Thought record

Review one interpretation once, then choose a useful action. A balanced view can include uncertainty.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

Situation: what happened?

e.g. My manager asked for a meeting.

Thought or image / belief 0-100%

e.g. I have done something wrong. Belief 80%.

Feeling / intensity 0-100

e.g. Anxious, 75/100.

Look at the evidence, not only the feeling

Evidence for the thought

e.g. The email did not explain why.

Evidence against or another view

e.g. Meetings are often routine; no concern was mentioned.

A balanced thought

e.g. I do not yet know the reason. A meeting does not prove I made a mistake.

My next useful action

e.g. Ask what to prepare, then return to my planned task.

Belief and feeling afterwards

e.g. Belief 45%; anxiety 55/100. Some uncertainty remains.

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Using this resource

Thought record

What this helps with

A thought can feel convincing without giving the whole picture. This record helps you examine one interpretation with fairness and curiosity. The aim is a more complete, believable view, not an argument against your feelings. Sometimes the evidence confirms that a problem needs attention. In that case, a balanced response may include setting a boundary or asking for help. Complete one thoughtful review rather than repeatedly checking until you feel certain.

How to use it

1. Describe the event and one specific thought; rate belief and emotion from 0-100 if helpful.
2. List observations supporting the thought, separating them from guesses.
3. Look for missing information, exceptions or observations pointing to another explanation.
4. Write a balanced response that includes uncertainty and compassion.
5. Choose an action consistent with that response. Review belief or emotion once, without requiring it to fall.

A fictional worked example

Omar forgets one point in a presentation and thinks, 'I have shown everyone I am useless', believing it 85/100. He feels ashamed. Supporting evidence: he lost his place and needed a pause. Other evidence: he completed the presentation, answered two questions and was asked to send his slides. Balanced response: 'One pause felt uncomfortable, but it does not describe my whole performance. I can practise that transition next time.' He sends the slides rather than avoiding his colleagues. His belief falls to 50/100; some embarrassment remains. The useful change is that he can act without treating the harsh conclusion as a fact.

Keep in mind

Repeatedly debating an OCD thought or seeking health certainty can maintain the problem. Use the relevant disorder-specific toolkit instead. Do not use this sheet to dismiss abuse, discrimination, physical symptoms or genuine safety concerns. Bring difficult or persistent beliefs to therapy.

Sources and attribution

NHS Every Mind Matters. Thought record: self-help CBT technique.

Roth, A. D., & Pilling, S. (2007). The competences required to deliver effective CBT for people with depression and anxiety disorders. UCL competence framework.

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

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