Core beliefs worksheet

Work on one belief with your therapist. Use a recent, manageable example.

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

What happened, and what did it seem to say about me?

e.g. I needed help at work; it seemed to mean I am incapable.

What is the broad belief?

e.g. I am incapable.

What do I notice or do when this belief is active?

e.g. I hide questions and notice only my mistakes.

What experiences do not fully fit the belief?

e.g. I learned a new task last month and helped a colleague.

What is a more flexible belief to explore?

e.g. Being capable includes learning and asking useful questions.

What small test and review will we agree?

e.g. Ask one work question, then review what happened with my therapist.

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Core beliefs worksheet - guide

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

What this helps with

A core belief is a broad idea about yourself, other people or the world. It can feel like a fact, especially when you are low or anxious. This sheet supports a shared conversation about one belief and a more flexible alternative; it is not a search for something wrong with you.

How to use it

1. Start with a recent situation rather than detailed memories of the past.
2. Name the broad belief in your own words. Treat it as a working idea, not a diagnosis.
3. Notice how attention, avoidance or rules may keep it convincing. Include experiences it overlooks.
4. Agree a believable alternative, a safe small test and how you will review the learning with your therapist.

A fictional example

After a difficult meeting, Ben concludes, 'I am useless.' With his therapist, he notices he counts mistakes but dismisses preparation and support he gives others. They explore, 'I have skills and limits, and I can learn.' He plans to ask one clarifying question at the next meeting and record what he learns, without grading his whole worth from the outcome.

Keep in mind

Broad beliefs can be connected with painful experiences. You do not need to revisit trauma or disclose private history on this sheet. Pause if it becomes overwhelming. Choose any behavioural test with your therapist; avoid tests involving danger, humiliation or pressure to prove your worth.

Review your learning

What would let me hold the old belief less rigidly, even if it still feels convincing?

Sources informing the approach

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

NICE (2022). Depression in adults: treatment and management. NG222.

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