgiveness statement, such as: "I forgive myself for missing the opportunity to listen during the argument. I am learning to respond more thoughtfully in the future."

How does forgiving yourself help you move forward?

How can you use this experience to make better choices in the future?

Sometimes, having someone supporting your journey toward responsibility can be helpful. Think of someone you trust who can help you stay accountable for your choices (e.g., a friend, family member, therapist). Share one goal with them and set up regular check-ins to discuss progress.

Example:

Goal: Manage time better at work.

Partner: A colleague who also wants to improve productivity.

Check-In Plan: Weekly 15-minute coffee break to review goals and progress.

Who will you choose? Why?	Goal	When will you do check-ins?

What is one small step you can take today to practice taking responsibility for your choices?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Stop Taking Things Too Personally

Objective

To decrease your tendency to take things too personally (believing people are critical of you when they are not).

What to Know

Do you frequently feel that you are unfairly criticized by others? Do you feel people are attacking you when you do not deserve it? If you often feel this way you may be taking things too personally – believing people are being hard on you when they are just expressing their opinions.

For example, John's wife Susan told him one night at dinner, "My friend Maggie just got a new car. She's lucky to have a husband who is a lawyer and has such a good income." John felt his wife was saying that he is a failure and that he cannot give her the nice things she wants. He felt she was putting him down for his job as a salesman at car dealership. John at first felt hurt and depressed, but then he felt angry. He thought to himself, "Susan has no idea how hard I work. She's so selfish and only thinks about things she wants to buy. I don't even know why I stay married to her."

If you were watching this conversation as an observer, you would see that Susan was not really being critical of her husband. She was just stating a fact about her friend. You could probably tell this by Susan's tone of voice and her body language. But John often takes things personally that are not really about him. He does this with his wife, with his family, and at work. As a result, John has a difficult time with most of his relationships.

Does this sound like you? Are you also sensitive to criticism and rejection? Can you see that if you do not take things so personally your relationships will improve?

The next time your feelings are hurt, you can ask yourself:

- Was that really about me?
- Could she have meant something else by that comment?
- Is there another way to take this?
- Maybe he is talking about someone else?
- Maybe that remark means nothing.
- I can check it out with her later.
- This isn't necessarily about me!

This worksheet will help you practice "not taking things personally." If you can learn to challenge your tendency to over-personalize what people are saying, you will likely have an easier time navigating your relationships.

What to Do

Over the next two weeks, record when you take things personally in the following chart. Write down thoughts you have when you take something personally and how you react. Then, come up with some rational responses or challenging thoughts. See the example in the chart.

Date	Thoughts where I over-personalized	How I reacted	Rational responses/challenging thoughts
4/1	<i>I didn't receive an invitation to Kim's wedding, so she must dislike me.</i>	<i>I complained to my family. I feel like I don't have any friends.</i>	<i>Just because I didn't get an invitation to Kim's wedding doesn't mean she dislikes me. Maybe it's a small wedding for close friends and family only.</i>

Reflections on This Exercise

Once you have completed the exercise, answer the following questions.

Are you more aware of when you take things personally? Why or why not?

After completing this exercise, do you find that you do not take things personally as often?

What else can you do to stop taking things personally? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?

Transforming Argumentative Patterns

Objective

To understand why arguments escalate, explore ways to identify common ground, and practice strategies to de-escalate conflicts and promote collaboration.

What to Know

Arguments are a normal part of any relationship. However, disagreements can erode trust and connection when they become chronic, heated, or destructive. Transforming argumentative patterns involves shifting the focus from "winning" the argument or being "right" to finding common ground. This approach builds understanding, mutual respect, and collaboration. By learning to identify shared values, goals, or perspectives, you can create a foundation for healthier communication and stronger relationships.

Arguments often follow a predictable cycle; recognizing these patterns is essential to transforming how you approach conflict. The argument cycle generally includes triggers, escalation, and aftermath. Each phase contributes to the dynamic, often in ways that prevent resolution and reinforce adverse reactions. The desire to be "right" can fuel the cycle, keeping both parties stuck in a loop of defensiveness and blame.

1. **Triggers:** Every argument begins with a trigger—an event, statement, or action that sparks a reaction. Triggers often stem from unmet needs, misunderstandings, or deeply rooted emotional sensitivities. For example, a comment about a messy living space might seem harmless but could ignite a heated argument if one partner feels unappreciated for their efforts to clean. Triggers often involve topics with a history of tension, such as finances, parenting, or unresolved past conflicts. Recognizing your triggers and the triggers of others is the first step toward breaking the cycle. Ask yourself: What situations or words consistently lead to disagreements? Are there specific emotional states (e.g., stress, fatigue) that make you more prone to react? Identifying these patterns can help you approach these moments with greater awareness and control.
2. **Escalation:** After the initial trigger, arguments can quickly escalate if emotions are not managed. Escalation happens when both parties feel unheard, disrespected, or misunderstood. This stage often includes raised voices, interruptions, accusations, or even stonewalling (withdrawing from the conversation altogether). One of the main contributors to escalation is the tendency to argue to be "right." The argument transforms into a competition when the focus shifts from resolving the issue to proving a point. Both parties dig in their heels, trying to validate their perspective while dismissing the other's. This "fight to be right" mentality creates a win-lose dynamic, where the relationship suffers even if one person feels victorious. To de-escalate, it's important to remember that arguments are rarely about winning. They are about understanding. During the heat of the moment, ask yourself: Am I trying to resolve the issue, or am I

trying to "win"? Shifting your focus can significantly change the tone and outcome of the conversation.

3. **The Emotional Fallout:** The aftermath of an argument can leave lingering emotional effects. Depending on how the conflict was handled, both parties may feel frustrated, resentful, or emotionally drained. If the argument ends in stonewalling or unresolved tension, these feelings can fester, making future conflicts more likely to escalate. The aftermath may include guilt, shame, or regret about things said or done in the heat of the moment. Others may avoid addressing the issue altogether, hoping that ignoring it will make it go away. However, unresolved arguments rarely disappear—they build over time, adding layers of resentment and distance to the relationship. Reflecting on the aftermath of arguments provides insight into the patterns that need to change. Ask yourself: How do I typically feel after an argument? Do I focus on repairing the relationship, or do I avoid addressing the conflict altogether? Understanding the emotional fallout can help you plan healthier ways to approach future disagreements.

Breaking the argument cycle begins with awareness. Recognize your triggers, consider how arguments escalate, and examine the aftermath. Challenge the need to be "right." In healthy communication, being "right" is less important than being heard and understood. By focusing on common ground and mutual respect, you can transform the argument cycle into an opportunity for growth and connection.

This worksheet will help you understand why arguments escalate, explore ways to identify common ground, and practice strategies to de-escalate conflicts and promote collaboration.

What to Do

Arguments often follow predictable patterns. Reflect on your typical disagreements and answer the following questions.

What situations or topics frequently lead to arguments?

What emotions do you feel when disagreements begin?

Who do you argue with? _____

Write down some common triggers.

How do arguments usually escalate?

Are there specific words, tones, or behaviors that intensify the conflict?

Describe how arguments escalate.

How do you and the other person feel after the argument?

Do these feelings lead to resolution, resentment, or avoidance?

Write about the typical aftermath of an argument.

Common ground is any shared value, goal, or perspective that can bring you closer during a disagreement. This does not mean giving up your opinion but seeking areas of agreement that create a sense of partnership.

What do you and the other person both want to achieve? Examples: "We both want to feel respected," "We both care about the kids," "We both want to be heard."

Write some shared goals.

What values do you both care about? (e.g., honesty, fairness, security, love)

How can these values guide the conversation?

List shared values:

How can you reframe the disagreement as a problem to solve together? For example, instead of “You never listen to me,” reframe as, “How can we both feel heard in this conversation?” Write down some ideas.

The Pause and Reflect Method

When an argument begins:

1. Pause the discussion for a few moments.
2. Take a deep breath and ask yourself:
 - What do I want to achieve here?
 - What does the other person want?
 - Is there any common ground we can build on?

Write about a recent argument and how pausing might have helped.

“Yes, And” Statements

Instead of focusing on differences, try validating the other person’s perspective while adding your own. Example: Instead of “That’s not true,” say, “Yes, I see your point, and I think we could also consider...”

Practice creating “Yes, And” statements for the following scenarios:

Someone accuses you of not helping enough around the house.

A colleague criticizes your approach to a work task.

The Shared Interests Chart

Fill in this chart for a recent disagreement:

What I want.	What the other person wants.	What we both want.

What have you learned about your argument patterns?

What strategies worked best for you in finding common ground?

How will you apply these techniques in future disagreements?

Transforming argumentative patterns takes practice and patience. By focusing on understanding and collaboration, you can build stronger relationships and resolve conflicts more effectively.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

COMMUNICATING WITHOUT ANGER

Effective communication requires a willingness to listen to your partner's point of view without getting defensive or angry. These communication rules can help.

On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being never, and 10 being always) rate how you typically do on each communication skill.

Guidelines for Communicating Without Anger

1. Listen without interrupting.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Try to hear the other person's point of view.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Suspend your inner dialogue.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Stick to the subject.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Make your point without blaming the other person.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Request a specific behavioral change. Ask what will be different after this discussion.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Remember your partner's trigger points. Then resist the temptation to use them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Remember your trigger points. Then resist the temptation to react to them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Stay in the present. Don't bring up past disagreements.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Expressing Yourself Effectively: Transforming Passive-Aggressive Patterns

Objective

To help you identify passive-aggressive communication patterns, understand their impact on relationships and personal well-being, and develop healthier, more assertive ways to express your feelings and needs effectively.

What to Know

Passive-aggressive behavior occurs when someone expresses feelings indirectly rather than openly addressing them. Examples include:

- **Sarcasm:** Making cutting or undermining remarks disguised as humor.
- **Procrastination:** Delaying tasks to express frustration or resentment.
- **Backhanded compliments:** Offering praise that contains an insult, such as “You’re surprisingly good at this for a beginner.”
- **Avoiding confrontation:** Shutting down communication instead of addressing the issue.
- **Silent treatment:** Withholding communication to express disapproval or anger.
- **Sabotaging efforts:** Intentionally doing something poorly or not completing a task to make a point.
- **Eye-rolling or sighing:** Using non-verbal cues to show annoyance or disapproval.
- **Agreeing without intention:** Saying “sure” or “fine” but having no intention of following through.
- **Conveniently Forgetting:** Claiming to have forgotten a task or commitment to avoid accountability.
- **Playing the victim:** Exaggerating personal hardship to guilt or manipulate others.

These behaviors often undermine trust and prevent constructive problem-solving.

Passive-aggressive communication strains relationships and makes it challenging to have your needs met in a healthy, constructive way.

This worksheet is designed to help you identify passive-aggressive patterns, understand their effects, and develop more effective and direct ways to express yourself.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

When was the last time you indirectly expressed frustration or anger?

How did the other person respond?

Did the situation improve or worsen after this interaction?

What could you have done differently? Be specific.

Identifying what triggers passive-aggressive behaviors can help you change your reaction. Reflect on the situations that make you feel unheard, undervalued, or frustrated.

Write down three recent scenarios where you noticed yourself being passive-aggressive. Then, answer the following:

- What triggered your feelings in each scenario?
- What thoughts did you have at that moment?
- How did your behavior reflect those thoughts?

Scenario	Trigger	Thoughts	Behavior
<i>Example: A coworker took credit for my idea.</i>	<i>Feeling disrespected.</i>	<i>"They don't appreciate me."</i>	<i>Gave them the silent treatment.</i>

Effective communication begins with expressing your feelings and needs directly and respectfully. Use the DEAR framework (Describe, Express, Assert, Reinforce) to practice assertive communication. Fill in the blanks to reframe one of the scenarios you wrote in the above chart.

Describe the situation factually:

"When you _____..."

Express how it made you feel:

"I felt _____ because _____"
 _____"

Assert what you need:

"I would appreciate it if _____."

Reinforce the benefits:

"This would help us _____."

Passive-aggressive patterns often stem from feeling unheard. Learning to actively listen to others encourages mutual respect and better communication.

Find a friend or trusted person to role-play:

- Person A shares a frustration.
- Person B practices active listening by paraphrasing, reflecting emotions, and asking clarifying questions.
- Switch roles and write about the experience below.

Change requires awareness, effort, and consistency. Develop strategies to catch passive-aggressive tendencies and replace them with healthier responses. Complete the chart below to identify one passive-aggressive behavior you want to change and a new behavior to replace it.

Passive-Aggressive Behavior	Trigger	New Response	Practice Steps
<i>Example: Avoiding confrontation.</i>	<i>Conflict at work.</i>	<i>Use the DEAR method.</i>	<i>Roleplay with a friend once a week.</i>

After one week of practicing the tools, answer the following questions.

What is one situation where you expressed yourself assertively instead of passive-aggressively?

How did it feel to address the situation openly?

What can you do to maintain this progress moving forward?

By recognizing your triggers and practicing assertive communication, you can transform passive-aggressive patterns into healthy, direct expressions of your needs. Use this worksheet regularly to reinforce your skills and build more fulfilling relationships.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this worksheet help you reduce your passive-aggressive tendencies? Why or why not?

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

The Costs and Benefits of Your Problem Behaviors

Objective

To identify the underlying reasons for your problem behaviors by examining their positive and negative consequences.

What to Know

Problem behaviors are often deeply ingrained and challenging to change, even when they lead to unnecessary pain or difficulties. These behaviors may persist not because you want them to but because they serve a purpose or provide some immediate benefit, even if the long-term effects are harmful. Understanding why you repeat these behaviors is a critical first step in changing them.

Every behavior has both positive and negative consequences. The positive consequences are often immediate and rewarding, making it harder to break the cycle. For example:

- **Positive Consequences:** A person might overeat when stressed because it provides temporary comfort and relief.
- **Negative Consequences:** Overeating can lead to weight gain, health problems, or feelings of guilt, which compound the original stress.

Behaviors can also become habits when these short-term rewards reinforce them. Over time, they may feel automatic, making pausing and considering their negative consequences difficult.

By understanding both the positive and negative outcomes of your behaviors, you can identify healthier alternatives that meet your needs without causing harm. Recognizing the emotional triggers or situations that lead to problem behaviors is also essential, as this awareness allows you to plan new responses and break the cycle.

Key Points:

1. Problem behaviors persist because they offer short-term benefits.
2. Negative consequences are often delayed, making them easier to ignore in the moment.
3. Change begins when you identify the rewards driving your behavior and find healthier ways to meet those same needs.
4. Awareness of triggers and patterns is critical to creating lasting change.

Understanding this dynamic allows you to approach change compassionately, focusing on building better habits rather than simply eliminating old ones.

What to Do

Now, examine your problem behaviors. Use one sheet for each problem behavior, considering its costs and benefits.

Describe your behavior.

What are the negative consequences of this behavior? List as many as you can think of.

How does this behavior make you feel about yourself?

How do the people you care about respond to this behavior?

What are the positive consequences of this behavior?

What is the function of this behavior? How does this behavior fit into your daily life?

How would your life be different if you were able to change this behavior?

Describe a time when this behavior didn't exist or was not a problem.

What would help you change this behavior?

What are the things that currently prevent you from changing this behavior?

Write down any additional thoughts about this behavior.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Letting Go of Grudges

Objective

To identify and let go of your grudges.

What to Know

Do you hold grudges? Holding a grudge involves replaying a past injustice over and over in your head. If you are holding a grudge, you repeatedly get caught up in the emotions associated with the situation long after it has passed. Do you really want to stay “stuck” and keep rehashing painful situations? What will it take for you to move on and let go?

Holding grudges weighs you down. When you hold grudges, it is not possible to heal your emotional pain. And holding grudges may actually harm your health. In one study, adults who held grudges for more than a decade experienced greater cognitive decline than those who were more forgiving. Some studies even suggest that holding grudges may increase stress hormones such as cortisol, negatively impacting your immune system.

The longer you hold a grudge the more difficult it is to forgive and move on. To let go of a grudge, shift your focus off the person who “wronged” you and the story of your suffering. Here are steps you can take to let go of a grudge.

1. **Acknowledge the problem.** Identify the grudge and what is causing you to hold onto it.
2. **Identify your feelings.** A grudge can form when a problem is not fully confronted or solved. Clarify your feelings on the situation. Then, decide if this is something you will work on yourself, or if you need to contact the person involved.
3. **Gain understanding.** Sometimes it is helpful to put yourself in the other person’s shoes to understand their point of view and behavior. Understanding the other person does not justify their behavior, or that you were wronged, but it might make it easier to let go of the grudge.
4. **Acceptance.** Consciously choose to release the grudge – with or without an apology. The other person may never come around, and they might have forgotten about the issue or not even realize how you were affected. Even if you do not receive an apology, the other person might be remorseful. Some people are unable to apologize.
5. **Move on and avoid dwelling on it.** Once you decide to move on and release the grudge, keep moving forward. Do not spend time thinking about the situation, or repeatedly discuss it with others. If the issue is brought up in conversation, change the subject.

6. **Consider the positive.** You can view the situation that caused your grudge as a learning experience. Trying to understand the person you were angry at can help you let go of the grudge and release lingering resentment.

7. **Let go.** Making a determined and sincere effort to let go of a grudge can lead to feelings of calm and greater happiness.

8. **Forgive.** Forgiving the person does not mean forgetting about what happened; it is simply acknowledging differences and accepting that everyone makes mistakes. Forgiving is not always easy – especially if you have experienced hurt and pain – but it is an important way to have more peace in your life.

What to Do

First, reflect on grudges you are holding against other people, including family members, friends, or a spouse or partner. On the chart on the next page, write down the grudges you are holding, and next to each statement, rate the intensity of your anger on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no anger, and 10 = extreme anger or fury.

Name of person	Grudge	How long have you held this grudge?	Intensity (1-10)

Which grudge is hardest to release?

Which grudge might be easiest to release?

Choose one grudge to work on releasing. Write it down.

How does it benefit you to hold onto this grudge?

Is this a grudge you can let go of yourself or do you need help from a professional?

What can you do to better understand the other person and their behavior?

Are you able to accept the situation as it is, even without an apology?

What can you learn from this situation? About yourself? About the other person?

Reflections on This Exercise

What else can you do to let go of grudges?

On a 1 to 10 scale, how successful were you at letting go of your grudges, where 1 = not at all successfully, and 10 = completely successful: _____

Are you ready to let go of additional grudges? Explain.

Do you feel differently about yourself or your life now that you have completed this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned in this exercise that was helpful?

Changing Unhealthy Behaviors to Produce Positive Emotions

Objective

To change unhealthy self-defeating behaviors into positive behaviors. To stimulate a cycle of positive behaviors and emotions.

What to Know

Your emotions can be both the cause and the effect of your thoughts and behaviors. When you experience overwhelming emotions, your thoughts and behaviors may become self-destructive. You may self-injure, overeat, abuse drugs or alcohol, lash out at other people, or become physically aggressive. Consequently, you may feel depressed, ashamed, or guilty – which, if unmanaged, can lead to additional self-destructive behaviors.

Did you know that you receive reinforcement or benefits for your thoughts and behaviors, even when they are self-destructive? That is why it might be difficult to break out of a cycle of harmful reactions, and the longer the negative behaviors continue, the more temporary the relief can become, and the more destructive the consequences of that behavior.

Consider Jane's situation. Jane's sister was seriously injured in a car accident. Jane was supposed to have been a passenger in the car, but she decided to stay home. Following the accident, Jane felt guilty about not getting hurt or being with her sister when it happened. She started drinking to cope with her painful emotions. In the short term, Jane got positive reinforcement from her actions - she was able to tune out her feelings of guilt and self-loathing. But in the long term, her actions had dangerous consequences because she became dependent on alcohol and was fired after missing too many days of work due to hangovers.

The good news is that the opposite about behaviors and emotions is also true. When you engage in healthy behaviors and self-affirming thoughts, your emotions become more positive and fulfilling. As you receive positive reinforcement for healthy choices, it becomes easier to repeat those behaviors or identify additional positive ones.

Consider Tom's situation. Tom's office announced a Steps Challenge to encourage staff to get active. Tom wanted to lose some weight but he disliked exercising at the gym. He joined the competition and started walking a few miles a day. Although he did not win the challenge, Tom still received positive benefits that reinforced his behavior. In the short term, he could walk up stairs without getting winded and he had more energy. He decided to continue his daily walking routine. Over the long term, he noticed his stress level was lower, he was sleeping better, and he was losing weight.

What to Do

In order to begin increasing your healthy behaviors and emotions, you first need to identify harmful behaviors that impact your thoughts and feelings.

The unhealthy or self-destructive behaviors I engage in are:

The temporary emotional benefits I receive from my unhealthy behaviors are:

The long-term risks and consequences of my unhealthy behaviors are:

Describe how harmful behaviors negatively affect your thoughts and feelings.

The next step is to identify healthy behaviors to help you manage upsetting emotions during times of distress. Here are some suggestions.

- Calling a friend or visiting a supportive chat room.
- Working out or taking a walk.
- Journaling or writing poetry.
- Having a good cry.
- Screaming or yelling in a location where others won't hear you.
- Playing with a pet.
- Doing deep breathing exercises or meditating.

Describe other ways you can manage upsetting emotions.

Have you ever experienced overwhelming emotions but chose behaviors that were helpful instead of harmful? What happened? What behaviors did you choose instead?

Now, over the next week, keep track of situations that lead to unhealthy behaviors and distressing emotions. Using the chart below, identify the unhealthy behavior you chose (or wanted to use) to manage those emotions, and the short-term benefits you experienced. Then, write down a healthier alternative that you used (or could have used) instead to help manage your emotions and develop healthier ones.

Situation	Emotions I experienced	Unhealthy or Destructive Behavior	Short-Term Benefits	What I Did/Could Have Done Instead

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Dealing Effectively with Authority Figures

Objective

To feel more empowered to deal effectively with those in authority by practicing assertiveness skills.

What to Know

For many people, especially those with social anxiety, interactions with authority figures can be fraught with worry. You may fear that you are being perceived as bad or incompetent. You may fear that you will be criticized or berated in private or in public. You may even “fear the fear” associated with dealing with authority figures. For instance, many people are afraid that the physical symptoms that accompany their anxiety will be noticed by others. These can include blushing, sweating, fast heartbeat, dizziness, or stammering.

Facing an authority figure can feel intimidating, and even paralyzing, especially if that authority figure has some control over your future, such as a boss who is in a position to fire you.

Some people are simply born more fearful than others. However, many timid children grow out of this innate character trait, given the right support.

Some people were not born timid but grew up in homes where there was a significant amount of criticism, yelling, and even abuse. This type of family environment can affect people for a lifetime.

In this worksheet, you will identify the authority figures in your past as well as your present. Then you will learn about simple strategies for assertive interactions with authority figures.

Note: If you are currently dealing with an authority figure who is verbally or physically harassing or mistreating you, ask for help immediately from a safe person (friend, family, professional), consult with your Human Resources Department if the problem is at work, or, if necessary, call the police.

What to Do

To raise your awareness about your anxiety in dealing with authority figures, write down the names and/or the role of authority figures in your past, such as parents, step-parents, grandparents, older siblings, other relatives, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, and so on.

Next to each name, write down what it was like to interact with them. For example: “I felt safe with my father,” or “I felt intimidated by my teacher,” or “I felt angry and sad about my older brother, who bullied me.”

Name	Relationship	What You Felt Then

Next, write down the names and roles of the authority figures in your current life and what your feelings are about dealing with them. You can include family members, teachers, bosses, supervisors, managers, landlords/landladies, or other people in a position of authority in your current life.

Name	Relationship/Role	How You Feel When You Deal with Them Now

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What are some *fears* about your interactions with the authority figures in your present life?

What difficulties have you encountered in *actual* interactions with authority figures? What happens to you physically? Emotionally? Describe below.

Now that you are more aware of what happens to you with authority figures in your current life, here are some strategies for dealing with them more effectively. It may take some practice to feel more comfortable, but be persistent. What you carry with you from your past does not need to be repeated in the present.

Strategies for More Assertive Communication with Authority Figures

- Realize that authority figures are people too, with vulnerabilities and soft spots.
- Check your posture. If you are slumping, straighten your body and hold your head high.
- Make eye contact, even if it's hard.
- Speak with a confident voice.
- Listen actively, making sure not to interrupt or talk over the other person's words.
- Control your breathing as best you can. Take deep, diaphragmatic breaths to stay cool.
- Be aware of when you feel defensive about something. Try to hear both sides.
- Be open to receiving suggestions and advice.

- If you feel paralyzed by a question, say, “I need to think about that and I’ll get back to you.”
- Recognize that authority figures have to do a tough job sometimes by setting limits or sharing bad news. Try not to take it personally.
- Share your feedback or point of view openly and honestly. Take your time.
- If you feel yourself shutting down or wanting to escape, take a moment to collect yourself, perhaps grounding yourself in your feet or taking a few breaths.
- Be kind to yourself if you have visible anxiety symptoms. Everyone gets nervous with authority figures. It is not a sign of a character flaw. It is not the end of the world.
- Think positively before or during a meeting: “I can do this,” “I have a right to stand up for myself,” “I am competent and trustworthy,” “I am open to feedback and constructive criticism.”

Now it’s your turn to write down some positive strategies that you would like to use the next time you have to encounter an authority figure. Be creative. Be realistic. And be patient with yourself.

More to Think About

1. From the lists above, identify which strategies seem the hardest for you and why.

2. Which strategies are ones you think you could use? Why? Commit to trying one each time you ae with an authority figure.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

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

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

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

Learning to Trust Others

Objective

To identify why you might distrust others and find ways to increase your trust with appropriate people.

What to Know

Do you have a hard time trusting other people? Maybe a loved one betrayed you, or you found out a friend lied to you. Perhaps you worry you are going to be hurt again, or you constantly question if what others tell you is true. Maybe you distrust a certain group or institution.

What is trust? If you trust others, you:

- let them know how you feel, and you are confident they will respect you and not take advantage of you.
- share your thoughts with others, trusting they will not gossip about you.
- are confident others support you, even when you are vulnerable or make mistakes.
- assume others will not intentionally hurt or abuse you.
- create relationships built on mutual respect, caring, and concern.
- easily discuss personal information.
- rely on others to treat you in a fair and honest way.

Check off any of the following statements that apply to you.

_____ I've been hurt in the past and I won't be hurt again.

_____ People are out to get all they can from me.

_____ As soon as I let my guard down, I'll be hurt or used.

_____ No one can be trusted.

_____ I'm always hurt by the ones I love.

_____ No one respects me.

_____ All men / women are dishonest.

_____ Everyone is out to get me.

_____ I'm never successful in choosing friends and/or romantic partners.

_____ As soon as I open up to someone, they hurt me.

_____ There is no such thing as a healthy relationship.

_____ People don't really change.

_____ The only person I can trust is myself.

- _____ If I relax my defenses I will get hurt.
- _____ Most people only manipulate me to get what they want.
- _____ There's no such thing as a fair employer, generous company, or supportive workplace.
- _____ It's better to be alone than risk getting hurt.
- _____ I'll never share my true feelings because others will use them against me.
- _____ Total the checked statements.

If you checked off more than five statements, you might have problems trusting others.

What do you need to develop trust? Here are some characteristics of people who trust others. They have:

- faith in the goodness of others.
- hope for the future.
- faith in the fairness of life.
- a belief in a power greater than themselves.
- the ability to forgive and empathize with others.
- healthy communication skills.
- a willingness to self-disclose and be vulnerable.
- authenticity.
- the ability to let go of fear.
- self-acceptance.

This worksheet will help you increase your trust in others.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Do you distrust certain people, groups, or institutions? If yes, explain.

What are your reasons for distrusting them?

How does this lack of trust affect your life?

Why do you think you distrust others? Describe the circumstances that contributed to your lack of trust.

Write down 2-3 beliefs that hold your distrust in place.

What are some traits you can acquire or develop to increase your trust in others?

Next, complete the following activities.

Write a Letter

Write a letter to a person you distrust. List your reasons for the lack of trust and feelings and beliefs you have. Tell the person what you are willing to do to build trust. Include what you will do to change this situation and outline what you are unwilling to do. Once you have written the letter you have three choices: send it, save it, or destroy it.

What will you do with your letter? _____

Was it easy or hard to write this letter? Explain.

Trust Walk

Ask someone you are having problems trusting to spend at least 20 minutes with you. Each of you will take turns being blindfolded for thirty minutes. The person leading the way (the “guide”) will follow these steps.

1. Lead the blindfolded person in a park, around a mall, or in a neighborhood. Determine the route and destination of the walk.
2. Give clear and precise verbal instructions but avoid holding on to or grabbing the blindfolded person. Only allow them to hold on to your left upper or lower arm or elbow.
4. Answer any questions the blindfolded person might have.
5. At the end of the first thirty-minute walk, exchange roles. Proceed with the second part of the walk for another thirty minutes.

When both of you have played each role, each of you can answer the following questions.

How comfortable was I trusting you?

How comfortable was I in the “guide” role?

How comfortable was I in the “blindfolded” role?

How important was mutual trust in making the trust walk successful?

What were my feelings as I was being blindfolded?

What were my feelings as the guide?

How clear were my verbal instructions when I was the guide?

How could I have improved my guidance?

How willing were you to accept my guidance?

What does this experience tell us about our trust of each other?

What does this experience tell me about my fear of loss of personal control?

What does this experience tell us about changes we need to make to develop mutual trust?

How willing are we to take a trust walk each month or until we have established trust in each another?

Are there obstacles or blocks to developing trust?

What are we willing to do to continue developing trust in each other?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you identify why you distrust others and find ways to build trust? Why or why not?

Did you experience any challenges while completing this activity? What was hard? Easy? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn during this exercise?

Stop Taking Things Personally

Objective

To decrease your tendency to take things too personally (believing people are critical of you when they are not).

What to Know

Do you frequently feel that you are unfairly criticized by others? Do you feel people are attacking you when you do not deserve it? If you often feel this way you may be taking things too personally – believing people are being hard on you when they are just expressing their opinions.

For example, John's wife Susan told him one night at dinner, "My friend Maggie just got a new car. She's lucky to have a husband who is a lawyer and has such a good income." John felt his wife was saying that he is a failure and that he cannot give her the nice things she wants. He felt she was putting him down for his job as a salesman at car dealership. John at first felt hurt and depressed, but then he felt angry. He thought to himself, "Susan has no idea how hard I work. She's so selfish and only thinks about things she wants to buy. I don't even know why I stay married to her."

If you were watching this conversation as an observer, you would see that Susan was not really being critical of her husband. She was just stating a fact about her friend. You could probably tell this by Susan's tone of voice and her body language. But John often takes things personally that are not really about him. He does this with his wife, with his family, and at work. As a result, John has a difficult time with most of his relationships.

Does this sound like you? Are you also sensitive to criticism and rejection? Can you see that if you do not take things so personally your relationships will improve?

The next time your feelings are hurt, you can ask yourself:

- Was that really about me?
- Could she have meant something else by that comment?
- Is there another way to take this?
- Maybe he is talking about someone else?
- Maybe that remark means nothing.
- I can check it out with her later.
- This isn't necessarily about me!

This worksheet will help you practice "not taking things personally." If you can learn to challenge your tendency to over-personalize what people are saying, you will likely have an easier time navigating your relationships.

What to Do

Over the next two weeks, record when you take things personally in the following chart. Write down thoughts you have when you take something personally and how you react. Then, come up with some rational responses or challenging thoughts. See the example in the chart.

Date	Thoughts where I over-personalized	How I reacted	Rational responses/challenging thoughts
4/1	<i>I didn't receive an invitation to Kim's wedding, so she must dislike me.</i>	<i>I complained to my family. I feel like I don't have any friends.</i>	<i>Just because I didn't get an invitation to Kim's wedding doesn't mean she dislikes me. Maybe it's a small wedding for close friends and family only.</i>

Reflections on This Exercise

Once you have completed the exercise, answer the following questions.

Are you more aware of when you take things personally? Why or why not?

After completing this exercise, do you find that you do not take things personally as often?

What else can you do to stop taking things personally? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?

Understanding and Addressing Compulsive Lying

Objective

To recognize dishonest behavior, understand its impacts, and develop healthier communication habits.

What to Know

Some people lie all of the time. It seems to come so easy to them, that that it is hard for others to distinguish what is true and what is untrue. Unlike occasional casual lying, compulsive lying is frequent and pervasive. It is often not clear why a person is lying.

If you have a problem with frequent lying it has likely gotten you into trouble in your relationships and even in your work life. It is also likely that your lying has affected your self-esteem and is contributing to a variety of mental health problems. This worksheet can help, along with professional help.

You can begin to manage lying by following these steps:

1. **Increase your awareness.** The first step is to recognize the pattern of lying. Knowing when and why you lie can help you understand the triggers.
2. **Take time to reflect.** Considering the consequences of lying can motivate change. Think about how lies affect your relationships and self-image.
3. **Practice honesty.** Begin with small truths. Practicing honesty in less challenging situations can build confidence and help form new habits.
4. **Seek support.** Therapy and support groups can provide guidance and strategies to help you reduce lying.
5. **Incorporate mindfulness as a coping strategy.** Learning mindfulness can help manage the impulses that lead to lying. Developing healthier coping strategies for stress and anxiety is essential.

This worksheet is designed to help you recognize your behavior, understand its impacts, and develop healthier communication habits.

What to Do

Use the following chart to reflect on your recent experiences with lying. Consider each instance and answer the following questions. Try to be as honest and thorough as possible with your responses.

- Describe a recent situation where you found yourself lying. What was the lie about?
- What motivated you to lie in this situation? Possible motivations might include avoiding conflict, protecting someone's feelings, enhancing self-esteem, or escaping consequences.
- How did the lie affect the situation? Was the outcome positive or negative?
- How did you feel immediately after lying? How do you feel about it now?

- How do you think the lie affected other people involved? Consider their feelings and any changes in their behavior toward you.

Situation	Motivation	Outcome	How you felt immediately after	How you feel now	How the lie affected others

Do you notice any patterns in the situations where you lie? Are there common triggers or themes? Explain.

Read about the potential consequences of pathological lying and relate them to your own experiences. Then, check any of the following statements that apply to you.

Chronic lying can damage trust. Write down relationships in your life that have been affected by your lying. What changes have you noticed?

_____ **Lying frequently can lead to feelings of guilt, anxiety, or loneliness.** Have you experienced these emotions? How do they impact your daily life? Explain.

_____ **Persistent dishonesty can change how you see yourself or how others perceive you.** What thoughts or feelings arise when you think about your honesty?

_____ **Lying can result in job loss or other serious consequences.** Have you experienced consequences related to lying? How has lying impacted your life? Explain.

For the next week, keep a log of your daily conversations where you consciously choose honesty, especially in moments where you might typically lie. Note the situation, your honest behavior, and the outcomes. Use the chart on the following page.

Date	Situation	What you'd typically say	What you honestly said	Outcome

At the end of the week, review your log. How many times did you choose honesty? _____

Summarize the outcomes.

Write about how being honest affects your feelings about yourself and your interactions with others.

What did you learn about yourself through this activity?

How difficult was it to be honest? What challenges did you face?

How did others respond to your honesty? Were there any unexpected reactions? Explain.

Based on your reflections and the honesty log, set some goals for yourself regarding honesty. Consider small, achievable steps to improve your truthfulness in communication.

First, identify specific situations where you will commit to being honest.

Plan strategies to manage the urge to lie. Consider alternatives like taking a moment to think before responding or discussing your feelings openly. Write down some ideas.

Think about ways to seek support as you work on this issue. This might include therapy, joining a support group, or confiding in a trusted friend or family member. What will you do?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section II: Building Psychological Strengths That Contribute to Progress

Surround Yourself with Optimism and Positivity When You Feel Hopeless

Objective

To reduce feelings of hopelessness by surrounding yourself with optimistic people.

What to Know

If you have experienced a loss, had a major life change, or if you are living with a mental health condition like depression, you may feel hopeless. Perhaps you believe your situation will never improve.

Hopelessness involves despair, desperation, and utter sadness. You may pull back from life, isolate yourself, and avoid doing things you enjoy or spending time with people you love. Hopelessness can even lead to suicide.

If you feel hopeless, you may have no expectation of good or success. You may struggle to find solutions or feel successful. If you're hopeless, it might be easier to focus on what is going *wrong* and forget to appreciate what is going *right*.

One simple step you can take is choosing the people you spend time with. The people you spend the most time with influence your life, your moods, and your expectations. Surrounding yourself with optimistic, positive, and admirable people can result in you adopting those same traits. You may experience changes such as:

- an attitude adjustment.
- feeling better about yourself.
- increased motivation and energy.
- accomplishing more each day.
- less stress.
- connecting with other happy, optimistic people.
- a reduction in feelings of hopelessness.
- increased gratitude and generosity.

According to research, surrounding yourself with positivity can help you live longer than pessimistic people who tend to be negative. Optimistic people cope with disease better, recover from surgery faster, are healthier, and even live longer lives. Optimists also experience greater happiness, healthier hearts, stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, and a reduced risk for stroke.

Positive and optimistic people are not always happy. They *do* typically try to keep a positive attitude – and they often have your best interests at heart. They can motivate and encourage you.

How can you become more positive and optimistic? It has a lot to do with the people you spend time with. Surround yourself with happy people who motivate you to become a better person and believe in the importance of positivity. They can actively cheer you on and lend you emotional support. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Positivity is contagious. Other people’s emotions “rub off” on you and impact the way you feel. Choose optimistic, joyful, and motivated people and absorb their positivity.

2. Feel good to feel unstoppable. Your success is influenced by positivity and optimism. If you are physically and emotionally healthy, you are more likely to be successful. If you always feel down, unhealthy, or sluggish, you will not feel motivated and you are less likely to experience achievements. Identify at least one way to feel good every day – preferably doing an activity that involves other people.

3. Tap into inspiration. Who inspires you? Can you think of people in your life that genuinely inspire you? If not, find others (living or deceased) that are an inspiration. Connecting with people who inspire you fuels your passion and desire to grow and expand. So read books, watch movies, or otherwise learn more about inspiring people.

4. Strive for integrity. Being a “good person” involves consistently prioritizing your values. This may include supporting great causes, obeying laws, caring for the environment, always trying to be kind to others, and so on. When you do this, you will find yourself becoming a more optimistic and positive person – and when you are engaged in these activities, you will connect with others that place a high value on their own values!

5. Always express appreciation and focus on gratitude daily. Gratitude isn’t a cure-all, but it can contribute to making you feel better if you practice every day. Regularly reflect on what you are grateful for and express your appreciation to the important people in your life.

This worksheet will help you reduce feelings of hopelessness by surrounding yourself with optimistic people.

What to Do

Now, for the next two weeks, use the following chart to record the activity you do each day to spend time or connect with positive and optimistic people. Write down the date, describe the situation or activity, and write down how you felt. Finally, if you found yourself feeling hopeless, write down what you could have done differently.

Date	Activity	How did you feel?	What could you have done differently?

Date	Activity	How did you feel?	What could you have done differently?

Reflections on This Exercise

Do you feel less hopeless? Why or why not?

Did this exercise help you surround yourself with positive and optimistic people? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Your Self-Efficacy

What to Know

Self-efficacy refers to the strong sense of trust in your abilities and competencies, and determines how you think and feel about yourself. It influences your thoughts, emotions, actions, and motivation, and enhances self-control. It is a way of understanding and acknowledging what you are truly capable of! An important component of resilience, self-efficacy supports you in achieving goals, feeling accomplished, and enhancing overall wellbeing.

There are four sources of self-efficacy:

1. Mastery Experiences - Success directly impacts the way you think about yourself, boosting your confidence and increasing the likelihood you will achieve similar tasks again. Building self-efficacy through mastery requires resilience to manage expectations and accept inevitable failures.

2. Vicarious Experiences - Observing others around you, especially people you can relate to, motivates you to believe that if they can do it, you can too.

3. Modeling Experiences - Role models are the people you follow, admire, and want to replicate. Their actions, principles, and achievements teach you and motivate you. You are more likely to put in the effort and believe you can be successful.

4. Positive Emotional Experiences - Your mental and physical wellbeing influences self-efficacy. Self-efficacy improves when you have experiences that bring you a sense of happiness and fulfillment.

Check off any of the following statements that apply to you:

- I avoid accepting challenges because I think I will fail.
- I strongly believe I am incapable of performing complicated tasks.
- I tend to focus on my failures or shortcomings.
- I am not confident.
- I have a hard time making commitments.
- It is hard for me to recover from setbacks or failures.
- I quickly lose interest in activities, projects, or work.
- I want results without putting in the effort.
- I am very anxious about failing.
- I feel depressed thinking about past failures.
- I tend to focus more on my weaknesses and less on my strengths.

___ I lose motivation and feel helpless when my efforts fail or are not appreciated.

___ I don't trust myself.

___ TOTAL

If you checked off more than three statements you can work to improve your self-efficacy. People with low self-efficacy may experience more disappointment and feel less fulfilled.

What can you do to increase your self-efficacy? Here are some ways that can help you improve self-efficacy:

1. Set simple goals. Goal-setting is crucial to building and sustaining self-efficacy. Set reasonable goals and break them into smaller sub-goals, working on achieving them one at a time. You can celebrate small successes, avoid stressing about the results, and more easily manage your goals – one step at a time.

2. Stay in the “stretch zone.” If you want to be highly productive, spend more time in the “stretch zone,” where you take reasonable risks and bounce back from failures and setbacks. Try new things outside your comfort zone, face challenges, and accept failures and criticism with grace.

3. View the big picture. Look beyond short-term loss, sort your priorities, plan, stick to your goals, and focus.

4. Reframe obstacles. Increase self-efficacy by identifying obstacles and reframing or replacing them. Redefine the way you view obstacles to effectively cope with and understand life's inevitable challenges.

There are things you can do to build and improve your self-efficacy. This worksheet includes four exercises that will help you do just that!

What to Do

1. The Three Things Exercise. This activity allows you to track daily activities and how they make you feel.

List three things you did within the past week that went well.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How did you feel after doing these three things successfully?

What are the three things you want to accomplish within the next few weeks/months?

1.

2.

3.

Are there potential obstacles? List them and try to reframe them.

How will you feel after you have accomplished them all?

2. Positive Self-Talk. Set aside 10 minutes every day to talk to yourself in front of the mirror. Say whatever you would like to say! You can complement yourself, motivate yourself, or ask yourself what is making you happy or sad. Remember to respond and note what your inner voice says. Use a journal to write about your self-talks. Refer back to the “Four Ways to Improve Self-Efficacy” as a reminder how to view the big picture and reframe.

3. Review your achievements. It is easy to focus on failure, but if you have high self-efficacy you will more likely focus on your successes and achievements. Recalling achievements and past successes reignites your self-confidence and makes you feel optimistic that you can be successful in the future. Make a list of past accomplishments and successes, small or large. Refer back to the “stretch zone” way of improving self-efficacy, and see if you can come up with ways to stretch outside your comfort zone.

List your past achievements and successes here:

What can you do to stretch outside of your comfort zone? Successfully accomplishing tasks that make you slightly uncomfortable will increase self-efficacy.

4. Self-awareness. Gretchen Rubin stated, “self-awareness is a key to self-mastery,” and self-mastery is the direct path to self-efficacy. You can practice self-awareness in a journal by recording your thoughts and feelings each day. Include physical cues to help you understand your feelings. Refer back to the “Four Ways to Improve Self-Efficacy” for ideas.

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing the four exercises to improve self-efficacy, describe your experiences.

What did you learn about yourself while completing this activity?

Learning to Accept Reality

Objective

To recognize and address areas where you resist reality, whether in your past, present, or future.

What to Know

Accepting reality can be challenging, but it is a key step toward emotional well-being and personal growth. When we resist reality, we may rewrite our past, distort our present, or predict the future in unhelpful ways. This resistance can lead to difficulties in relationships, unproductive behaviors, and feelings of hopelessness.

Accepting reality does not mean you approve of everything that has happened or will happen. Instead, it means seeing things as they are, not as you wish them to be. Acceptance allows you to take responsibility for your actions, make more informed decisions, and create meaningful life changes.

Examples of Resisting Reality

- 1. Rewriting the Past:** Holding onto an idealized version of past events rather than acknowledging them as they were.
Example: Jennifer believed her absent father loved her despite his actions showing otherwise, which impacted her ability to set healthy expectations in relationships.
- 2. Distorting the Present:** Refusing to see how your current behavior impacts your circumstances.
Example: Bob believed his manager was biased against him, ignoring feedback about his own behavior, which kept him stuck in the same situation.
- 3. Predicting the Future:** Assuming that a feeling or belief will inevitably shape your future.
Example: Sharon convinced herself she would always be alone after her divorce, not recognizing that her actions and decisions influence her future.

This worksheet will help you explore how resistance to reality manifests in your life and provide tools for practicing acceptance.

What to Do

Step 1: Identify an Area of Resistance. Write about situations where you struggle to accept reality.

Past: Is there a past event you view unrealistically? *Example: "I tell myself that my ex was perfect, even though the relationship was unhealthy."*

Present: Are you resisting behaviors or circumstances in your current life? *Example: "I avoid admitting that my procrastination is causing problems at work."*

Future: Are you predicting a negative outcome for your future? *Example: "I believe I'll never succeed in my career, no matter what I do."*

Step 2: Challenge Your Thoughts. For each area, challenge the unrealistic thinking. Use the prompts below to guide you:

Past: What are the facts of the situation? How might your idealized version of the past be holding you back?

Example: Fact: "My ex ignored my needs and wasn't supportive." Realization: "Believing my ex was perfect stops me from recognizing I deserve better."

Present: How might your current actions contribute to this situation? What could you change to improve it?

Example: Fact: "I procrastinate, which makes me miss deadlines." Realization: "I can start small by completing one task today."

Future: What evidence supports your belief about the future? How can your actions influence a different outcome?

Example: Fact: "I feel like I'll fail, but I've succeeded at other challenges before." Realization: "Taking consistent action will shape my future more than my feelings will."

Step 3: Practice Acceptance Statements. Write one acceptance statement for each area. Use these examples as a guide:

Past Acceptance Statement: *"I acknowledge that my father was distant. While it hurts, I can build relationships with people who show me love and care."*

Present Acceptance Statement: *"I see that my bad attitude at work has held me back. I will focus on improving my attitude to create better opportunities."*

Future Acceptance Statement: *"I don't know what the future holds, but I can make choices today that align with the life I want to create."*

Past Acceptance Statement: _____

Present Acceptance Statement: _____

Future Acceptance Statement: _____

Step 4: Take Action. For each area, write one small action step to practice reality acceptance:

Past: *Journal about the facts of my childhood.*

Present: *Apologize to a co-worker and work on being on time.*

Future: *Schedule an activity that supports my long-term goals, like a class or networking event.*

Past: _____

Present: _____

Future: _____

How did it feel to challenge your thoughts and write acceptance statements?

What did you learn about the ways you resist reality?

How might practicing acceptance improve your emotional well-being or relationships?

By acknowledging the past as it was, taking responsibility for your present, and focusing on what you can influence in the future, you empower yourself to live more authentically and effectively. Use this worksheet as a guide to revisit and deepen your practice of acceptance whenever you need it.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practicing Self-Care and Self-Calming

What to Know

You probably spend a significant amount of time every day doing things to ensure your physical health and to prevent illness. But how much time do you take each day doing things to improve your mental health? This worksheet is designed to help you develop habits which are important to your mental *and* your physical health. By practicing self-care and self-calming you can develop a more positive attitude towards life, control your anxiety, and feel calmer and more at peace. Studies also tell us that these practices will contribute to better physical health including improved circulation, a stronger immune system, an improvement in your ability to tolerate pain, and more.

Self-care behaviors address your basic lifestyle. These habits have an almost immediate effect on your physical and mental well-being. They include:

- Getting at least ½ hour exercise each day.
- Getting 8-9 hours sleep each night.
- Eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet, preferably low in sugar and food additives with multiple portions of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Consuming alcohol and caffeine in moderation.
- Spending time each day in the company of people who care about you.

Self-calming techniques are planned and conscious behaviors that trigger your parasympathetic nervous system. These techniques slow your breathing, relax your muscles, and also lower your heart rate and blood pressure. These techniques simultaneously increase the brain chemicals associated with a positive mood and decrease the brain chemicals associated with stress. Self-calming techniques include:

- Progressive Relaxation
- Deep breathing
- Guided Imagery
- Yoga
- Walk in Nature
- Mindful Meditation
- Massage

But none of these techniques can help you if you don't do them. Use the chart on the next page to keep track of using your self-care and self-calming techniques for 21 days. Researchers tell us that this is the amount of time it takes for behaviors to become a habit.

Day	Rate Yourself on Your Self-Care 1=Poor 10=Excellent	What Did You Do to Improve Your Self-Care?	What Self-Calming Techniques Did You Use?	Time Spent in Self-Calming Exercises
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				
Day 8				
Day 9				
Day 10				
Day 11				
Day 12				
Day 13				
Day 14				
Day 15				
Day 16				
Day 17				
Day 18				
Day 19				
Day 20				
Day 21				

Understanding Your Social Circles

Objective

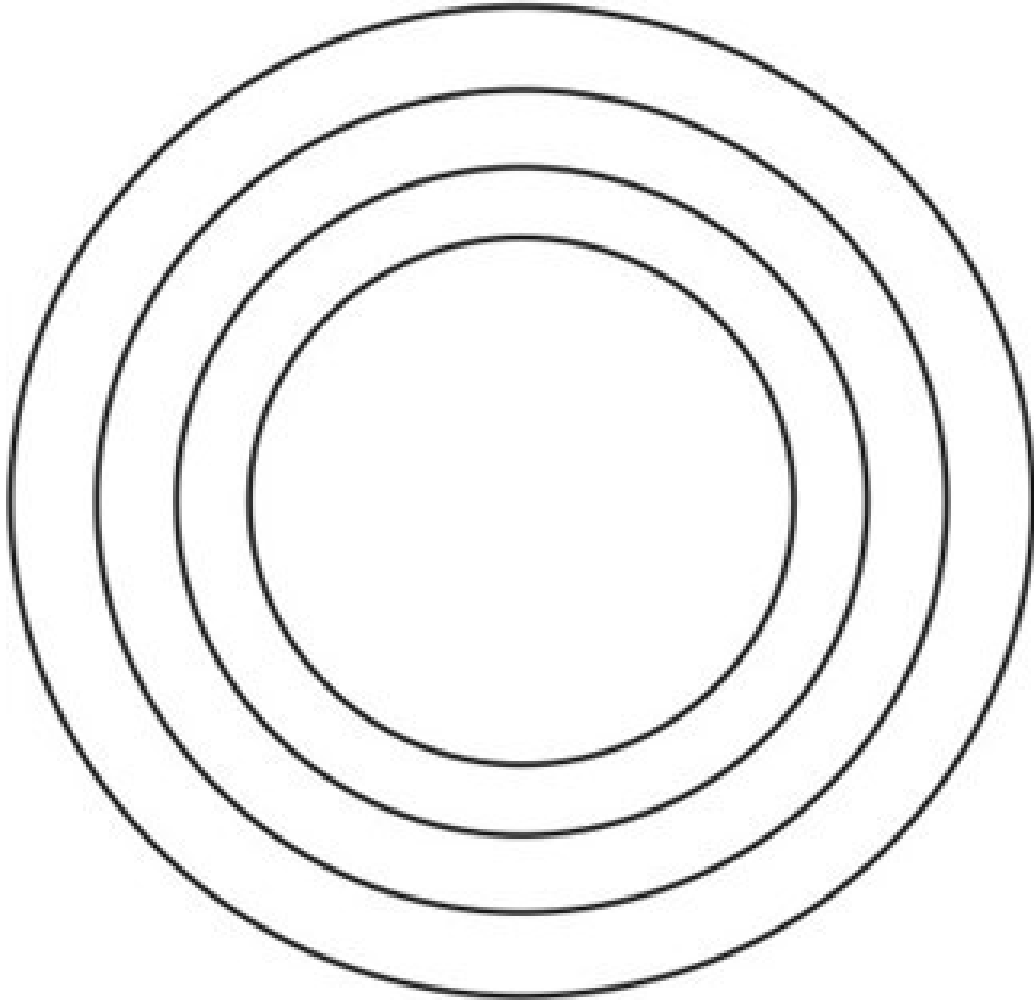
To identify your important relationships and determine which are the most stable and supportive.

What to Know

Establishing stable, healthy relationships takes time, and you might need to evaluate the people in your social circles so you can identify who you can trust, who you can reach out to when you need support, and so forth. This worksheet will help you identify the people in your social circles so you can make changes if needed.

What to Do

First, take a few minutes to think about all of your relationships. Place yourself in the middle, and then write those peoples' names in the circles that show how close you consider them to be. Include everyone you can think of – family members, friends, co-workers, classmates, counselors, and so forth. For example, in the circle closest to “you,” you might include your closest friends or family members. The outer circle might include acquaintances or co-workers. Think about the roles each of these people play in your life. Also think about changes you might want to make to the different circles.



Which relationships are the most stable? Write down the names, roles they play in your life, and contact information:

Name	Role	Phone / Email
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Reflections on This Exercise

Do you have enough supportive people in your circles? Why or why not?

Which people in your circles do you trust the most?

Which relationships do you feel you want to change?

Who are the people you would like to be closer to?

Do you want add have new relationships you can add to your circles? Why is this important to you?

What type of people would you like to add? Explain.

Where might you meet these people?

What can you do to bring people closer?

What is one step you can make today to make changes to your social circles? Be specific.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Motivating Yourself to Change

Objective

To increase your motivation to take meaningful steps forward.

What to Know

Change can be uncomfortable, especially when you feel resistant to it. Resistance often arises from fear of the unknown, doubt about your ability to succeed, or a lack of clarity about why change is important. It is expected to want to stay in your comfort zone, even when that comfort zone is not helping you grow or feel fulfilled.

This worksheet is designed to help you better understand your resistance to change, explore your reasons for wanting to change, and build the motivation needed to take meaningful steps forward. You will gain insight into the barriers holding you back, identify the benefits of change, and create a personalized plan to make progress in a way that feels achievable.

Change isn't about perfection—it's about progress. Every small step you take moves you closer to the life you want to create.

What to Do

Understanding your resistance is the first step in overcoming it. Answer the questions below honestly and without judgment:

What specific change are you resisting?

What emotions or thoughts come up when you think about this change?

What are the benefits of staying the same?

What are the costs of staying the same?

Change becomes more manageable when it's tied to something meaningful. Answer these questions to explore the deeper reasons for wanting to change.

What is one goal this change could help you achieve?

What values does this change align with? Values are what matter most to you, like family, health, or personal growth.

How will your life look and feel if you make this change?

Overcoming resistance starts with small, actionable steps. Break the change into manageable pieces and focus on the first step:

What is one small step you can take this week?

What support or resources could help you take this step?

How can you reward yourself for taking this step?

Using the insights from the previous steps, create a personal motivation statement that you can revisit when you feel resistance.

Example Statement: "I want to manage my anxiety because I value personal growth and want to feel more connected to my family. Even though it's hard, taking small steps like finding a therapist will help me build a healthier, happier life."

Your Motivation Statement

Take a moment to reflect on how completing this worksheet has impacted your perspective.

What insights have you gained about your resistance?

What feels different now that you've connected with your motivation?

How can you remind yourself to focus on your goals when resistance arises?

Additional Tips for Staying Motivated

1. **Celebrate small wins:** Acknowledge every step you take, no matter how small.
2. **Track your progress:** Keep a journal to reflect on how your actions are helping you grow.
3. **Build a support system:** Share your goals with someone you trust who can encourage and support you.
4. **Practice self-compassion:** Change takes time. Be kind to yourself when you encounter setbacks.

Resistance to change is natural, but it doesn't have to control your life. You can create meaningful and lasting change by understanding your resistance, connecting with what truly matters to you, and taking small, consistent steps forward. This worksheet is a tool to guide you on your journey—keep coming back to it as needed to renew your motivation and focus.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using your Senses to Feel Grounded

Objective

To notice what you see, hear, and sense in your external surroundings to “ground you” when you experience distressing thoughts and feelings.

What to Know

When you experience difficult situations, your distressing thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations may be the only things you notice. It might be challenging to focus your attention on what others are saying, or to concentrate on a task. However, the physical or mental distress you feel can be quite different from what is taking place externally, in the world around you.

By focusing on what you perceive through your senses, you can become more aware of what is happening outside of your feelings in that moment. This view helps to “ground you,” enabling you see the situation more fully and become “present.”

The following meditation exercise shows you how to shift your attention between your internal and external experiences to increase your awareness of your senses.

What to Do

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted, and set your timer for 10 minutes. Focus on breathing and relaxing throughout this exercise.

- Take several deep breaths and notice how your breath feels in your body.
- Using your sense of sight, focus your attention on one object in your surroundings.
- Notice how the object looks, including size, shape, color, and other visible details. If you find your attention wandering, return your focus to the object without judging yourself.
- Shift your attention to your body, noticing any physical sensations, while you continue taking deep breaths.
- Now focus your attention to your sense of hearing, noticing any sounds you hear. This can be a clock ticking, birds tweeting outside, or a car honking nearby. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your focus to listening.
- Once again, shift your attention to your body, noticing any physical sensations, while you continue taking deep breaths. Notice the sensation of your body sitting in the chair, of your feet on the floor, and of your chest expanding with each breath.
- Next, focus on your sense of smell. If you do not notice any pleasant or unpleasant smells, focus on the air flowing through your nose and mouth as you inhale and exhale. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your attention to your nose.

- Return to physical sensations, scanning your body from your head to your toes and notice any tension, tingling, or pain. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your focus to your body.
- Finally, focus your attention on your sense of touch. Reach out with your hand to touch something in your reach, or the chair you are sitting on, or your arm or leg. Notice if it is hard or soft, smooth or tough, solid or hollow. Notice how your fingertips feel as you touch the object. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your attention to your fingertips and the object.
- Take three to five long slow breaths, and refocus on yourself and your surroundings.

How easy or difficult was it to sit quietly and focus on your senses? Explain.

Describe any physical sensations you noticed during this exercise.

Describe any changes in your thoughts or emotions that you noticed during this exercise.

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe a situation where this exercise might have been helpful in allowing you to see the situation more fully. Had you used this technique would you have reacted differently? Explain.

How could you use this technique to help “ground” you the next time you experience upsetting or overwhelming emotions?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Imagining Your Best Possible Self

Objective

To identify where your current self differs from your Best Possible Self, recognizing opportunities for positive change.

What to Know

We all have moments when we do not feel like the best version of ourselves. Stress, bad habits, or difficult situations can lead to choices or behaviors that do not align with who we want to be. This can leave us feeling stuck, frustrated, or unfulfilled.

Your “Best Possible Self” is the version of you that aligns with your values, goals, and strengths. This version of you isn’t perfect, but they make choices that lead to growth, fulfillment, and connection with others. Imagining your “Best Possible Self” is a powerful tool to clarify what you want for your life and create a plan to move toward it.

By visualizing your Best Possible Self, you can:

- Recognize how your current choices and habits may hold you back.
- Identify steps to grow closer to this version of yourself.
- Build a sense of hope and motivation for the future.

This worksheet will help you imagine your “Best Possible Self” and develop practical steps to make that vision a reality.

What to Do

Take a few moments to close your eyes and think about what your life could look like if you lived as your “Best Possible Self.” Imagine yourself in different areas of life—relationships, work, health, hobbies, and personal growth. Write your answers to the following questions.

What does your Best Possible Self look like regarding behavior and attitude?

Example: "I am kind, patient, and confident."

What habits or routines does your “Best Possible Self” follow? *Example: "I exercise regularly, eat healthily, and prioritize time with loved ones."*

How does your “Best Possible Self” handle challenges or setbacks? *Example: "I stay calm, look for solutions, and ask for support when needed."*

What accomplishments or goals has your Best Possible Self achieved? *Example: "I have advanced in my career and built strong, supportive relationships."*

Reflect on how your current self compares to your “Best Possible Self.” Be honest but kind to yourself. Write your thoughts below. In what ways are you already like your “Best Possible Self?”

In what areas are you not yet aligned with your vision?

Choose one area where you want to move closer to your “Best Possible Self.” Write a simple, actionable step to take this week to align your behavior with your vision.

Example:

Area of Focus: (e.g., health, relationships, personal growth)

Action Step: (e.g., "I will go for a 15-minute walk every day this week.")

Area of Focus: _____

Action Step: _____

Take a moment to reflect on how taking this step could bring you closer to becoming your "Best Possible Self." Visualize yourself completing the action and notice how it feels. How will this change impact your life positively?

Complete the following chart for one week and note what you did to become your "Best Possible Self." Write down the date and the action step you took. Describe how it felt, and the outcome (if any).

Date	What did you do?	How did it feel to take this step?	Outcome

Each small step you take will help you grow closer to the life you want to live. Revisit this exercise regularly to refine your vision and adjust your action steps as you grow.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Overcoming Self-Sabotage

Objective

To reduce or eliminate self-sabotaging behaviors.

You Should Know

Self-sabotage refers to destructive or unhealthy behaviors or habits that undermine your goals, efforts, or values. Self-sabotaging behavior is often rooted in anxiety, anger, or feelings of worthlessness.

Most of us occasionally undermine our best efforts by cheating on a diet or being late for an important meeting. However, for some people, self-sabotage is a chronic pattern that leads to significant problems in their life, work, and relationships.

Self-sabotage manifests in many ways. Here are some common examples:

- “Forgetting” deadlines or failing to prepare.
- Chronically tardy, repeatedly arriving late to work or important meetings.
- Abusing alcohol or drugs.
- Procrastinating or putting something off – even though it might be urgent.
- Overeating to deal with stress and anxiety.
- Starting projects but never finishing them.
- Never getting around to doing anything about goals, plans, or dreams.
- Intentionally abandoning or ruining friendships or romantic partnerships.
- Quitting when trying to achieve goals.

Self-sabotage is often fueled by negative self-talk and low self-esteem, leading to feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness – subsequently driving repeated patterns of self-sabotaging behaviors. Self-sabotaging behaviors reinforce a sense of worthlessness and provide justification for negative thoughts.

Self-sabotage damages reputations, because repeated lack of follow through leads others to view the self-sabotaging person as unreliable, unmotivated, uncommitted, lazy, or lacking drive. Repeated failures and disappointments create guilt and frustration. Over time, this feeds shame – further supporting low self-esteem.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Write down a goal you have had for a long time but have never accomplished.

Are there particular areas where you are delaying making a decision? Describe.

Do you lack motivation – even for important tasks? Explain.

Is there something you do (or fail to do) that consistently frustrates people around you (for example, family members or your boss)? Is there a task that causes you stress or upset because you know you could do it, or do it better? Be specific.

Describe a situation where your emotions led you to self-sabotage. For example, you might have had a bad day at work, and that evening you found yourself overeating in front of the TV. Be specific.

Now, review the following information.

1. Understand the need your self-sabotage fills. To eliminate self-sabotaging behaviors, you might think being “tough” on yourself is the answer. But that is also a form of self-sabotage because you miss the most important first step: understanding what need self-sabotage fills.

Before you get tough on yourself, offer yourself compassion. Your self-sabotage serves a purpose, so suspend self-judgment and understand it is serving a function. Here are a few examples:

If you overeat to cope with stress, understand how stress eating “works” to make you feel better after a challenging day at work.

If you constantly procrastinate, understand that procrastination helps you avoid your fear of failing.

When you understand the need self-sabotage fills, you will be able to identify alternative behaviors to fill that need. When you meet that need in other ways, you will begin to reduce self-sabotaging behaviors.

Describe specific ways you self-sabotage.

What need(s) do these habits or behaviors fill?

Next, think of three alternative behaviors that address the need in a healthier way.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

2. Plan for obstacles. You have identified the underlying need and healthier alternative behaviors, but there will probably be obstacles. For example, if your alternative behavior to overeating after work is to have a small healthy snack instead of bingeing on junk food in front of the TV, what might get in the way? It is easy to have good intentions when the conditions are right, but if you want to eliminate self-sabotage, you need to plan for when you are stressed, overwhelmed, or upset.

Using the overeating example, here is a way to anticipate obstacles and plan for addressing them:

If you want to choose healthy snacks instead of junk food, ensure you always have some healthy snacks at home, and prepare the night before (you can even do this weekly). Using small containers or plastic baggies, portion out snacks you can carry with you in your car, purse, or desk, or have available when you arrive home from work.

3. Tolerate emotional discomfort. The best way to practice building emotional tolerance is to start small:

a) Identify emotion(s) you experience when you stop self-sabotaging habits and choose healthier alternatives. *For example: irritability, fear, frustration, sadness, etc.* List them.

b) Next, look for other places in your life where that emotion comes up. *For example: you get frustrated when you are waiting in line and the person ahead of you is moving slowly.* Describe.

c). Instead of immediately trying to get rid of the feeling or distracting yourself, practice tolerating it. *For example: instead of immediately pulling out your phone and checking your email while waiting in line, practice doing nothing and letting yourself feel frustrated for 20 seconds.*

d) Over time, you will gradually increase your tolerance for that emotion in other areas of your life. You can then practice doing the same when you choose alternative healthy behaviors over self-sabotaging behaviors.

4. Clarify your values. When you clarify the things that matter most to you – and then connect your new, healthier behaviors to them – it is much easier for them to grow and replace the old self-sabotaging behaviors.

Using the example from above: You want to give up overeating junk food get in shape. The alternative, healthier behaviors might include eating healthy snacks and going for walks each evening. “Getting into better shape” is a value, but it is vague and not very compelling. Researchers indicate the importance of values being visceral and specific. If you want your values to motivate you toward your new behaviors, they must be compelling and specific. So, instead of “getting into better shape,” you might instead say, “to lose 10 lbs. and feel energetic.” This statement is more specific and compelling, but you can do better! What can you do if you have more energy and lose weight? What excited you and lights you up? Maybe you have always dreamed of running a 10K. That is a clarified value, and it will help pull you toward your goal and new behaviors so you can resist old, self-sabotaging behaviors.

Write down three specific, compelling values.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now, complete the following chart for one week. Describe self-sabotaging behaviors and alternative, healthier behaviors you choose instead. Describe how you feel before and after engaging in the alternative behavior.

Date	Self-sabotaging behavior	Alternative behavior	How did you feel before practicing the alternative behavior?	How did you feel after?

Researchers have found people are unlikely to defeat self-sabotage if behavior is the only element that changes. Thoughts and emotions must also change for long-term success. As you become more aware of the emotions, behaviors, and thoughts that trigger self-sabotage, you can begin to challenge them. Negative self-talk supports self-sabotage. The next time you notice yourself engaging in self-sabotaging behavior, notice your thoughts. Write down all your negative self-talk (even if they seem silly or unrealistic).

Now you are aware of your negative self-talk. Ask yourself what deeper beliefs underlie these thoughts. Are these beliefs rational? Are they based on any clear facts? Explain.

Challenge negative thinking with logical, positive affirmations by turning negative thoughts into powerful affirmations. What can you say to yourself that is positive or encouraging? On the lines below, write down a negative thought, and write a positive affirmation to replace it. *For example, "I am so lazy! I sat in front of the TV for three hours and mindlessly ate chips," becomes, "I realize I am being unkind to myself; I am not lazy, I was stressed and exhausted. I am working hard to defeat my self-sabotaging habits."*

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Now, connect the positive self-talk to what you can accomplish and what you want to achieve. When your emotions, beliefs, skills, and behaviors are aligned, you can create the mental, emotional, and physical space necessary to do whatever you set your mind to.

What would you like to achieve? Be specific.

Can you begin by setting and achieving smaller goals, on your way to achieving the bigger ones? Brainstorm ways you can do this.

Use your answers to come up with a message that inspires you to move in a positive direction. For example, *"Even though I might not finish the 10K, I know I have the resources and skills I need to complete it. I've worked hard to eat healthier, avoid mindless snacking, and exercise each day. I feel energized and less stressed."*

Your message: _____
_____.

Reflections on This Exercise

What surprised you as you completed this exercise?

What did you find challenging about completing this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using a Diary Card to Manage Intense Emotions

Objective

To use the Diary Card tool to manage intense emotions and decrease the likelihood of engaging in self-harming behavior.

What to Know

The use of diary cards in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is an effective tool if you have intense emotions or want to harm yourself, and it is a helpful tool for monitoring yourself on a day-to-day basis. Here are the ways a Diary Card can help you:

1. **Recall.** A lot can happen during the course of one week – or even during one day! When you complete a diary card every day, it helps you remember what helped you.
2. **Notice behavior patterns.** You might do things repeatedly without even realizing it. Completing a diary card can help you identify unhealthy behavior patterns that lead to intense emotions and actions you might later regret. Once you identify these patterns, you can more easily change them.
3. **Increase self-awareness.** You might sometimes think, “I don’t know how I feel,” or “I don’t know why I did that!” Completing a diary card can help you look at your behavior to find the answers to these types of questions.
4. **Skill recognition.** You might be learning new skills in therapy, or you might have things that you have found help you cope. You can acknowledge what helps you by describing what you are doing on your diary card.
5. **Skills recall.** Looking at a diary card on a daily basis reminds you of what works, and increases the likelihood you will use them when you are having a hard time.
6. **Trigger identification.** Completing your diary card will help you identify how people, places, thoughts, and things affect you.
7. **Mindfulness.** Completing a diary card helps you look at what you did well and recognize not everything is “bad.” Things that made you laugh or feel good also deserve acknowledgment.
8. **Self-validation.** Sometimes it might be hard to validate yourself. As you complete your diary card, you will become more aware of the healthy behaviors and skills you are using, making self-validation easier.
9. **Progress recognition.** If you complete your diary card each day, you will see the changes you are making in your life. As the weeks and months pass, you can look back at your emotions and urges to see how they have changed.

Diary cards allow you to record your intense emotions, self-harm, substance use, or suicidal thoughts and urges. You can include skills you use to cope with these thoughts and behaviors. You can identify links between triggers, situations, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Use the app! If you would rather not make copies of this worksheet, you can use the Diary Card app, which is free to use. In addition to a daily diary card log, there are 28 DBT skills to choose from. Your entries are collated to give you a weekly or monthly view – or any date range you want. You can add notes, set up a notification to remind you to fill it in each day, and share it on social media or email. Learn more about the app [here](https://www.diarycard.net/) (<https://www.diarycard.net/>).

What to Do

Review the sample diary card, then make copies of the blank form so you can fill it in each day (*or use the app, described above, on your smart phone or tablet*). Note the date and whether or not you had suicidal thoughts. Then rate your depression, anxiety, and anger from 1 to 10, where 1 = none, to 10 = extreme; the worst I have ever experienced. Then describe the specific actions you take.

Diary Card Sample

Date: 10/15

Depression: 6

Anxiety: 8

Anger: 2

Suicidal thoughts: N Y

Triggers: *I spilled my coffee and I was late to work. Later in the day I had an argument with my friend. My sister made a mean comment to me.*

Destructive behaviors I engaged in today: *I drank six beers and then lashed out at my friend.*

Skills used: *Distraction, mindfulness. I went on a 3-mile walk.*

Self-soothing: *I walked outside and focused on the sights and sounds around me.*

Distraction: *I tried to watch a movie on Netflix, but I had trouble focusing.*

Opposite Action: *When I was anxious, I tried to face my fears.*

Mindfulness: *For 5 minutes I focused on my breath.*

Interpersonal effectiveness: *I sat down and talked with a friend about a problem we had, and we sorted it out.*

Positive Steps I took today: *I reached out to my friend; I didn't get into an argument with my sister when she made a mean comment; I resisted the urge to cut myself.*

Notes: *I was really proud of myself for using skills to distract myself and pull myself out of moments of severe anxiety. I was feeling really down about myself, but at the end of the day I realized I did really well making myself feel better.*

Diary Card

Date: _____

Depression: _____

Anxiety: _____

Anger: _____

Suicidal thoughts: N Y

Triggers: _____

Destructive behaviors I engaged in today:

Skills used: _____

Self-soothing: _____

Distraction: _____

Opposite Action: _____

Mindfulness: _____

Interpersonal effectiveness: _____

Positive Steps I took today:

Notes:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Developing Healthy Personal Boundaries

What to Know

Personal boundaries are defined by the physical and emotional limits you establish with other people. They are the unspoken rules you have about personal closeness in every relationship, whether it is with your boss, your friends, or your loved ones.

When you do not have *clear* personal boundaries, you may feel that you are controlled by another person. When your personal boundaries are too *rigid*, you may feel isolated, lonely, and misunderstood. When you have healthy personal boundaries, you recognize that everyone is unique, with distinct emotions, needs, and values. You can communicate what you need from other people, while respecting their points of view.

As you develop insight about your personal boundaries, you will develop healthy and mutually rewarding relationships. You can use this worksheet to help you think about your personal boundaries and the things you can do differently in your relationships.

The following are statements that reflect a positive approach to personal values.

Rate each statement from 1 to 3, with: 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, and 3 = always. If you feel that a statement does not apply to you, write in "NA."

_____ I'm able to trust others by observing their behavior over time.

_____ I look to myself first to fulfill my personal needs.

_____ I reveal my personal thoughts and feelings to people I trust.

_____ I seek emotional intimacy with the people who care about me.

_____ I seek physical intimacy only in a trusting and caring relationship.

_____ I make my own decisions about my relationships.

_____ I focus on my own needs and goals without being influenced by others.

_____ I consider the consequences of my decisions and how they affect others.

_____ I don't allow people to take advantage of me.

_____ I maintain my personal values no matter what other people say or believe.

_____ I'm able to take care of myself when I feel emotionally vulnerable.

_____ I'm aware when someone infringes on my rights.

_____ I'm able to say 'no' if I feel that someone is asking for something I do not wish to give.

_____ I'm aware of the personal boundaries of others and respect them.

_____ I don't take advantage of others.

Using a Behavior Chain to Change the Outcome of Emotionally-Intense Episodes

Objective

To de-escalate and change the outcome of an emotionally-intense episode by using a behavior chain.

What to Know

You might have a hard time recognizing important events or situations that trigger or escalate intense emotional episodes. Using a Behavior Chain can be a helpful way to link various choices and behaviors to specific events.

When you identify triggering events that contribute to episodes that escalate to destructive or self-harming behaviors, you can trace thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (the “links” in the chain) from that point. Emotionally-intense episodes are actually a sequence of events, and steps can be taken at different places in the “chain” to think or act differently to change the consequences or outcome. Research indicates that if you take the time to analyze the series of events surrounding harmful behavior, you are more likely to make different choices to support your well-being and avoid self-destructive choices. The sooner you notice patterns, the quicker you can identify alternative strategies to deal with episodes more effectively to avoid hurting yourself or loved ones.

What to Do

Pick a specific incident that led to destructive or self-harming behavior, and ask the following questions. Always start with an event – even if it does not seem that the event “caused” the behavior. Questions you can ask yourself:

- What specific event started the chain reaction?
- When did the sequence of events that led to the behavior begin?
- When did the problem start?
- What was going on just before the problem started?
- What was I doing, thinking, feeling, or imagining?
- Why did the problem behavior happen on that day instead of the day before?

Problematic Event: _____

When did the problem begin? _____

Who were you with?

What were you feeling and thinking? Be specific.

What did you do next? _____

What happened as a result of your actions?

What were you thinking and feeling immediately after?

What factors or events made you more vulnerable to the chain of events? Areas you might consider are (*check off any that apply*):

____ Physical illness or injury. Describe: _____

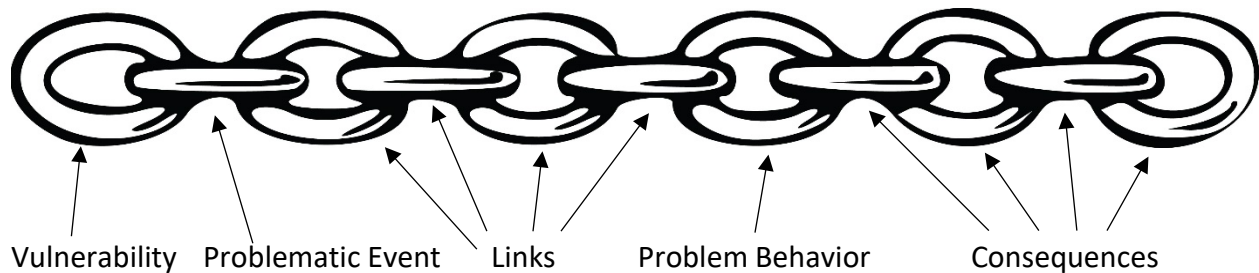
____ Unbalanced diet or lack of sleep. Describe: _____

____ Use of drugs or alcohol or misuse of prescription drugs. Describe: _____

____ Stressful life events. Describe: _____

____ Intense emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, or loneliness). Describe: _____

____ Other? Describe: _____



Here are some ideas for making different choices to “stop” the chain of events:

1. **Identify when problems are brewing.** The sooner you recognize problems coming, the quicker you can take alternative actions to break the chain of events.
2. **Use your skills.** It can be helpful to write down frequently-used skills that help you. You might call a supportive family member or friend, distract yourself, exercise, and so forth. Write down a few ideas:

3. **Remove yourself from the situation.** If you can remove yourself from the situation, you are more likely to avoid or minimize the damage. Leave, surround yourself with support, or go to a place where you are less likely to do something destructive.
4. **Make a different choice.** Even if it sounds simple, just do something differently – anything at all! This makes it more likely you will break the pattern and avoid negative consequences.

At each link of the chain, what could you have done differently to “stop” the chain of events? For example, are there alternative thoughts, actions, or choices you could have made? Referring to the image above, write down your ideas.

Link 1 – Vulnerability (*e.g., lack of sleep and drinking too much alcohol*):

Link 2 – Problematic Event:

Links 3-6 – Thoughts, feelings, other people that were involved, etc.:

Link 7 – Problem Behavior (*harmful or self-destructive choices or reactions*):

Links 8-11 – Consequences of Problem Behavior:

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing this exercise, were you better able to de-escalate and modify the outcomes of an emotionally intense episode? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? ____

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Acting Opposite to Your Impulses

Objective

To recognize how emotions influence your actions and empower you to respond intentionally rather than reacting impulsively.

What to Know

Sometimes your emotions will dictate how you behave. It's common for emotions to drive your actions. For example:

- When feeling down, you might turn to a pint of ice cream or “comfort food,” even if it goes against your health goals.
- After a frustrating day, you may snap at your partner or a loved one, even though they are not at fault.
- If you are worried about being judged, you might avoid going out with friends, even though staying home leaves you feeling lonely.

While these reactions are understandable, they can often lead to self-defeating patterns that keep you stuck in a cycle of emotional discomfort. Acting opposite to your impulses is a powerful skill that can help you break free from these patterns and make choices that align with your long-term goals and values.

What does “acting opposite” look like in practice?

- Instead of reaching for comfort food when you feel down, try going for a walk or calling a friend to talk.
- When frustrated, take a few deep breaths and calmly explain your feelings instead of lashing out.
- If fear of judgment makes you want to stay home, commit to joining your friends for just 30 minutes to see how it feels.

This worksheet will help you recognize situations where emotions steer your actions and experiment with acting opposite to your usual impulses. By practicing this skill, you can begin to respond to emotions in ways that promote healthier behaviors and greater emotional balance.

What to Do

Write about a recent situation when your emotions strongly influenced your actions in a way you later regretted. Write down the situation and the emotion you felt.

Example:

Situation: “I had a bad day at work.”

Emotions: Frustrated and overwhelmed.

Write down what you felt compelled to do in response to that emotion. Be specific about your initial impulse.

Example:

Impulse: "Yell at my partner and kids when I got home."

Consider how acting on that impulse impacted you or others. Was it helpful or harmful? Explain.

Example:

Consequence: "My partner felt hurt, and my kids started crying. I felt guilty."

Now, imagine what you could have done instead—something that aligns with your goals and promotes emotional balance. Write down the opposite action you could take.

Example:

Opposite Action: "Take a walk to clear my head before talking to my partner and kids calmly."

Write down a plan for how you will act opposite to your impulse the next time a similar situation arises. Include one or two concrete steps.

Example:

Plan:

- 1. When I feel frustrated, I will pause and take five deep breaths.*
- 2. I will communicate calmly with my partner and avoid blame.*

Plan

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How did it feel to imagine acting opposite to your usual impulse?

What benefits could this new behavior bring to your relationships or emotional well-being?

How can you remind yourself to act opposite when faced with a similar situation in the future?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing Flexible and Compassionate Thinking

Objective

To help you develop flexible and compassionate thinking patterns by challenging rigid beliefs, reframing negative thoughts, and practicing empathy.

What to Know

Do you ever think in all-or-nothing terms, labeling others as “good” or “bad”? Maybe you’ve noticed you hold onto unchanging negative views about certain people. This rigid thinking can lead to frustration, unhappiness, and even feeling disconnected from others.

The good news is that by practicing flexible thinking, you can open yourself up to new perspectives and create more understanding and compassion for others and yourself. Flexible thinking allows you to manage your emotions better, helping you feel calmer, more in control, and more satisfied with life.

This worksheet will guide you through practical steps to develop a more flexible and compassionate mindset. By building this habit, you can improve your relationships with family, friends, and co-workers, and experience more joy and connection in your daily life.

This worksheet will help you consider whether you have a flexible and compassionate attitude toward others.

What to Do

Rate each statement on a 1-5 scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Be honest about how you rate yourself. There are 100 possible points. If you score under 75, consider ways to think and act with more flexibility and compassion towards others.

1. _____ I am willing to see different sides of an argument.
2. _____ I consider how my behaviors affect others.
3. _____ I consider the consequences of my actions on the people around me.
4. _____ When making a choice, I think about how it will affect the people I care about.
5. _____ I consider the feelings of others when I’m talking.
6. _____ When making choices, I look ahead to what might happen.
7. _____ I learn from my mistakes.
8. _____ I try to be non-judgmental, even when I disagree with someone.
9. _____ When I’m in a social situation, I consider the needs of others.
10. _____ Even when I am upset with people, I try to see their point of view
11. _____ I am open to having several ideas at once and comparing them, even when they seem contradictory.
12. _____ I am willing to change my mind when evidence supports another point of view.
13. _____ If I do something that upsets someone, I try to understand what happened.

14. ____ I apologize if I have hurt someone's feelings.
15. ____ If people are upset, I ask questions to understand how they feel.
16. ____ I try to make people feel better about themselves if I can.
17. ____ I look for good things about people, even when I don't always like what they say or do.
18. ____ I am willing to compromise when I disagree with someone.
19. ____ I don't feel like I always must win an argument.
20. ____ I am willing to keep my thoughts to myself when I feel they may hurt others.

____ **Total Points**

Next, complete the following activity.

Write down a recent situation in which you judged someone negatively. Be specific about what you thought or felt.

Ask yourself questions to challenge your perspective:

What might have caused this person to act this way?

Could there be another explanation for their behavior?

How would I want others to think about me in a similar situation?

Rewrite your judgment as a more flexible and compassionate thought. Focus on understanding and empathy rather than blame or criticism.

Example

Negative Judgment

"They're so rude for not stressed? saying hello."

Questions to Challenge It

- *Could they have been distracted or*
- *Have I ever been preoccupied and missed greeting someone?*

Reframed Thought

"Maybe they were having a tough day and didn't notice."

How did it feel to challenge and reframe your judgment?

Did this activity help you feel more understanding or compassionate? Why or why not?

How might practicing this regularly improve your relationships and emotional well-being?

This activity helps train your brain to abandon rigid thinking and embrace more understanding and compassion, promoting healthier relationships and inner peace.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Changing Your Negative Thinking with the “Add-a-But” Technique

Objective

To reduce habitual negative thinking by also considering the positive side of an argument.

What to Know

Are you always seeing just the negative side of things? When you hear about something good do you find yourself immediately seeing the negative side of things, saying “Yes, but...” to discount or invalidate the positive thing you just heard.

Consider Jim. He finds himself spending a lot of time watching the news. He is angry and depressed much of the time, and even when someone points out something good happening in the world, he has a rebuttal. He will say, “Yes, but look at what’s happening with the economy!” Or, “Yes, but good things never last.” Instead of considering the positive in situations, Jim habitually focuses on the negative.

One way you can develop a more positive outlook is by using the Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) tool “add a but” (Beck, 2005). Using this tool, your “negative but” is followed by a “positive but.” The “positive but” will help you:

- prevent always seeing the worst-case scenario
- become more solution-focused, rather than just dwelling on problems
- shift your habit of believing the worst about people or situations
- get out of rigid thinking or feeling you have to always prove your point of view

What to Do

The first step is becoming aware of negative or discounting “buts” when you are presented with a positive situation or information. In the following chart, write down a positive statement, event, or situation and your automatic or habitual negative response or thought. Then, add a positive “but” to counter the negative “but.” Fill in the chart for two weeks.

Reflections on This Exercise

What are the most common situations that trigger your negative thinking?

How difficult was it to see the positive side of a situation? How did you manage to do this?

After you completed this exercise do you feel that you are more positive? What difference does this make in your life?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing Empathy

Objective

To identify the needs of others and show your empathy through specific acts.

What to Know

Do people often say to you that you do not understand them? Do people often refer to you as “uncaring”?

Empathy is the ability to not only see another person’s point of view, but also to understand their feelings. Most people assume that everyone is born with the same capacity for empathy, but that is not really the case. Some people have a high degree of empathy and some people do not seem to have a great deal of empathy at all. Most scientists think that the degree of empathy a person has is a combination of their genetic make-up and their experience.

People brought up in a home where there was physical or emotional abuse, or where their parents had mental health problems like drug or alcohol abuse, may have more difficulty in feeling empathy for others when they are adults.

Whether or not you naturally feel empathy for others, it is still important to note that understanding the point of view of other people is important to having good relationships, whether they are with family, friends, or colleagues at work. Empathy is essential to developing any kind of intimate relationship with a spouse or partner.

This worksheet is designed to help you pay more attention to the needs of others by observing at least five people and performing an act which helps them without being asked.

What to Do

In the next week, look for opportunities to help others. Perform at least five acts for five different people which reflect your understanding of what each person needs. It could be as simple as holding a door for someone with an armful of groceries. Or, it could be a more elaborate and thoughtful act, like cooking or buying a surprise dinner for someone you care about who is busy and stressed.

Record what you saw that triggered your desire to help each person, what you actually did, and how they reacted.

You might want to make copies of this worksheet and increase your empathic behavior on an ongoing basis. If you practice this, you will likely find that you will have closer and more positive relationships with the people in your life.

Increasing Empathy and Helpful Behavior

Date	What triggered your empathy?	How did you express your empathy?	How did the person react to your good deed?

Reflections on this Exercise

Did you find it difficult to pay more attention to the needs of others? How did you remind yourself to do this?

What was the most surprising reaction you got from the people you helped?

Was there anything you would have done differently?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

What did you learn that might be helpful in your important relationships?

Responding, Not Reacting, to Feelings

Objective

To manage difficult situations skillfully by learning the difference between reacting and responding.

What to Know

Good mental health means becoming familiar with and accepting all your feelings and not trying to escape or avoid them. Simply acknowledging your feelings, especially unpleasant ones, without doing anything about them can be a powerful skill in learning to deal with emotional problems.

The world is full of triggers that cause us to react rather than respond wisely:

- uncooperative, unsympathetic, or demanding people
- events and situations beyond our control
- disappointments and dashed expectations
- crazy drivers—they're everywhere!

But it doesn't mean you ignore your reaction; you can learn ways to work with it.

As with any new skill, it takes practice and a willingness to experience something new and unfamiliar. There will always be external events that bother us, but if we learn to respond and not react, we can make things better for ourselves, even if we can't change the world to our liking.

Reacting happens instantly, usually from anger, fear, or feeling overwhelmed.

We all do it. It usually happens when we're not thinking clearly or logically—that gut reaction.

When we respond, we stop, notice what we're feeling, assess the situation, and then thoughtfully and wisely decide what to do next. This definition is very similar to mindfulness— noticing what's happening in the present moment without judgment and with acceptance. Then, mindfully, you can choose what to do next.

What to Do

Can you think of a situation when you reacted, that is, became emotional without thinking through your response? What about a time when you responded rather than reacted? Briefly describe each situation.

What to Do

Notice where in your body you experience feelings and their intensity. This will help you respond instead of react. Remember not to judge yourself harshly. That won't help. Start with these steps:

- Take three deep, conscious breaths.
- Notice what you are feeling and where in your body you are feeling it (for example, jaw, neck, shoulders, chest, stomach).
- Note the intensity of the feeling (mild, moderate, strong).
- Let go of any tension you are aware of to the best of your ability.
- Consider what is at stake—is it worth reacting angrily or impulsively? What will the consequence(s) be?
- Respond compassionately to the person or situation, using clear, simple language.

Fill in the chart for one week. Keep note of any incidents that might typically cause you to be upset and even do something you might regret. See if you can respond positively to the incidents. Describe the situation, how you reacted, and the feelings you experienced in your body, including a rating from 1-10, where 1 = minimal sensations to 10 = severe physical reaction. Then, write about your response and the outcome.

Day	Situation	Reaction	Feeling/ Intensity	Body Sensation	Response	Outcome
Sunday						
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
