Worksheet
UK English

Catching Your Thoughts

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Catching Your Thoughts (CYP)

Description

Beck's cognitive model (Beck et al, 1979) proposes that events are not directly responsible for the way we feel. Rather, it is the interpretation of those events – our appraisals, thoughts, or cognitions – that trigger our emotional responses. The model implies that we can change how we feel by changing how we think.

The CBT cognitive model describes different levels of cognition that underpin how we think about ourselves, other people and the world, shaping our interpretation and response to events. Moving from the deepest to the most superficial, these are:

- **Core beliefs.** These are understood as generalised statements that shape how an individual understands themselves, other people, and the world (e.g. "I'm competent", "I'm unlovable", "No one can be trusted", "The world is dangerous and unpredictable", "I'm adaptable").
- **Intermediate beliefs.** These are understood as a set of assumptions that guide behaviour across different situations. They can often be stated in a conditional if-then format (e.g. "If someone is nice to me, it's because they don't know the real me").
- **Automatic thoughts.** These arise quickly and without any apparent effort throughout our day to day lives, often in response to specific events (or in response to other thoughts or memories). Automatic thoughts are not facts, but they are so immediate and familiar that we often assume them to be true (e.g. your parent asks to speak to you and you think "It's bound to be bad news").

> *"Automatic thoughts… are situation specific and may be considered the most superficial level of cognition"*
>
> Beck & Beck, 1995, p. 34

Automatic thoughts that result in negative emotions (e.g. sadness, anxiety, anger) are commonly described as Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs). Some negative thoughts are accurate representations of the world (e.g. thinking "He could hurt me too" after seeing an acquaintance act violently would be both negative and accurate). However, automatic thoughts are often inaccurate – biased in characteristic ways – and there is considerable evidence that different mental health problems are associated with particular biases in thinking. For example, people who

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suffer from certain types of anxiety often 'catastrophise', and people who are depressed often discount positive information. Beck (1963) and Burns (1980) have described common cognitive biases which are outlined in more detail in our information handout *Unhelpful Thinking Styles*.

'Cognitive restructuring' describes the category of techniques that cognitive therapists use to help their clients to overcome their cognitive biases and think differently. The aim of these techniques is not to 'think happy thoughts' or to replace negative thoughts with positive ones, rather, it is to overcome biases and think accurately. CBT therapists use a variety of techniques to help their clients to develop cognitive restructuring skills, but a mainstay is the 'thought record'. Thought records exist in multiple variants, depending on the needs and abilities of the client.

This *Catching Your Thoughts* worksheet is a thought record for children and young people. It is designed to help young people to develop their skills in noticing and recording their automatic thoughts, as well as identifying triggering situations and accompanying emotional reactions.

Containing simple instructions, this worksheet guides the user to complete the form whenever they notice strong feelings, to notice what event has triggered a change in their emotions, and to pay attention to what goes through their mind and how they felt emotionally. With this information, clinicians can help their client to re-appraise situations using a variety of cognitive restructuring techniques.

Instructions

"We know that 'what we think and do affects the way we feel'. So, if we want to change the way we feel then it is important that we know what we are thinking. Everyone has hundreds of 'automatic thoughts' every day. These are thoughts that just 'pop' into your mind. Sometimes they are helpful, and sometimes they're not. One good way of catching these automatic thoughts is to use a thought record. This one is called the Catching Your Thoughts form. Would you be willing for me to show you how it works?"

1. **Trigger.** We all have automatic thoughts throughout the day, often without even noticing. A good clue that you have had a negative automatic thought is if you notice a change in how you are feeling. For example, you might suddenly start feeling sad or angry. If that happens, try to fill in this form to record what has happened.

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2. **Situation.** This column is for recording where you were and what you were doing when you had the negative automatic thought. You don't need to record too much detail, but enough that you would be able to remember the event later and to describe it if you needed to. You can use the mnemonic "Who? What? When? Where?".
   - Who were you with?
   - What was happening?
   - When was this?
   - Where did it happen?

3. **Feelings.** This column is for recording how you felt, especially if there was a change in how you felt: such as going from feeling OK to feeling sad. Feelings can often be described using one word, like 'happy', 'sad', 'afraid', 'angry', or 'embarrassed'. A quick tip, if it takes more than one word to describe how you are feeling, then you're probably trying to describe a thought. Once you have recorded the feeling, record how strong the feeling was: with zero being very mild or almost not there, and ten being very strong and powerful.
   - What did you feel?
   - Where did you feel it in your body?
   - What word best describes how you felt when that happened?
   - How strong was that feeling on a scale of 0 to 10?

4. **Thoughts.** This column is for recording Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs). If the client has already articulated some Negative Automatic Thoughts in session, refer back to these as examples. NATs are thoughts (or images, or memories) that arrive effortlessly in your mind. They might be interpretations of a situation, or predictions about what is going to happen next.
   - What went through your mind just before you started feeling that way?
   - What popped into your mind when that happened?
   - So you had an image of <image> pop into your mind. What did that mean?

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References

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Catching Your Thoughts

What we think affects the way that we feel. You can use this form to catch some of the thoughts that go through your mind. Fill it in whenever you notice strong feelings. Write down what you were doing in the **situation** box, how you felt in the **feelings** box, and what went through your mind in the **thoughts** box.

Situation Who were you with? What were you doing? Where were you? When did it happen?	**Feelings** What did you feel? (Rate how strong your feelings were 0–10)	**Thoughts** What was going through your mind? (Thoughts, images, or memories)

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Situation Who were you with? What were you doing? Where were you? When did it happen?	Feelings What did you feel? (Rate how strong your feelings were 0–10)	Thoughts What was going through your mind? (Thoughts, images, or memories)

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Situation Who were you with? What were you doing? Where were you? When did it happen?	**Feelings** What did you feel? (Rate how strong your feelings were 0–10)	**Thoughts** What was going through your mind? (Thoughts, images, or memories)
Mum said I couldn't go out on Saturday night with my friends.	Angry.	It's so unfair! She's ruining my life!
I didn't make it in my youth team for swimming.	Sad.	Reminded me of when I failed my test. I'm rubbish, I'll never be good at anything.
I have to stand up and talk in a school assembly.	Scared.	I will embarrass myself. Image of myself going red.

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