CBT coping card

Write reminders from your own learning. Keep the card brief and personal.

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

When this may be useful

e.g. When I am tempted to leave an everyday social situation.

What I have learned

e.g. A feeling is information, not proof of what others think.

One helpful next step

e.g. Listen to the conversation and ask one genuine question.

Support or an agreed plan I can use

e.g. Follow the small practice step I agreed with my therapist.

Print and cut around the dotted line, or save a private photograph of your own card.

How will I practise without relying on the card?

e.g. Read it once before practice; leave it in my bag next time.

What did I learn from using it?

e.g. It reminded me of my plan. I did not need to keep rereading it.

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CBT coping card - guide

Use alongside the worksheet on page 1. Adapt it to your needs and any therapy plan.

What this helps with

A coping card holds a few words from what you have already learned in CBT. It can help you remember a useful action when the mind is busy. Make it personal and believable. The card is a reminder, not a promise that nothing difficult will happen.

How to use it

1. Choose one situation and use learning you actually believe, rather than a general positive slogan.

2. Write a short reminder and one action that fits your treatment plan. Agree any exposure step with your therapist.

3. Keep a copy or photograph if useful. Practise using the action, sometimes without consulting the card.

4. Review whether the card supports participation or has become something you feel you must check before you can cope.

A fictional example

Alex writes, 'I do not know exactly how I will come across. I can listen and contribute one point.' At a familiar meeting he reads it once, then puts it away. Later he tries the same action without the card. The learning is that he can participate with uncertainty, not that the card protects him from feeling anxious.

Keep in mind

Repeated rereading for certainty can become reassurance or a safety behaviour. If you feel unable to act without the card, review its use with your therapist. This is not a crisis or medical safety plan and must not replace either. Use a separate agreed support plan if urgent help is needed.

Review your learning

Did the card help me use a skill, and can I gradually rely more on the learning itself?

Sources informing the approach

Beck, J. S. (2020). Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

NICE (2011, updated 2020). Generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults: management. CG113.

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