

EVERYDAY CBT WORKBOOK FOR ADULTS

STOP OVERTHINKING EVERYTHING, AND REDUCE
ANXIETY AND STRESS WITH SIMPLE COGNITIVE
BEHAVIORAL THERAPY PRACTICES,
47 WORKSHEETS AND JOURNAL PROMPTS

SERENA CHOO



SISPARA HODFORD

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“Yesterday is gone.
Tomorrow has not yet come.
We have only today.
Let us begin.”

MOTHER TERESA



Introduction

JAMES WAS NO STRANGER to stress and anxiety, but one morning, it hit a new level. He had been juggling work pressures for months, each day feeling like a never-ending cycle of deadlines and expectations. That day, he'd dressed for work, just like any other day. But as he reached for the door handle to his apartment, he froze.

The next thing he remembered was finding himself lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling, tears rolling down his cheeks. He wasn't sobbing; rather, he felt numb, and he couldn't stop the tears. It was like he had hit a wall. His body and mind refused to move forward—he felt utterly paralyzed, unable to face the day ahead.

After a lot of internal struggling, he decided to phone in sick for the day. He knew something had to change. He'd felt an overwhelming heaviness that he couldn't shake off for so long now that it had become his norm. He wasn't sleeping well, if at all on some nights, and he felt exhausted. But he kept all this hidden from everyone. At work, his colleagues would never have guessed the turmoil he was hiding. On the outside, he maintained a professional facade, but inside, he was a tangled mess of anxiety and exhaustion. Putting up a brave face at work was wearing him out as well.

Now, he couldn't keep it hidden from his family either. The pressure was seeping into every corner of his life. His home life was suffering because he was too drained to give it any attention. He'd get up in the morning only because he had to, dragging himself through each day, feeling like a zombie. And when the day finally ended, he'd collapse into bed, only to

wake up and do it all over again the next day. He was used to the feeling of dread; and the one thing he most wanted to do was to curl up into a ball and let time pass him by.

This cycle was relentless, and James felt trapped, as if his whole existence had become a series of monotonous, stressful days with no end in sight. The emotional toll was too much, and he was barely holding on, trying to get through each day without breaking. James was suffering from something that ails many of us—a difficult-to-tame mental and emotional landscape, or what some may call, overthinking. Each time he got stuck in his thoughts, he would end up stressed and anxious. The stress and anxiety would create a series of negative thoughts that would keep the cycle self-feeding. The irony was James knew he felt trapped in this cycle of overthinking, dread, and anxiety, but he didn't know how to get out of it.

That's how James came to work with me. I'm not a clinical psychologist but a personal transformation coach who discovered near the start of my coaching career over 25 years ago that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) strategies could be applied everyday outside of a therapy environment to great success.

Through applying CBT, James found ways to cope with negative emotions and stop negative thoughts before they put him in a spiral. Over time, his automatic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors became more balanced and optimistic. It wasn't easy at first, but with regular practice, he started seeing positive changes to his feelings of anxiety and stress. Although there was still a lot of pressure at work, he felt more relaxed and had more energy to interact with the people in his life instead of only wanting to shut the world out and sleep away the weekend.

Is This Book for You?

You may not be a professional working in the corporate world like James; perhaps you are a parent trying to balance family demands, or a student having to cope with the pressures of academic competition and social life. Wherever you happen to be, you may have been feeling overwhelmed by your own thoughts. If you see echoes of James's story in your experience, you may feel skeptical that there is anything you can do. But there is, and I'd like to invite you to start making small but sure steps toward feeling calmer, lighter, and more in control. Can

you imagine what life would be like if instead of worry and stress you had more days of clarity and focus? What if you could live in such a way that you have more fulfilling days than days of low motivation?

You may still have some off days, but you would be equipped to make the right choices for you—with confidence and trust in your own abilities. You would be progressively freeing yourself from undue fear, overthinking, and self-doubt. Life would start to feel lighter and more optimistic.

When we overthink, we worry about anything and everything. We can worry about work, money, being left, disappointing others, disgrace, the state of the world... just to start the list. And all this can get us down. We worry in the early hours, we worry on vacation, we worry at parties—in short, we worry all the time while trying to smile and seem normal to good people who depend on us. This is what was happening with James. I too have had my fair share of overthinking and stress: I experienced imposter syndrome for many years, overthinking, overanalyzing, second-guessing myself, and filled with constant performance anxiety that brought me close to burn-out. And like James, I too kept it all hidden.

But it's because of James that I am writing this book—to give you the same tools that I taught James and many other clients: Tools that you too can use while going through your day, as and when issues come up. This is why I've called this book, *Everyday CBT*. Traditionally, CBT may have required working with a trained therapist, but it has since been found to work extremely well for individuals who don't or no longer have a need for this level of help. Or perhaps your mental health practitioner has recommended the use of this workbook alongside your work with them. This book is for you. It is now well established that self-directed CBT is a potent self-help tool that can be applied in one's "everyday," in real time, for a better quality of life. That's the beauty of CBT.

A stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius once said that the happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts. By the end of this workbook, you'll be able to improve the quality of your thoughts, replacing spirals of negative and unsupportive overthinking with more positive and helpful ones, so you experience better well-being.

How to Use This Workbook

Here, you will find practical techniques from CBT designed specifically to address stress, anxiety, and negative thought patterns—practices that once learned, you can apply at your desk, before a stressful event, even during a commute, or while shopping at the supermarket. At first you will learn individual skills on how to identify and challenge the triggers that fuel your overthinking, stress, and anxiety. You will then discover how to transform your old automatic patterns of thinking and behavior into new ones that help you feel better.

In the beginning, as with any new learning, it will take you some time and effort but be consistent with applying and practicing the skills you learn. The more you do, the easier it becomes, and the more benefit you'll gain. The goal is to help you identify manageable and actionable insights that you can apply to your own real-life situations to create lasting change. Eventually, the strategies and techniques you'll gain will become second nature, seamlessly integrating into your life and significantly improving its quality.

I recommend you approach this book chapter by chapter because each chapter builds upon the previous one, creating a structured path taking you from awareness to activation. Chapter 1 will give you context and understanding of how CBT works, which will help you get more out of the exercises. However, if you are already familiar with CBT, you might choose to focus on the areas that resonate most with you or address your current needs.

It's important to note that this book is not a substitute for professional therapy if you are in need of more personalized support. While it provides valuable tools and insights, it is not intended to replace the expertise of a licensed therapist. In particular, if you find that the practices in this book lead to feelings of overwhelm or distress rather than relief, it's advisable to seek guidance from a mental health professional.

As you go through the book, remember that each exercise is designed to fit into your life. If you find certain exercises resonate more than others, prioritize those and apply them consistently. This would be more effective than trying to tackle everything, feeling overwhelmed, and then doing nothing. That said, it is a good idea to try everything at least once before you make a judgment; spend enough time with each exercise so you understand how it works and can use it in a way that's meaningful for you. Familiarize yourself with the

exercises through regular practice: The more familiar you become with the exercises, the more able you'll be able to apply them to good effect in real-time when you most need them. Eventually, they cease to be practices and become how you naturally operate.

Aim to make this process enjoyable by carving out dedicated “you time.” Find a space and time that works for you and have the exercises be stepping stones to a calmer and more serene state of being rather than a “should” on your to-do list. Consistency is key, and small, steady efforts are more effective than sporadic, intense bursts. Choose and adjust each exercise so that it feels like a definite 10/10 in terms of your commitment and likelihood of completing it. The goal is to create a positive and manageable routine that supports your well-being and leads to lasting change.

Take Action: Easy First Steps

1. **Identify a 15- to 30-minute slot** in your day to have a scheduled “you time.” This is your time to take a retreat from a busy schedule and work toward better mental health. Commit that time to working on exercises that deal with overthinking, stress and anxiety. It is an investment into your future self.
2. **Trust the process.** This works, but you may find yourself resisting it. Commit to letting go of your resistance and allowing yourself to trust the process, so you can prove it to yourself.
3. **Email me right now** to let me know you've started (my email is serena@serenachoo.com). Put in the subject line, “I'm ready and willing,” and tell me that you're committed to doing this, for yourself, so you can find peace of mind and better well-being.

”

“You don’t have to control
your thoughts; you just have
to stop letting them control
you.”

DAN MILLMAN

Chapter 1: Everyday CBT and Overthinking, Stress, and Anxiety

WHEN MOST PEOPLE THINK of therapy and therapeutic techniques, they often picture something straight out of the movies: a therapist in a chair with a notepad, and a client lying on a couch, pouring out their feelings. While that's one version of therapy, it's just the tip of the iceberg. Therapy can be much more varied and dynamic than that. Therapeutic techniques like CBT give you tools that you can use on your own, to navigate life better. All it takes is an open mind and the willingness to learn and consistently apply the techniques.

CBT has been around since the 1960s and is known for its effectiveness in tackling many mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. It also has a strong evidence base for other challenges like insomnia, fatigue, anger control, and general stress. In a non-clinical setting, it has been found to be particularly effective as it's less about trying to figure out “why” a problem exists and more about understanding and changing “what” you are doing to bring relief and resolution to the problem. This is where “Everyday CBT” comes in—it's enabling you to use CBT principles and strategies every day, not as a therapeutic tool to “fix” something that's “broken”, but as one that brings self-awareness for the purpose of improving your well-being and ability to function.

Think of it this way—instead of being like a mechanic fixing a car by identifying and repairing the broken parts, it's tuning up the car to enhance its performance and make it run even

smoother—optimizing how you function so that life feels more like a well-oiled engine. For James, this meant no more feelings of dread and thriving in both his work and home life.

CBT is designed to help you understand and manage the complex interplay between your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, which is what also makes it perfect for everyday use. In everyday life, we experience a range of emotions and situations that can benefit from the structured approach of CBT. For instance, someone might feel overwhelmed by a busy schedule. By applying CBT strategies, they can learn to manage their stress by restructuring their thoughts to see the situation in a more manageable light. This enables them to start taking actions that can help them alleviate their stress before it escalates into something more severe.

For clarity, let's break down what “cognitive” and “behavioral” mean in CBT.

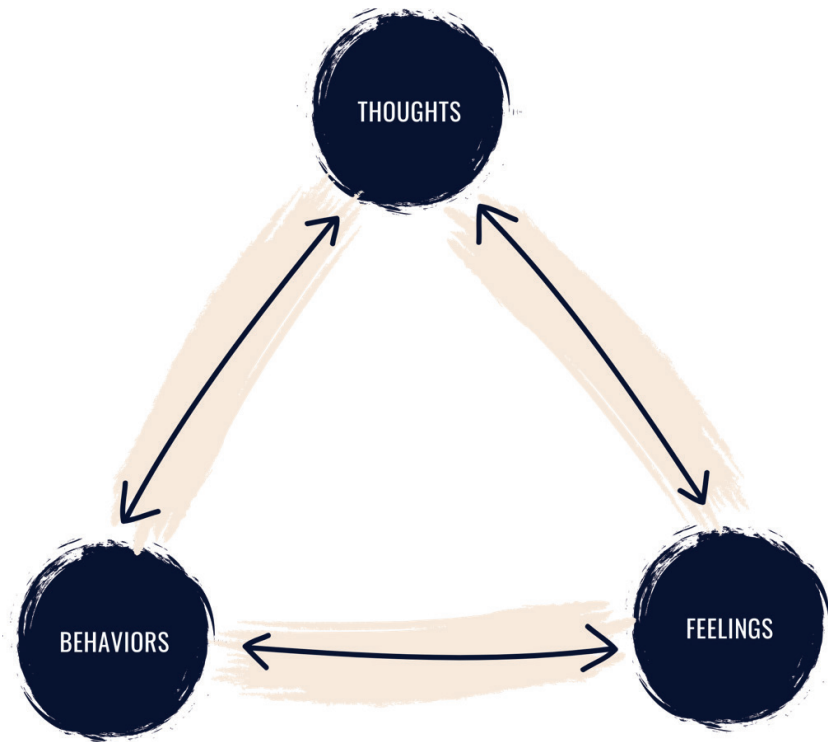
- **Cognitive**—Refers to the mental processes involved in thinking. In CBT, cognitive work involves identifying and challenging negative or distorted thoughts. It's about understanding how your thinking patterns can contribute to your emotional distress and learning to replace them with more accurate and realistic ones. When we are stressed or anxious, executive function is compromised. Changing our negative thoughts allows us to relax, which helps calm the nervous system, allowing the cognitive executive function of the brain to operate more effectively.
- **Behavioral**—This focuses on your actions and how they influence your thoughts and feelings. In CBT, behavioral work might involve changing unhelpful behaviors or developing new habits that support your mental and emotional well-being. It's about breaking the cycle of negative behavior by trying out new and more helpful actions.

However, CBT is not “positive thinking.” It acknowledges your thoughts and feelings and encourages exploring more helpful ways to respond to a problem and gain a more balanced perspective. It asks you to take a structured approach to critically evaluate solutions for yourself which leads to more adaptive and resilient ways of thinking. Positive thinking, on the other hand, often simply replaces negative thoughts with generalized positive ones—such as through positive affirmations—without any critical evaluation. It doesn't help a person to become more aware of their thinking patterns and how to change them. For some people,

this can feel like they're trying to convince themselves of something that's too distant to their current belief and can lead to a feeling of inauthenticity, so they give up. Others may start to feel guilty for having a negative thought or feeling, and instead of problem-solving, they may ignore their problems and hide how they truly feel.

Basic Principles of CBT

CBT helps you recognize the connection between your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (or actions). This is shown by the CBT triangle below. The three corners within this triangle are—as you might expect—your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, which are constantly interacting with one another.



- **Thoughts**—These are the ideas and beliefs running through your mind. For example, if you think, “I’m going to mess up this presentation,” that thought sets the stage for how you feel and act.

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- **Feelings**—These are your emotional responses to your thoughts—your interpretation of an event or situation, or the meaning you assign to it. If you think negatively about your presentation, you might start feeling anxious or stressed.
- **Behaviors**—These are the actions you take based on your feelings and thoughts. If you're feeling anxious, you might procrastinate on preparing for the presentation or avoid it altogether.

None of the three elements exist in isolation. Your thoughts affect how you feel, which in turn influences how you behave and vice versa—how you act impacts your thoughts and feelings, which can then feed into a spiral of thoughts. If you can change how you think (cognitive), you can affect how you feel and act (behavior). Similarly, if you change your behavior, you can influence your thoughts and feelings.

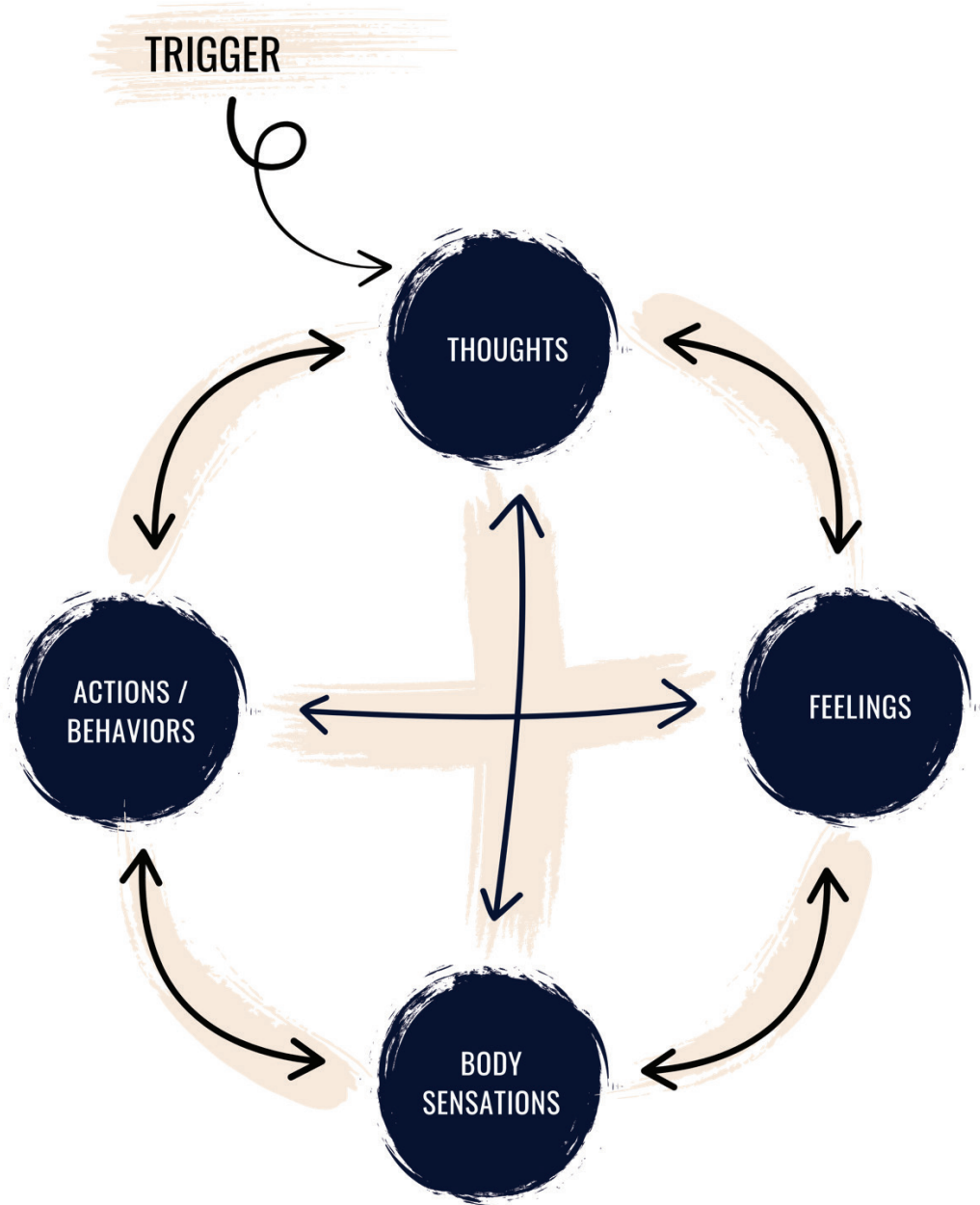
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Since everything is interrelated, since all things depend one upon another, nothing is absolute, nothing is separate, but all are part of the one indivisible whole.

- Thich Thien-An

”

This can be seen from this “hot cross bun” that extends the CBT triangle further, showing how body sensations, such as an increased heartbeat or feeling hot, also play an important role.



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Here's how it works.



Emotions vs. Feelings

I want to take a moment to draw a distinction between “emotions” and “feelings.” These terms are often used interchangeably but if you understand the distinction, it can make a difference to your perspective.

Emotions are automatic physiological (biochemical) responses to a trigger. Triggers can be external such as something you observe through any of your five senses (see, hear, smell, taste, and touch), or internal such as something you’re thinking about. These biochemical responses are felt in the body as body sensations. For instance, your heart might race when you’re in a situation you are uncertain about, or you might feel a knot in your stomach.

Feelings, on the other hand, are the subjective experiences of emotions (the biochemical responses in your body) shaped by your interpretations of those emotions. You then give these interpretations a label to describe it, such as nervousness, fear, joy, or anger—based on the meaning that you give to the situation or event.

So, because feelings are an interpretation of the emotions or biochemical responses in our body, we have the ability to choose a different interpretation, which can make a big difference in how you feel. This is why it is often said that it’s not about the event or situation itself, but how we respond to it that makes a difference in our life. For example, James loved skiing, and whenever he stood at the top of a couloir (a steep and vertical gully) looking down, his heart would race. Some may interpret this situation and the related body sensations as fear, but for James, it was excitement.

To keep things simple, “feelings” and “emotions” are used interchangeably in this workbook, and “body sensations” is used to refer to the physiological responses to a trigger.

WORKSHEET 1: UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUTOMATIC RESPONSES

In this exercise, you'll see how a situation or event can trigger a cascade of thoughts that can lead to overthinking, stress, and/or anxiety, by understanding how your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interconnected. You'll break your automatic responses to a trigger into manageable elements that you can influence, using the ABC model.

(A) Activating Situation or Event (Trigger): Describe a situation that triggered your negative or over-thinking. Be as specific and detailed as possible. This could be a situation you're facing, something someone said or did, or an internal thought. *Example: I received an email from my boss.*

(B) Beliefs or Automatic Thoughts: Identify the automatic thoughts that went through your mind in response to the trigger. These are the immediate, often negative, interpretations or beliefs that arise. Write them in the box. *Example: "I must have done something wrong. They're unhappy with me."*

(C) Consequences:

- **Feelings:** Capture the emotions you experienced as a result of these automatic thoughts in one word (e.g. anxious, sad, angry). Rate the intensity of your feelings on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is very weak and 10 is extremely strong. *Example: Anxious, uneasy, concerned, guilty, stressed 8/10*
- **Body Sensations:** Notice the sensations you feel in your body. *Example: Hot, flushed, uncomfortable, tense*
- **Actions/Behaviors:** What did you do or avoid doing? This could include observable behaviors such as being defensive or irritable, or an internal behavior like overthinking, worrying, or overanalyzing. *Example: Ate a candy bar from the vending machine, became impatient with my colleague, procrastinated on reading the email*

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Complete the table below anytime you feel triggered or use it for activating situations or events that commonly occur for you.

(A) ACTIVATING EVENT OR SITUATION	(B) BELIEFS OR THOUGHTS	
(C) CONSEQUENCES		
Feelings (+rating)	Body Sensations	Behaviors

Reflect on the following questions to gain further insight into your responses:

How did the triggering situation influence your automatic thoughts?

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Were your automatic thoughts proportionate to the situation?

How did your feelings impact your behavior or actions?

WORKSHEET 2: MAKING MEANING

The meaning you assign to something—whether automatic or not—impacts your thoughts, feelings, and actions. By changing the meaning, you can change how you feel. Fill in the blanks on the following exercise.

Situation	Meaning	Feeling	Alternative Meaning	New Feeling
I make a mistake at work	I'm no good at what I do	Anxious, embarrassed	Everyone makes mistakes at times; I can learn from it	
My friend didn't invite me to their dinner party	They're angry with me	Rejected, hurt	They hold loads of dinner parties, and she asks a different group of people each time	
My partner doesn't consult me	They don't value me enough to ask for my opinion	Unappreciated		Calm, understanding
My boss criticized my presentation	They think I'm terrible at my job	Discouraged		Motivated
A competitor posted about their recent win on social media	What's wrong with me? Why don't I get successes like that?	Envy, inadequacy	They have different strengths than me, and I can use their success as inspiration to build on what I'm good at	

How does changing the meaning of something affect your feelings?

Overthinking, Anxiety, and Stress

Overthinking, anxiety, and stress are closely linked in this cycle.

When you're anxious, you might notice things like your heart racing, your muscles feeling tight, or even a churning stomach. These are your body's way of reacting to what it sees as a threat, even when that threat is more imagined than real.

One big way anxiety takes hold is through overthinking. This is when you get stuck in your head, running through the same worrying thoughts over and over. For example, if you're anxious about a big presentation at work, you might keep replaying all the things that could go wrong. This kind of rumination can make you feel even more anxious because your mind starts to imagine all sorts of worst-case scenarios.

Then, when you overthink and get anxious, your body responds by going into stress mode. This is your “fight or flight” response kicking in, making you feel on edge and reducing your ability to think clearly. If this goes on for a while, it can lead to even more stress, which in turn can make your anxiety worse. It's like a loop where each worry feeds into the other— anxiety can cause stress because it makes you worry about things that may not even happen, and then, stress makes you even more anxious, creating a cycle that can be hard to break. CBT teaches you how to break that cycle.

You're in Charge

Osho, an Indian philosopher, said, “Your mind is a garden, your thoughts are the seeds. You can grow flowers, or you can grow weeds.” Food for thought, isn't it? Stressful or worrisome thoughts can be like weeds, and overthinking is like feeding them with fertilizer and letting them overgrow. If left unchecked, they can overrun your garden, making it difficult to enjoy.

Even though it may not feel like it for you right now, you can take charge of and change your automatic patterns of thought. You have the power to influence your mental and emotional states by changing how you think. Changing your habitual negative thoughts and focusing on the things you are doing right can, over time, lead to reduced stress and anxiety, making life feel more manageable and fulfilling.

Mapping Your Journey

James reached a breaking point when he was too paralyzed to make it into work. He knew in that moment that something had to change because he couldn't no longer bear to live with the dread and anxiety. For him, that was his why. It allowed him to see his starting point and the kind of change he wanted. Now you—do you want to make changes in your life? Why? What's your motivation?

Understanding where you're at and what you want will provide the fuel to keep you engaged and committed. You may be tempted to skip the next two exercises, because they ask you to truly connect with yourself and you may resist this. But you've likely been pushing down how you truly feel—this is your chance to get it out and write it down—and I encourage you to take it. It's an important part of the process that will help you deepen your commitment to yourself and set a meaningful foundation for your journey.

WORKSHEET 3: ACKNOWLEDGE WHERE YOU'RE AT

Use the following journal prompts to help you explore your desire for change. Accept wherever you're at—it's the perfect place to begin.

Part 1: Your Pains

What prompted you to pick up this workbook? Think about what led you to seek out these tools and techniques. Was there a specific event, feeling, or realization that made you decide to make a change? Describe it in detail.

What are the main challenges you're facing right now? Reflect on the stress, anxiety, or negative thoughts you've been dealing with. How are these challenges affecting your daily life, relationships, and overall well-being?

What personal values or reasons are driving you to seek change? Consider the core values or personal reasons that are important to you. How does addressing these challenges align with your values or reasons?



FREE BONUS GIFT #1: DISCOVER YOUR TRUE VALUES

If you want to uncover what's most important to you in life, go to: bonuses.serenachoo.com/ecbt-unlock-your-bonuses where you'll get access to a downloadable mini-workbook to help you identify your true values. You can also scan the QR code if you don't like typing. It's completely free.

Part 2: Your Hopes

How would your life look if these challenges were no longer an issue? Imagine a future where you've successfully managed your stress, anxiety, or overthinking. What changes do you see in your daily life, your mood, and your interactions with others?

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What benefits are you hoping to gain from using this workbook? Think about the specific improvements you're aiming for. Are you looking for more peace of mind, better focus, or improved relationships? How will these benefits impact your life?

How will you know when you've succeeded? Define what success looks like for you. What signs or changes will indicate that you're making progress and achieving your goals?

Part 3: Your Resistance

What fears or concerns do you have about making these changes? Acknowledge any doubts or fears that might be holding you back. Understanding these concerns can help you address them as you work through the exercises.

WORKSHEET 4: DECIDE WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

Did you know that we are born with only two innate fears?—The fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. Everything else is learned afterwards from our interactions with people and our environment. When we were very young and dependent on others to care for us, our mind associated meanings to our experiences, and learned what to watch out for in order to keep us safe and alive. It stored all that information so that it can quickly and automatically apply that learning, in the same way it helps us automatically tie our shoelaces without thinking about it.

Today, our mind still does its best to protect us and so, it has a natural tendency to think about the what-if scenarios that may pose a perceived danger to our survival. “What if I make a mistake?” “What if this awful thing happens?” It’s an automatic pattern of thought. But what if you could unlearn that way of thinking and learn to think about more realistic or optimistic what-if scenarios instead that would help you feel less stressed and anxious?

This simple exercise helps you do that. You’ll open to realistic possibility and map out what success will look like for you as a result of using this *Everyday CBT Workbook for Adults*.

Write out what your ideal day looks like—without any extra frills, like winning the lottery or surprise vacations. Think of this as painting a picture of a day you’d look forward to. It doesn’t have to be a remarkable day filled with a ton of activities; just a normal day, but one that would leave you feeling satisfied at the end of it.

Decide whether you’d like to start with a workday or a day when you have more downtime—you can then repeat this exercise for the other day once you’ve finished the first one. When you first do this exercise, you may find that you have some resistance in creating a “perfect day,” because you think it has to be the ultimate vision. Not at all. Make it one that is perfect, relative to where you’re at right now. It’s not about making everything perfect but feeling out the kind of day that you will genuinely enjoy and look forward to.

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Let your imagination guide you as you consider the following:

Is today a weekday or a downtime day? _____

Your morning routine. What's the perfect way for you to wake up? Do you love starting your day with a good book, snuggling with your partner, or maybe doing a quick stretch or mindfulness practice? Describe what that morning moment looks and feels like in detail.

How do you prepare? Once you're up, what's the first thing you do? Do you brew a cup of coffee before anything else, or do you jump straight into the shower? Are your clothes picked out the night before, or do you enjoy choosing them in the morning? Is there music or a favorite morning show setting the vibe, and how do you like your curtains—open or closed?

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What do you do with your day? Who do you interact with? What do those interactions feel like? If it's a workday, what is your workspace like? If you're at home with family, what kinds of activities do you do together? Picture your day, step by step.

At lunchtime, what do you do? Who are you with? What do you eat? What's your ideal way to spend this time?

Your afternoon and evening. How does the rest of your day unfold? What are you doing? Who are you spending time with? Do you have a preferred dinner routine or evening relaxation method? What do you have for your evening meal? How do you spend your time after your meal?

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As your day comes to a close, how do you end your day? Do you have a bedtime ritual? Do you prepare for the next day? Describe the perfect way to wind down.

Lying in your bed before you fall asleep, what do you notice about your perfect day and how you feel?

Now take a few moments to reflect on your perfect day. What are one or two things you can do right now that can bring you closer to your perfect day?

WORKSHEET 5: LETTER TO YOUR FUTURE SELF

Writing a letter to your future self is a powerful way to set intentions and track your progress over time. It allows you to envision where you want to be and what you hope to achieve. Take your time in writing this letter—be open and honest with yourself about where you are now and where you hope to go.

When you revisit the letter later, you'll have a tangible reminder of your goals and the journey you've undertaken. You can write your letter from scratch to include whatever details you like, or you can use the following template. Use what you've written in the previous two exercises to help you write your letter.

Once you've completed it, seal it in an envelope or save it in a place where you'll be able to find it at a later date; for example, when you've finished this workbook, you can reflect on the changes that have taken place and celebrate your progress and achievements. You can also take advantage of websites that email the letter to you at the set future date like Futureme.org.

Date: _____

Dear Future Self _____ (*your name*)

As I sit down to write this, I'm reflecting on where I am right now and where I want to be in the future. I'm about to start a journey of self-reflection and growth. I know that things may feel challenging right now, but I hope that by the time you read this, Future Self, you will have experienced positive change in ways that I can't imagine yet.

Right now, I feel (*Describe your feelings—anxious, overwhelmed, stuck, stressed, etc. and your current situation, including any challenges you're facing*) _____

_____. Some days are harder than others, but I'm committed to understanding my thoughts and emotions in new ways.

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As I go through this workbook, I hope to work on *(List your goals—reducing stress, improving my mental clarity, breaking free from negative and unhelpful patterns of thinking, etc.)* _____

_____ and I want to *(Describe the mental and emotional changes you hope to see—be more at peace, overthink and worry less, etc.)* _____

When I picture you, my Future Self, reading this, I imagine you feeling lighter, more at peace, more aware of your thoughts and feelings, and enjoying life more. I see you having developed healthier ways to cope with stress and anxiety and being able to be more present in life. I hope you feel proud of how far you've come.

As I begin this journey, I'm filled with hope that you will be in a better place when you read this. To help this happen, I'm *(Outline the actions and habits you're committing to in order to achieve your goals. This might include new routines, skills you want to develop, or changes you want to make in your daily life.)* _____

I know I have every resource I need because I have this workbook, and you will be with me all the way. As you read this, I imagine you are seeing everything having been accomplished above and beyond. I know that because you have already done it. We both deserve the peace and happiness I'm committed to working towards.

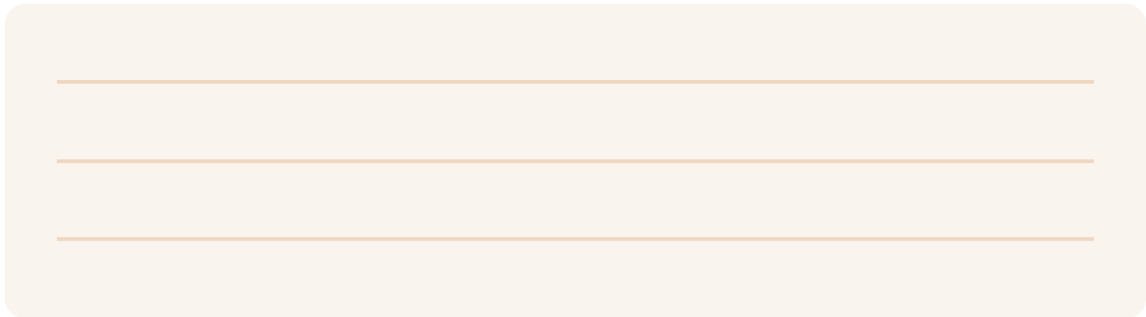
With love,

[Your Name]

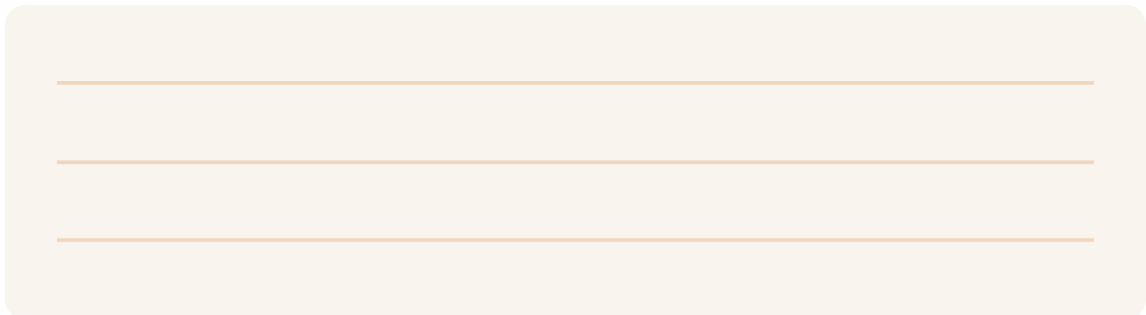
Chapter Reflections

You now have a better awareness and understanding of where you're at. You know the basic principles of CBT and have started to see how practical they are. You understand that your thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected. In the next chapter, you'll start to break the cycle of overthinking and negative thinking. Go back over this chapter now and review your experiences and insights and reflect on the following questions.

What was the most valuable insight you gained from this chapter and why?



How did your thoughts or emotions change as you worked through this chapter?



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What challenges did you face while working on the exercises, and how did you overcome them?

How can you apply what you've learned in this chapter to your everyday life?

What small steps will you take next to continue improving your thinking and emotional well-being?



”

“You are today where your thoughts have brought you. You will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you.”

JAMES ALLEN



Chapter 2: Breaking the Cycle of Negative Thoughts and Overthinking

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED why the very experiences you fear keep repeating themselves? It could be that you are dwelling on these stories that you keep telling yourself and you are giving them power. It could be that you are overthinking or entertaining negative thought patterns that reinforce these thoughts and make them your reality—because remember, your thoughts influence your feelings which influence your actions.

Now, I want for you to know that the way you think is not “wrong” or “right,” “bad” or “good” in itself—the only question is whether or not that way of thinking is helpful to you and serves you. You weren’t specifically taught how to think—none of us were—and you likely picked up ways of thinking from the people around you. You would also have made conclusions at a very young age when your conscious thinking mind was not yet developed and able to critically choose your thoughts. It’s the same for everyone. So, these old patterns still drive how you think today even though they may no longer be helpful. But now, you can become aware of those patterns and consciously choose to change them, so they are more supportive.

Negative thinking is a thought pattern that is pessimistic and/or self-critical. It skews your perception of a situation causing feelings of overwhelm and hopelessness. It is based on making incorrect assumptions or faulty connections. For example, you may start a new diet and for the first few days, you stick to the plan. Then you slip and have a slice of cake. You

berate yourself for being imperfect and tell yourself, “Oh, great! I’ve blown it. I may as well eat the whole cake. I am such a failure!” This is a type of negative thinking where there are no shades of gray. Things are either black or white. Psychologists have identified other types of negative thinking including overgeneralization, catastrophizing, and jumping to conclusions, among others. (We will consider them in depth in Chapter 3.) In all cases, a step in your thought process is “distorted” and so it brings you a different result than if you weren’t thinking in that way.

Overthinking, on the other hand, is a thought pattern that involves rumination—going over something time and time again, like a hamster on a wheel that’s running very quickly but going nowhere. It can include both positive and negative thoughts, but you tend to dwell on the potential problems. The result? Stress, anxiety, possible depression, and a negative impact on self-esteem. Overthinking will also leave you feeling stuck, unable to get out of your head and act. That’s how it was for James when he felt paralyzed as he went to open the door to his apartment on his way to work. It was only later on, as he started to come out of that full-on pattern of overthinking, that he realized this feeling of being unable to get out of his head and act had happened many times throughout his day—just not to the full extent he experienced that day.

Both overthinking and negative thinking involve distorted thought patterns that heighten your emotional distress and affect your daily functioning and decision making. Negative thinking can reduce your motivation, while overthinking can cause you to procrastinate. Then, the more you procrastinate or avoid a task, the more you overthink, and the negative thoughts run wild. You end up stuck in a cycle that’s difficult to snap yourself out of.

The way out of this cycle is through self-awareness. Self-awareness allows you to catch these thoughts and manage them as they occur, thereby changing the result.

Expanding Your Awareness

The worksheets in this chapter are designed to bring awareness to your habitual thinking patterns and to help you break the cycle of negative thinking and overthinking.

WORKSHEET 6: MIND MAP YOUR THOUGHTS

Mind mapping is a visual tool you can use to gain awareness around your patterns of thinking. It's structured in a way that's similar to how your mind works. Rather than creating a list, you organize your thoughts in hierarchies which help you see the interconnections between thoughts and can bring objectivity to your overthinking. Approach this exercise from the perspective of being an observer of your thoughts as you note them on your mind-map.

1. **Notice the Trigger:** When you notice yourself caught in a negative thinking spiral and overthinking things, pause, and track back to what started the series of thoughts. Perhaps it was something someone said, an email, or a deadline. Write this in the center bubble on the worksheet—this is the trigger that kicked off your thinking.
2. **Capture your Immediate Thoughts:** Around this, write down all the immediate thoughts that you had when the trigger happened. Each of these thoughts will form a bubble of their own, connected to the center. It doesn't matter what those thoughts were, simply capture them.
3. **Expand on Each Thought:** For each immediate thought, ask yourself what other thoughts it led to. These are your second-level thoughts. Write them in the next bubbles that join the immediate thought bubbles. This will help you see how one thought can lead to another. You might also find that these generate third-level thoughts and may even circle back on themselves.
4. **Take a Step Back:** Once you've completed your mind-map, take a step back and observe it. Remember, this isn't about judging or analyzing any of those thoughts; it is so you can become aware of how your thinking patterns work.
 - How did your thoughts grow from the initial trigger?
 - Were there certain thoughts that led to more negative ones or overthinking?
 - Were there any neutral or positive thoughts in the mix?

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- Do you see a pattern where your thoughts tend to escalate?
- Were your thoughts about something that hasn't happened yet or about something that had already happened?
- How does it feel to map out your thinking process?

You can use the blank space below and draw your mind-map or use online software such as Venngage or Miro.

For some people, seeing a visual on how their thoughts can escalate can be enough to help them immediately reduce the impact of those thoughts. Others may need more, and the next exercise takes this further.

WORKSHEET 7: STOP THE THOUGHT

Sometimes what you need to overcome overthinking is to disrupt the pattern of those recurring thoughts. Thought-stopping techniques work when you apply them at the right time—after the thought is triggered. This exercise takes ongoing practice. At the beginning, you may find it hard to let go of the string of thoughts and you may even feel some internal resistance to doing it. This is normal. Know that you are in charge and as you practice, this becomes easier.

Before you jump into this exercise, I want to draw a distinction between having a busy mind—a mind that is often busy thinking or thinking deeply—and overthinking. Having a busy mind isn't bad and can be the normal way of being for many people. It's not about having no thought at all or fighting them. We touched earlier on overthinking, which is ruminating on repetitive thoughts excessively that it leads you to feeling stressed, anxious or worried, and paralyzed, unable to make decisions or act. Busy or deep thinking on the other hand involves analyzing and reflecting, or turning things over in your mind, to find solutions. It may even be musing over something out of interest and curiosity, which can generate ideas or insights. This kind of thinking often feels emotionally neutral, productive or energizing. The biggest difference between busy or deep thinking and overthinking, is how it makes you feel. Overthinking is emotionally draining, and you may feel as if you're not in control—except that you are; you just haven't learned how to do that yet.

When you catch yourself overthinking:

1. **Stop the thoughts:** Use one or more of the following techniques to interrupt the thought train. You can use them all at the same time—it's better when you do, as research has proven that we learn more effectively when we use our physiology alongside our minds. Be assertive in applying them—you're in charge.
 - Mentally or verbally tell yourself, “Stop! ” when you notice the runaway thoughts.
 - Picture a red stop sign in your mind and imagine the thought coming to a halt at that sign.

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- Hold up your hand to physically signal “Stop!” and say it at the same time, out loud, if you can.
 - Imagine capturing the thought inside a net or box where you can contain it.
 - Imagine dropping your energy and attention out of your head and into your body.
2. **Divert your focus:** Redirect and focus your full attention onto something that feels neutral or expansive. You could look up and notice the color of the sky even if it’s gray, give your cat a stroke, or read an uplifting quote, or move on to an activity that takes your full attention..

When you first start practicing stopping the thought, you’ll likely find that you need to repeat it several times in succession. If you’ve ever watched the comic character Superman put his hands out to stop a runaway train, you’ll recognize that the train doesn’t immediately come to a complete stop. It continues, but loses speed and momentum, and then it stops. It’s the same with overthinking. Telling your mind to stop just once and assuming the thoughts will instantly stop is like expecting the runaway train to stop on a dime. You’re retraining your mind, and it’ll take more than just one stop right at the start.

How did it feel to tell yourself to stop overthinking?

WORKSHEET 8: KEEP A WORRY JAR

Sometimes, just writing down your worry is enough to significantly reduce or stop overthinking. Seeing your worries on paper robs them of some of their potency.

Select a jar or container that will serve as your Worry Jar. This will be where you place your written worries. You can pre-cut pieces of paper and put them close to the jar for easy access. Each time you notice a worry, describe it and slip the paper into the jar. Or you can write them inside the jar below. Be as specific as possible to clearly identify the concern. Date each worry if you like. You can use some of your worries alongside the next exercise as a way to work through them.



How did it make you feel to write down your worry? Were you able to let it go?

WORKSHEET 9: GIVE YOUR WORRIES AIRTIME

This technique may seem deceptively simple, but it's immensely powerful. It helps to manage and limit overthinking by allocating a limited box of time to focus on worries—a Worry Time Box. Boxing your worry time in this way allows you to regain control and peace of mind.

Choose a specific time each day that's exclusively dedicated to addressing your worries. This should be a consistent time that works for you, like 8:00 p.m., and limit this time to no more than half an hour. Don't leave it vague. Set an alarm to keep you limited to the time box.

1. **Identify your worries.** Every time a concern comes up during the day, rather than dwelling on it, write it down and shelve it in your mind until the designated time. You may already have been capturing these in your worry jar.

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2. **Let go of the worry.** Go about your day until your Worry Time Box arrives. If you find yourself worrying about not worrying, assure yourself that it's okay because you'll be able to worry at the allocated time. It may sound strange, but it works.

3. **Worry Time Box time!**
 - Find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed. Look over your list—do they still distress you in the same way as when you initially noticed it? Rate each worry on a scale of 0-10, where 0 = “doesn't really worry me at all,” and 10 = “distresses me hugely.”
 - For any items that you scored 4 or less, cross them through. For the others, take one item at a time, and ask yourself the following questions:
 - Is this worry something I have control over? If no, acknowledge this, practice acceptance, and let it go.
 - What are the chances of this happening?
 - Is there hard evidence supporting this future concern? What is it?
 - What is the hard evidence against this worry?
 - What outcome is more realistically likely?
 - Do I really need to address this? If yes, what steps can I take to address it? If no, let it go.
 - When your Worry Time Box is up, stop—even if you haven't addressed everything. You can pick up on anything that's unresolved in tomorrow's Worry Time Box if you still want to.

4. **Stand up and physically shake it off.** Then do something enjoyable or relaxing to signal your mind that Worry Time Box is over.

Repeat this exercise every day. The more often you postpone your worries, the easier it will become to manage them outside of your Worry Time Box. Many people find that over time, they have fewer worries, or the intensity of their worries decreases. You'll then be able to reduce the size of your Worry Time Box as you become more comfortable with reduced overthinking and anxiety levels.

WORKSHEET 10: USE A WORRY TREE

The worry tree is a simple tool that can easily be used in real-time to get you out of your head. It works by helping you act on real worries and let go of hypothetical ones.

1. **Start the tree** by writing down your worry.
2. **Ask yourself** if you can do something about it. Be honest.
 - If yes, ask yourself what specific actions you can take to address it. Write them down and work out which items you can take action on and when. If you can take action about the worry now, do it. If later, schedule it. Appropriate action can include delegating the task to someone else. Then, let the worry go and focus your attention on something else.
 - If no, affirm that the worry is outside of your control and worrying about it won't change the outcome. Practice letting go, and perhaps you might find it useful to do this by writing it down and placing it in your Worry Jar.

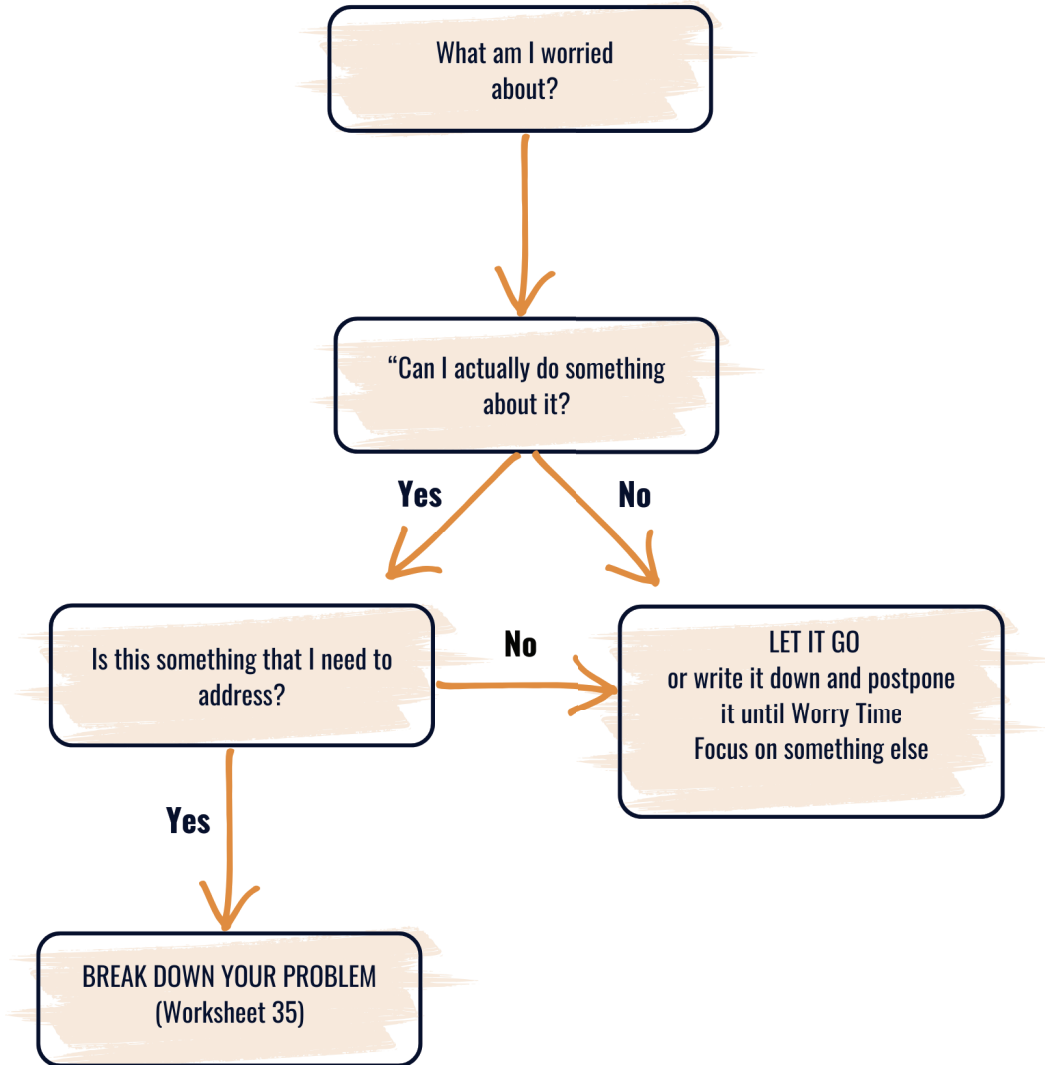
“

Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow.

- Swedish Proverb

”

A simple worry tree might look like this.



WORKSHEET 11: STOP THE TIME-TRAVEL

Have you ever considered that when you overthink, these thoughts are generally in relation to something in the past or the future, or in the present with a negative outlook?

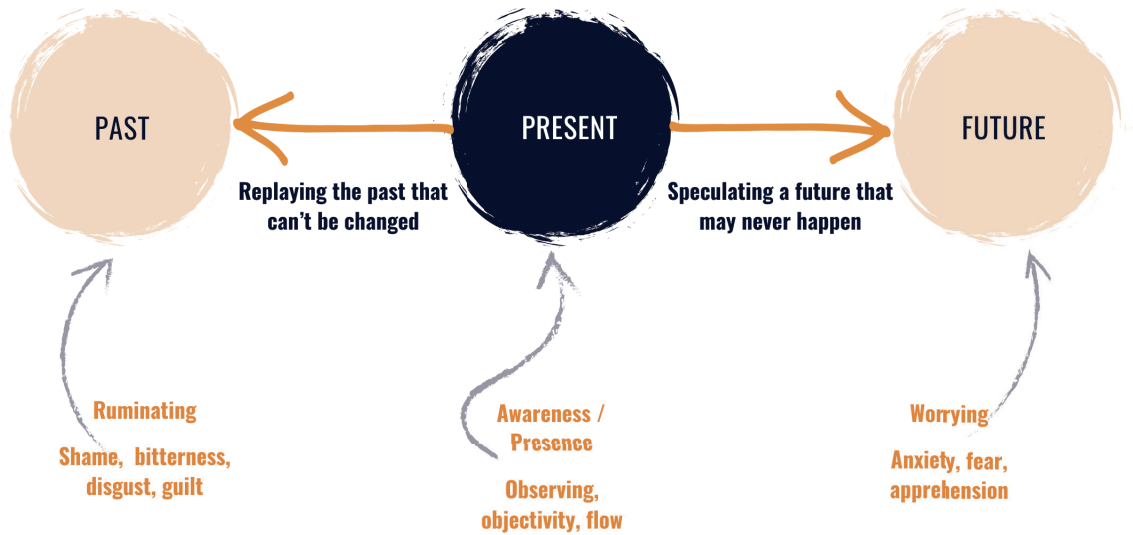
Overthinking typically involves ruminating and/or worrying about things like past mistakes, negative experiences, things you think you should or shouldn't have said or done or thinking negatively and imagining the worst-case scenarios.

Time-traveling in our thoughts often happens unconsciously. When we relive or replay negative events from the past, and/or speculate about what might go wrong in the future, our attention is taken away from the present. The goal is to bring the focus of your thoughts back to the present, without judgment.

This exercise is intended to help you see across time the kind of overthinking you are more prone to. This is an awareness exercise, so you can get some perspective on your patterns of thinking. Use this worksheet each time you catch yourself overthinking.

1. **Notice your thoughts and feelings**, and whether your thoughts are in the past, present, or future. As you observe the nature of your thoughts, notice the direction your thoughts and feelings are taking.
 - Are you ruminating over something that happened in the past? Are you reliving or replaying a past scenario? You may be feeling shame, bitterness, disgust, or guilt.
 - Do you feel as though your future is threatened in some way? Are you afraid something may happen? Are you scanning, calculating, or rehearsing a situation that may never happen? You likely feel anxious, fearful, or vulnerable.
 - If you are ruminating over something in relation to the present and with a negative outlook, you are likely projecting into the future or making a negative judgment about it.

2. **Use your finger** to track where your thoughts are on the timeline below. Feel the sensation of your finger on the paper as you slide it back and forth across the timeline. This helps you bring your awareness and thoughts to the present. Continue until your thoughts return to the present.



How did tracking your thoughts change your experience? What did you notice about your feelings? How can you practice returning to the present as you go about your days?

WORKSHEET 12: RECOGNIZE YOUR FEELINGS

There are times when we stay in negative thoughts because of what we are feeling. Identifying and reflecting on the emotions you experience throughout your day can help you gain clarity and context to how you're reacting to a situation, allowing you to manage your thoughts and actions, and thus change your responses to more supportive ones.

Imagine you've just received unexpected criticism from your manager. At first, you may feel an overwhelming urge to be defensive or feel discouraged and think about quitting. But instead of reacting impulsively, you pause to identify what you're truly feeling.

- Recognize the Emotion:** You take a moment and realize you're not just feeling anger but also hurt (from feeling unappreciated), fear (about your job security), and frustration (feeling misunderstood).

- Understand the Thoughts Behind the Emotions:** Recognizing these feelings allows you to separate them and notice the underlying thoughts. For example:
 - “My hard work isn’t valued,” might reflect hurt.
 - “If I can’t meet expectations, I might lose my job,” may cause a feeling of fear to arise.
 - “I feel misunderstood and want my perspective acknowledged,” may lead to feeling frustration.

- Manage and Reframe the Thoughts:** By identifying and validating these emotions, you can start to challenge the thoughts behind them:
 - “I’ve had positive feedback before, so this might be about something specific rather than my overall performance.”
 - “One criticism doesn’t mean my job is at risk.”
 - “I can ask for feedback and clarify how I can improve.”

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□ **Change Your Actions:** With more clarity, you now feel calmer and can take constructive actions rather than acting defensively.

- Schedule a meeting with your manager to discuss the feedback calmly.
- Approach it with curiosity, asking, “What specific improvements would you like to see?”
- Reflect on what’s within your control to improve without personalizing the criticism.

Taking time to recognize emotions as in this example, enables you to gain clarity, reframe your thoughts, and choose more helpful responses, which can help with handling challenging situations more effectively.

In this worksheet, you’ll focus on recognizing your emotions, and in the next chapter, you’ll discover how to balance and reframe thoughts to gain a new and more helpful perspective.

Remember, emotions and feelings are not “good” or “bad”, although the terms “positive” or “negative” are often used to differentiate them in relation to how we feel. Research has found that increasing positive emotions can be more helpful in influencing how we process information. So, it can be useful to think of our feelings as data or feedback that tell us whether we are processing information in a helpful or an unhelpful way.

1. **Review the Feelings Grid.** Use the grid to identify the feelings you experience each day for seven days—go with the words that resonate most with you. Sometimes, we may feel more than one emotion. It’s natural to have mixed feelings at times. If so, pick 2-3 words that feel like the best fit. There are no right or wrong answers. At the beginning, you may find it challenging to do this, but as you become more aware, the process becomes easier.

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ANGRY / MAD

hurt	betrayed	edgy
distant	disrespected	furious
irritated	ignored	humiliated
sarcastic	exasperated	annoyed
bitter	cross	resentful
selfish	stressed	critical
envious	provoked	on edge
jealous	let down	powerless
hostile	skeptical	offended
hateful	ridiculed	vulnerable
	frustrated	

SAD

tired	wronged	guilty
despondent	isolated	remorseful
stupid	discouraged	abandoned
bored	embarrassed	deflated
sleepy	grief	disappointed
apathetic	hopeless	regret
lonely	excluded	sorry
inferior	sorrowful	depressed
depressed	trapped	ashamed

HAPPY / JOYFUL

excited	thrilled	free
cheerful	curious	grateful
enthusiastic	delighted	encouraged
creative	eager	inspired
playful	accepted	loved
hopeful	energetic	passionate
optimistic	valued	radiant
respected	inquisitive	refreshed
expectant	rejuvenated	energized
satisfied	engaged	amused
	interested	

STRONG / POWERFUL

faithful	courageous	successful
confident	dynamic	aware
important	forceful	surprised
discerning	controlling	capable
appreciated	able	effective
valuable	focused	solid
respected	influential	proud
worthwhile	brave	

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SCARED

confused	apprehensive	paralyzed
bewildered	exposed	unsafe
rejected	inferior	threatened
discouraged	panicked	weak
helpless	shaken	embarrassed
insignificant	worried	anxious
submissive	worthless	overwhelmed
inadequate	nervous	excluded
insecure	jittery	vulnerable

CALM /PEACEFUL

nurturing	composed	thoughtful
thankful	quiet	pensive
trusting	restful	content
secure	safe	relaxed
loving	connected	responsive
serene		steady
intimate		

2. **For each feeling you identified**, indicate how frequently you experience it and its intensity.

Feelings	Frequency	Intensity (low, medium, high)

What do you notice about your pattern and frequency of the different feelings?

WORKSHEET 13: IDENTIFY YOUR AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THINKING PATTERNS

We may not always be aware of our thoughts, but we are usually aware of how we're feeling. Sometimes, thoughts can seem to spontaneously pop up on their own in response to various situations. In CBT, when these spontaneous thoughts reflect a pessimistic or negative perspective, they are called Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs), which are often associated with negative emotions. These thoughts can affect various aspects of our lives, including work, relationships, and self-esteem.

Below is a list of common ANTs categorized by different areas of life. Identify those that resonate with you and feel free to add any additional ANTs you experience.

1. Work-related negative thoughts

- "I'm not good enough at my job."
- "I always make mistakes and can't do anything right."
- "My colleagues are better than me."
- "I'll never get a promotion."
- "My work is never appreciated."
- "I'm going to get fired."
- "I can't handle the workload."

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Relationship-related negative thoughts

- “My partner doesn’t really care about me.”
- “I’m always the one putting in effort.”
- “I’m not worthy of a healthy relationship.”
- “My friends don’t value our friendship.”

- “I’m going to end up alone.”
- “People always let me down.”
- “I’m not interesting or fun to be around.”
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Self-esteem-related negative thoughts

- “I’m not attractive or desirable.”
- “I’m a failure.”
- “I can’t do anything right.”
- “I’m not smart enough.”
- “I’m not capable of achieving my goals.”
- “I’m always falling short of expectations.”
- “No one likes me.”
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

4. Other negative thoughts

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

For each ANT you've identified, or added, reflect on how it makes you feel. Can you see any relationship between your ANTs and the feelings you noticed from the earlier Recognize Your Feelings exercise?

WORKSHEET 14: UNCOVER YOUR BELIEFS

In the last worksheet you identified some of your automatic negative thinking patterns around work, relationships, and self-esteem. In this worksheet, you'll identify your beliefs of a more general nature. Beliefs are habitual thoughts that you've internalized and are often no longer conscious of. Some of these beliefs may be helpful, while some are not.

1. Thoughts about myself

Reflect on the thoughts you have about yourself. These can include beliefs about your abilities, self-worth, and personal qualities.

“I am...”

2. Thoughts about others

Consider the thoughts you have about other people. This can include beliefs about their intentions, behaviors, and how they view you.

“Other people are...”

3. Thoughts about the world

Think about your perceptions of the world around you. This includes your beliefs about society, events, and your general outlook on life.

“The world is...”

4. Thoughts about the future

Examine your thoughts about the future, including your expectations, fears, and hopes.

“The future is...”

Look over what you’ve written and using a different color highlighter for each, identify which are positive or negative.

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Is there a skew toward one or the other?

- How do your thoughts about yourself impact your self-esteem and mood?
- How do your thoughts about others affect your relationships and interactions?
- How do your thoughts about the world influence your overall perspective and behavior?

WORKSHEET 15: FREE YOUR THINKING TRAPS

From the previous two exercises, which thoughts seem to occur more often? List them.

Can you see a pattern in your thinking? Is there a balance between positive and negative thoughts? Are there areas of your life you tend to be more negative about than others? Which thoughts would you like to keep? Which would you like to change? Which would you like to let go of?

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Think about one practical step you can take to try and break the cycle of negative thoughts where it comes up for you.

The Power of Language

When we talk about our experiences or describe our feelings, the specific words we choose can make a big difference in how we feel and experience our world. Language is the externalization of our thoughts and a reflection of our inner world. You read earlier about how James loved skiing and how his heart would race at the top of a couloir. He interpreted this as excitement but if those body sensations meant fear to him instead, his experience would have been totally different. When James understood the power of language, he recognized that he could change his internal language that he used with himself to help him instantly feel better. You can do the same. By adjusting the words you use to talk about yourself and your situation, you can create a more supportive outlook.

WORKSHEET 16: HARNESS THE POWER OF “AND”

Imagine you’re talking about a situation. If you say, “I’m excited about the project, but I’m stressed,” the word “but” suggests that the stress is in contrast to the excitement, almost like they’re separate and competing emotions. It has the effect of cancelling or reducing the impact of what came before. More focus is placed on being stressed; it’s how our mind works. Or if you say, “My manager said I did a great presentation, but it was only a short presentation,” the “but” diminishes the compliment by the manager. However, if you say, “My manager said I did a great presentation, and it was only a short presentation,” it can significantly change how you feel. This small change of using “and” instead of “but” shows that these feelings can coexist. It makes it easier to accept both statements as part of your experience, rather than seeing them as conflicting and negating one or the other.

Another common example is, “Yes, but...”—not that the word “but” needs to be forever banned from your vocabulary. Rather, it’s about being more conscious about how you use it. Ultimately, in everything we do in CBT, it’s not about rejecting something like the “but” or a negative thought; it’s about making a conscious choice in relation to what serves you better.

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Think about some of the things you say, when you habitually use the word, “but”, and change this to “and.”

It was a good day but it was stressful	→	It was a good day and it was stressful
_____ but _____	→	_____ and _____
_____ but _____	→	_____ and _____
_____ but _____	→	_____ and _____
Yes, but _____	→	Yes, but _____
Yes, but _____	→	Yes, but _____

“

A language is the place from where we see the world and where we draw the limits of our thinking and feeling.

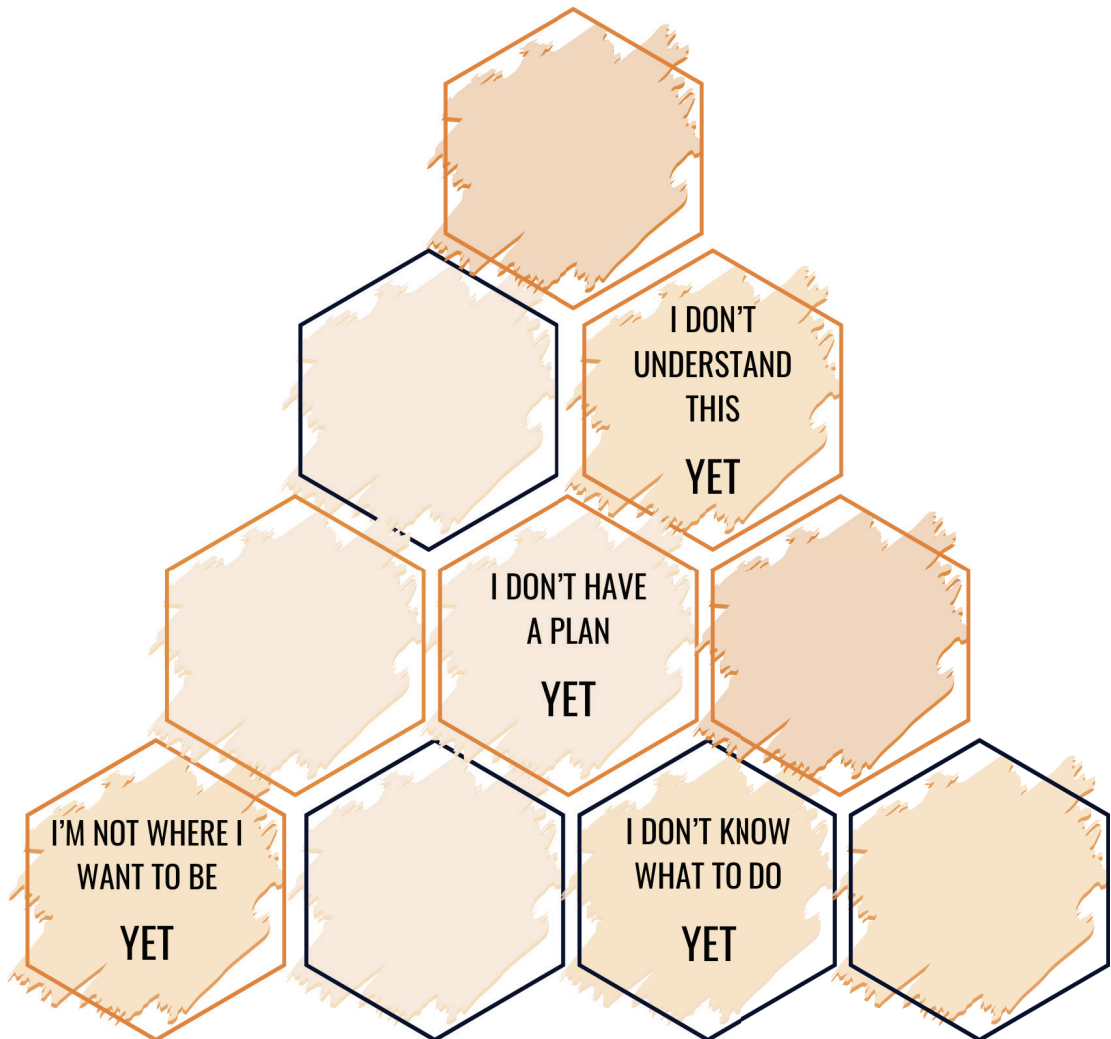
- Vergílio Ferreira

”

WORKSHEET 17: USE THE POWER OF “YET”

Adding “yet” to your language can also shift your perspective. For example, instead of saying, “I’m not good at this,” you might say, “I’m not good at this yet.” The word “yet” introduces a sense of potential and future possibility. It tells you that your current struggle doesn’t define your future outcome; there’s still room for growth and improvement.

Complete the grid with some examples where you can use the power of “yet.”



WORKSHEET 18: THE POWER OF “-ER”

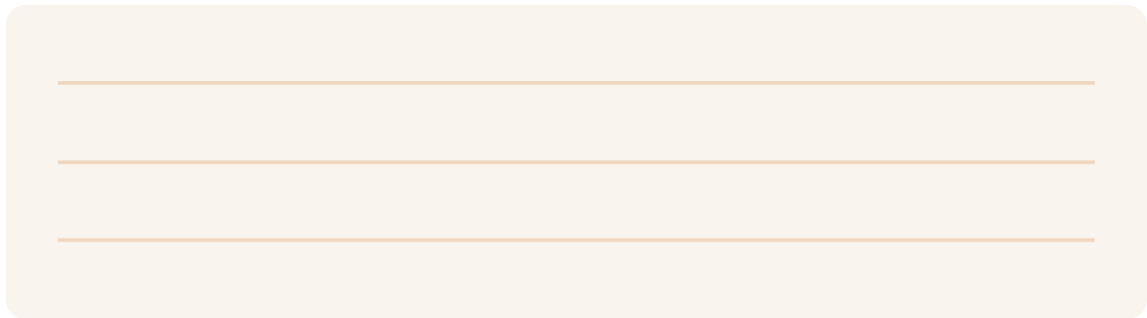
A final example of how language matters is the use of what’s called a “superlative,” like happy vs. happier. Saying, “I want to be happier,” is different from saying, “I want to be happy.” “Happier” implies that you’re currently in a state of some happiness but there’s scope to improve. It acknowledges that you’re on a journey and allows for incremental progress. “Happy,” on the other hand, comes from a place of implying and subliminally telling yourself that you are not happy right now. Can you see the difference?

Reflect on the times when you say things like, “I will be happy when...” Change it to “I will be happier when...” and notice what difference this makes to the way you feel.

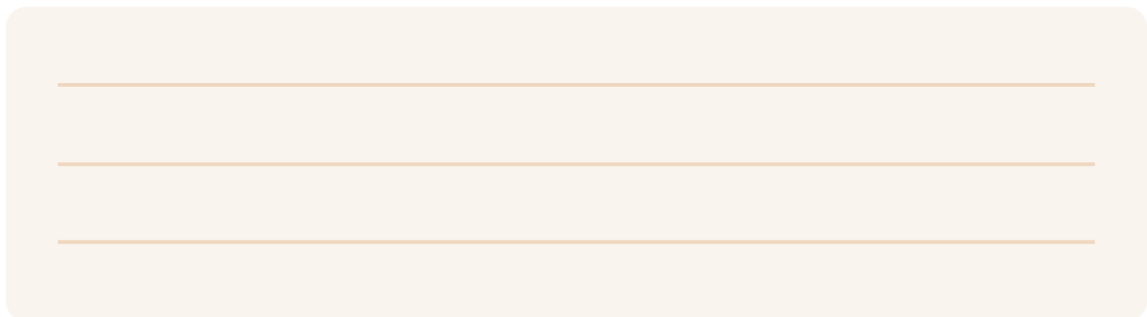
Chapter Reflections

By now, you know the ways in which your thoughts have been running you on autopilot, rather than you being the pilot and running your thoughts. And now, you have tools to take back control—whether it’s changing your language, scheduling your worry, or stopping negative thoughts on their tracks. The next chapter will be much more proactive. You will find tools to make your thinking more balanced through reframing and restructuring your thoughts. Now go back over this chapter and review what you’ve done. Think about your experiences and reflect on the following questions to integrate your learnings and insights.

What was the most valuable insight you gained from this chapter and why?



How did your thoughts or emotions change as you worked through this chapter?



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What challenges did you face while working on the exercises, and how did you overcome them?

How can you apply what you've learned in this chapter to your everyday life?

What small steps will you take next to continue improving your thinking and emotional well-being?



”

“We can’t solve our
problems with the same level
of thinking that created
them.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN



Chapter 3: Mastering More Balanced Thinking

SO FAR, WE’VE SEEN how overthinking, stress, and anxiety are related to patterns of thinking which tend to be more heavily skewed towards the negative—worry and rumination, the past or the future. This balance towards the negative may keep you in a state of emotional distress.

However, it is not about “positive thinking”—simply replacing negative thoughts with positive ones—which doesn’t work. The key is balancing your thinking. Balanced thinking is about changing your habitual or automatic patterns of thought so that instead of automatically following a negative spiral, you reshape thought patterns to create more balanced, realistic and accurate ways of thinking—which reduces stress and anxiety. In time, this then becomes your more habitual way of thinking.

This chapter will provide different techniques to help you balance your thoughts in a way that feels authentic—for you. The techniques will help to change your perspective so that you can find solutions to whatever is causing you anxiety and stress. Like Albert Einstein said, you can’t solve your problems with the same level of thinking that created them.

Cognitive Distortions

If our thoughts, feelings and actions are connected, then a “fault” in our thinking can lead us to feel and act in ways that do not serve us. Psychologists have coined a term called “cognitive distortions” to describe patterns of thinking that can negatively impact how we perceive and react to situations.

On the next page is a simple flow showing how cognitive distortions can perpetuate negative emotions.

The tools you will learn here interrupt this cycle so that instead of going around and around in a cycle on the same level, you move to a different level of thinking. This is done through a process called reframing. Imagine looking through a camera lens. You can change the picture you see by zooming in or zooming out. By slightly changing what you see through the lens, the picture is viewed and experienced differently. That is what reframing does with these cognitive distortions. Reframing techniques help you to change one aspect of the picture so that you can see a situation and experience it differently.

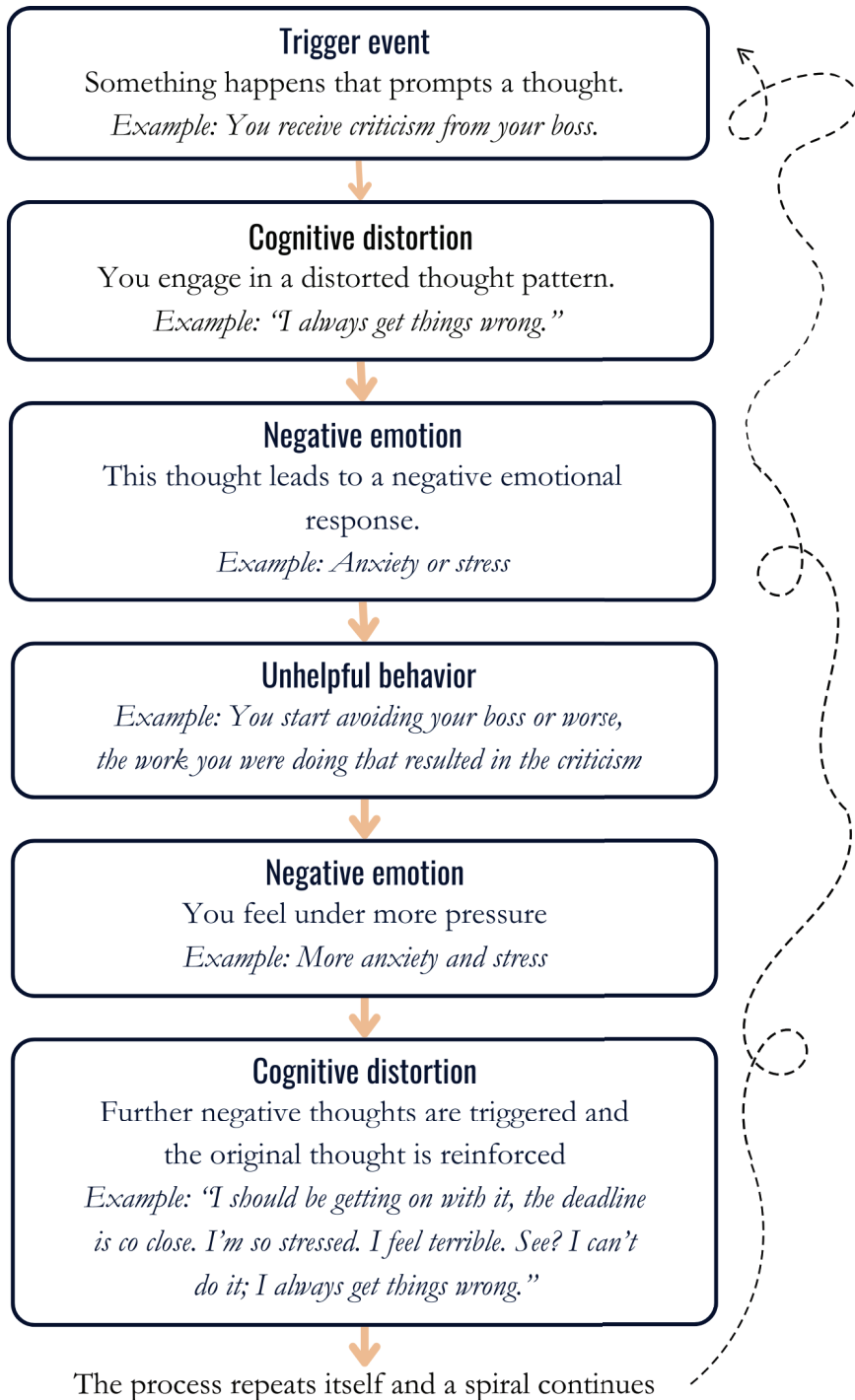
“

The real voyage of discovery consists
not in seeking new landscapes, but in
having new eyes.

- Marcel Proust

”

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Here is a list of the most common cognitive distortions. As you read through this list, check off any of them that are familiar to you in terms of how you think.

All-or-nothing thinking—Seeing things in black and white, without any middle ground. *Example: “I didn’t go to the gym this morning; I’ve totally blown my fitness plan now.”*

Overgeneralization—Making broad, sweeping conclusions based on a single event. You may be overgeneralizing if you often use words like always, never, nothing, all, everyone, or everything in your thought vocabulary. *Example: “My partner never takes the trash out. All live-in partners are like that.”*

Mental filtering—Focusing solely on the negative aspects of a situation and ignoring the positives. *Example: In your performance review, your manager compliments your work a number of times and makes one suggestion for improvement. You leave the meeting miserable and think about that one suggestion all day long.*

Discounting the positive—Dismissing positive experiences or achievements as unimportant. *Example: “The client said they liked the project, but they were just being polite.”*

Jumping to conclusions—Involves making negative interpretations without sufficient evidence. There are two kinds of jumping to conclusions:

Fortune telling—Expecting or predicting that a situation will turn out badly without any sound evidence. *Example: “I just know I’ll mess this interview up and they won’t hire me.”*

Mind reading—You assume you know what other think or believe, often assuming it’s something negative and without enough evidence. *Example: “My*

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partner raced out the door this morning without saying a proper good-bye. They must be mad at me.”

Magnification—Exaggerating the importance of negative events. *Example: You think that if you make a mistake in an important meeting, it will ruin your career.*

Minimization—Playing down the importance of positive events; the other side of magnification. *Example: You complete a project successfully and receive praise from your team. Then you respond, “It wasn’t that big of a deal; anyone could have done it.”*

Emotional reasoning—Believing that what you feel is a reflection of reality. *Example: “I feel anxious about this presentation, so it must be a disaster.”*

Should statements—Standards, demands, or expectations you set for yourself or others without room for exceptions or flexibility. Other words also commonly used include, “should,” “must,” “have to.” *Example: “I must do everything myself and not ask for help.” “She should understand how I feel.”*

Catastrophizing—Seeing only the worst possible outcomes of a situation. Catastrophizing often comes with “what if” questions. *Example: “What if my alarm doesn’t go off?” and before you know it, you are worrying, “What if I get late for the meeting? What if I get fired?”*

Personalization—Believing that you are responsible for events that are likely out of your control or not related to you. *Example: You’re at a friend’s place, your partner isn’t enjoying themselves and you think it’s your fault.*

Labeling—Taking one attribute and turning it into an absolute. *Example: You saw a colleague touching up their makeup just before a meeting and you label them as “shallow.” Or you make a mistake and then label yourself as “useless.”*

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Each of these cognitive distortions are not necessarily stand-alone. You may notice that several can show up at any one time, some of them more consistently than others. Here's an example, "My partner never helps me around the house. They always say they're tired when they come home from work. They should know that I need a massage, because I've been working all day too, and then cooked the evening meal, so it's only fair. All live-in partners are like that, and they never take the trash out either, oh and at the weekends, they want to go out with their friends when I just want to stay in and relax. I know they're always very sociable, but if they truly loved me, they'd stay in with me." Can you spot the cognitive distortions?

WORKSHEET 19: PLAY COGNITIVE DISTORTION BINGO

Use the blank Bingo card below to help you bring your awareness to where you may be engaging in faulty thinking in your everyday.

Throughout the week, pay attention to your thoughts and see if you can spot any of the cognitive distortions listed.

To win Bingo, you need to mark off four items in a row (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally). For an extra challenge, try to mark off all the items on your card. The blank spots are "bonus" scores for when you happen to catch one of the distortions more than once—write it in that spot yourself. Have fun with this exercise and see how many times you can win. Later, you'll learn how to reframe your cognitive distortions.

COGNITIVE DISTORTION BINGO CARD

Catastrophizing			Mind Reading	Over-generalizing
	Personalization	All-or-Nothing Thinking		Magnification
Fortune Telling		Emotional Reasoning	Labeling	
Minimization		Jumping to Conclusions		
	Mental Filtering	Should Statements		Discounting the Positive

Take some time to reflect on the distortions you identified. How did recognizing these distortions affect your thoughts and feelings?



FREE BONUS GIFT #2: COGNITIVE DISTORTION FLASHCARDS

Carry these flashcards with for a handy reference whenever you catch yourself thinking or saying something that may be a cognitive distortion that you want to change. Go to: bonuses.serenachoo.com/ecbt-unlock-your-bonuses where you'll get access to download the flashcards. You can also scan the QR code if you don't like typing. It's completely free.

Debating and Reframing Thought Patterns: Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring in CBT involves identifying and challenging negative thought patterns. The goal is to replace distorted or unhelpful thoughts with more balanced, realistic ones. It begins with recognizing automatic thoughts (some of which you have already done in the previous section) that contribute to feelings of anxiety or stress. Once these thoughts are identified, you can evaluate their validity and explore alternative perspectives. Cognitive restructuring helps you consciously shift your thinking so that you reshape your emotional responses and behaviors and improve well-being.

WORKSHEET 20: SEPARATE FACT FROM OPINION

Our thoughts are like a constant mental story that flows through our minds. Because they are fleeting and continuous, we often aren't conscious of them and don't critically analyze them to our benefit. Whether it's something someone said or something you said, cognitive distortions can make it difficult to discern what is fact and what is just opinion. Opinions reflect a perspective or a preference and are subjective, while facts can be proven or disproven.

See how well you are able to discern and separate fact from opinion. Mark each statement. Give yourself bonus points if you can also identify any cognitive distortions present.

	Statement	Fact	Opinion
1.	I failed the test; I'm never going to be good at this subject.		
2.	My colleague didn't say hi today; they must be upset with me.		
3.	The project was submitted late.		
4.	I didn't get invited to the party; they don't like me.		
5.	The weather forecast says it's going to rain tomorrow.		
6.	If I don't ace this presentation, everyone will think I'm incompetent.		
7.	I tripped while walking up the stairs.		
8.	Nobody listens to me.		
9.	I tried exercising for a week and I didn't lose any weight; I'm never going to reach my goal.		
10.	There were five errors in the report.		

Answers:

1. Opinion (Overgeneralization) 2. Opinion (Mind-reading) 3. Fact 4. Opinion (Mind-reading) 5. Fact 6. Opinion (Catastrophizing) 7. Fact 8. Opinion (Overgeneralization) 9. Opinion (All-or-Nothing Thinking) 10. Fact

WORKSHEET 21: CHALLENGE YOUR THOUGHTS

This worksheet is designed to help you capture and examine specific thoughts—particularly those you suspect may be irrational or unhelpful. If you are having difficulty identifying unhelpful thoughts, how you are feeling is always a clue because thoughts that trigger negative emotions are usually the ones that are useful to examine.

Use this whenever you encounter a troubling thought. The more regularly you practice challenging your thoughts, the easier it becomes to take a more balanced perspective.

1. **Identify the thought** that's irrational or unhelpful and write down supporting proof for and against this thought.

My Thought	
Supporting proof for this thought	Supporting proof against this thought

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2. **Review the proof.** Look over each piece of supporting proof you provided, for and against. Identify whether it is based on fact or opinion. Now consider: is your thought grounded in objective facts or is it more of a personal belief or opinion?

3. **Examine the thought.**

- Is this thought an either/or situation, or is there a range of possibilities? Are you using all-or-nothing thinking or one of the other cognitive distortions?
- Are you possibly misinterpreting the evidence or making unverified assumptions?
- Could other people have different perspectives on the same situation? What might those perspectives be?
- Are you considering all relevant facts, or just those that support your existing belief?
- Is the thought overinflating the reality? Are you extending a negative thought beyond its logical boundaries?
- Are you entertaining this negative thought out of habit, or do the facts truly support it?
- How did this thought come to you? Was it influenced by someone else? If so, are they a reliable source for truth?
- How likely is the scenario that this thought presents? Is it the worst-case scenario?

4. **Reflection.** Summarize your findings from this questioning process. How has this analysis affected your perception of the original thought?

WORKSHEET 22: REFRAME YOUR UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

In the previous exercise, you looked at how to challenge your thoughts. In this exercise, often called the ABCDE model in CBT, you will extend this further to reframe them and thus improve your emotional responses and behaviors. Think back on something that upset you recently and reframe it.

(A) Activating Event or Situation: What was the situation or event that triggered your negative thinking?

(B) Beliefs or Automatic Thoughts: What were your immediate automatic thoughts about the activating event?

(C) Consequences: What were the emotional and behavioral consequences of your beliefs? How did you feel as a result of those thoughts? What were your actions and behaviors in response to how you felt?

(D) Dispute and Reframe Your Thoughts: Why was your pattern of thinking not helpful to your situation? How do you wish you had felt in this situation instead? What alternative thoughts would have supported this? Look for cognitive distortions and evidence that contradict your

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beliefs. Think of the most optimistic and resilient person you know. What would they think in this situation?

(E) Effect: The effects on your thoughts and feelings from disputing and adopting a new belief. How do you feel as a result of these alternative thoughts? In what ways are these thoughts more helpful in this situation? What alternative actions and behaviors can you now take in response?

Activating Event or Situation	<i>I showed up to meet my friend, Sara, for lunch, and she was 30 minutes late.</i>
Beliefs or Automatic Thoughts	<i>Sara doesn't respect my time. She's always inconsiderate. She could at least have phoned or texted me to let me know.</i>
Consequences (Emotional and Behavioral)	<i>I felt angry and annoyed. I sent her a rude text asking where she was.</i>
Dispute and Reframe	<i>Maybe she got stuck in bad traffic and I don't know why she didn't phone or text. I jumped to a conclusion about her motivations.</i>
Effect (Emotional and Behavioral)	<i>I feel calmer and will wait to understand why she was late and didn't phone or text me before jumping to conclusions. I can apologize for the rude text. I can also change my behavior for next time, so I don't jump to conclusions and react without thinking.</i>

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Activating Event or Situation	
Beliefs or Automatic Thoughts	
Consequences (Emotional and Behavioral)	
Dispute and Reframe	
Effect (Emotional and Behavioral)	

Review your answers to see how your perspective has shifted through the ABCDE Model process. What new insights or changes in behavior have you identified? How can you apply this approach to other situations in your life?

WORKSHEET 23: BE A COGNITIVE DISTORTION DETECTIVE

This exercise is similar to the ABCDE model above, but here, instead of Disputing the Thought, you will identify Distortions and then Determine a more Balanced Thought. You'll take on the role of a detective, investigating your own thoughts or scenarios specifically for cognitive distortions. In Cognitive Distortion Bingo, you raised your awareness around cognitive distortions in your thinking patterns. Now, use the cognitive restructuring strategies you've learned in the previous exercises to reframe them into more balanced thoughts.

Activating Event or Situation	<i>I was late for a client meeting</i>
Beliefs or Automatic Thoughts	<i>Everyone in the meeting was judging me. They think I'm unprofessional and unreliable. I won't get the contract.</i>
Consequences (Emotional and Behavioral)	<i>Embarrassed, anxious, stressed. Procrastinated on briefing my manager.</i>
Distortions identified	<i>Overgeneralization, Mind-reading, All-or-Nothing thinking.</i>
Determine a more Balanced Thought	<i>I've been to meetings with them before and I've been on time or early. This was a one-off. I'm sure they'll have understood. It's likely they've been late for meetings on occasion too.</i>
Effect (Emotional and Behavioral)	<i>Calmer, less anxious. Sent a thank you email to the client and asked if they had any follow-up questions. Apologized again for having been late. Set up a debriefing meeting with my manager.</i>

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Activating Event or Situation	
Beliefs or Automatic Thoughts	
Consequences (Emotional and Behavioral)	
Distortions identified	
Determine a more Balanced Thought	
Effect (Emotional and Behavioral)	

WORKSHEET 24: DE-CATASTROPHIZE YOUR THINKING

When you're feeling overwhelmed by "What If...?" scenarios, it's easy to imagine the worst possible outcome. This worksheet is designed to help you challenge and reframe these runaway thoughts by examining the reality of the situation.

What is it that is bothering you that feels like a catastrophe? (Describe exactly what you are worried about.)

How distressing is this hypothetical scenario on a scale from 0 to 10? (0 means "not so bad," and 10 means "absolutely terrible").



How likely is this catastrophe to actually happen? (Consider whether this scenario has happened before and how often it occurs in real life.)

Not likely

Absolute certainty



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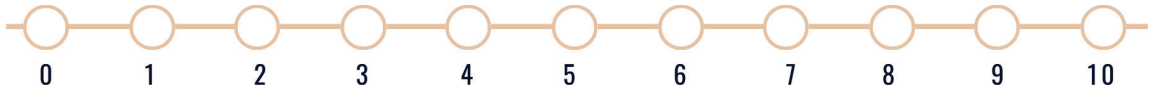
Imagine the catastrophe has occurred. How bad would it really be? What is the most positive outcome that could result? What is the most negative outcome that could result?

What would you do if the catastrophe actually happened? What have you done in similar situations before? Who can you rely on for help? What strategies have worked for you in the past?

Write a brief narrative about the catastrophe using all the information you've considered. What would make you feel better? What would reassure you? What would you want to hear?

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Reassess how distressing this catastrophe seems now with your new perspective. Give it a new distress level on a scale from 0 to 10.



Review this exercise and reflect on your insights.

WORKSHEET 25: FLEX YOUR UNHELPFUL RULES

We all have rules that guide our behavior on a daily basis. These are values, ideals, beliefs, and standards that we hold about how we and everyone else should act. We might not be able to clearly articulate all of them, but they are stored in our subconscious, nudging us towards behavior that is consistent with them. And they can often become rigid expectations or demands we place on ourselves and others. However, other people often have different rules, so they won't always behave in a way that you might expect they should.

Some rules may be helpful, and others not. Imagine you have a rule that says, "I must always be perfect." You might not consciously think about this rule every day, but it influences how you react to challenges. For example, if you make a small mistake at work, this unconscious rule might make you feel like a total failure, even if the mistake was minor. Or, if you have a rigid rule that text messages must be responded to the moment they're read, then a delay in

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receiving a reply to a message you sent could lead to unhealthy anger or frustration, even anxiety.

Because these rules are unconscious, we might not notice them until they cause problems. They can affect how we view ourselves, how we interact with others, and how we handle stressful situations. They often come with high expectations or standards that can make us feel anxious or inadequate. Use this worksheet to help you identify any rigid patterns of thinking you have and challenge it.

Part 1: Identify the Rules

Identify some rules you may hold. These are typically thoughts or beliefs which contain terms like “must,” “should,” or “have to.”

Rules I have for myself:

Rules I have for others:

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Rules I have for everyone:

Part 2: Evaluate the Rules

Pick one rule that currently causes you a problem and ask yourself the following questions.

How does this rule benefit you or support your behavior? What positive outcomes does this rule create?

How does this rule negatively affect you or hold you back? What are the downsides or challenges of following this rule?

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Is it realistic that this rule must always be followed?

Is it possible and can I accept that other people may have their own version of this rule which is different to mine?

How can I flex my thinking so I keep my own rules and have them be preferences instead of rigid rules that can never be flexed?

Part 3: Choose an Option

- Keep it—Is there a reason to keep this rule as is?
- Trash it—Is this rule outdated? Would it be more helpful to let it go?
- Modify it—Can this rule be adjusted to make it more helpful?

If you choose to modify it, what is a more balanced and supportive version of this rule? How can you reframe or alter the rule to better support your well-being?

WORKSHEET 26: RESTRUCTURE A THOUGHT A DAY

For a week (or more), identify and reframe one negative thought a day.

DAY 1

Negative Thought: _____

Reframed Thought: _____

Reflection: _____

DAY 2

Negative Thought: _____

Reframed Thought: _____

Reflection: _____

DAY 3

Negative Thought: _____

Reframed Thought: _____

Reflection: _____

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DAY 4

Negative Thought: _____

Reframed Thought: _____

Reflection: _____

DAY 5

Negative Thought: _____

Reframed Thought: _____

Reflection: _____

DAY 6

Negative Thought: _____

Reframed Thought: _____

Reflection: _____

DAY 7

Negative Thought: _____

Reframed Thought: _____

Reflection: _____

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Reflect on your experience over the past week. What patterns did you notice in your negative thoughts? How did reframing these thoughts affect your overall mood and behavior?



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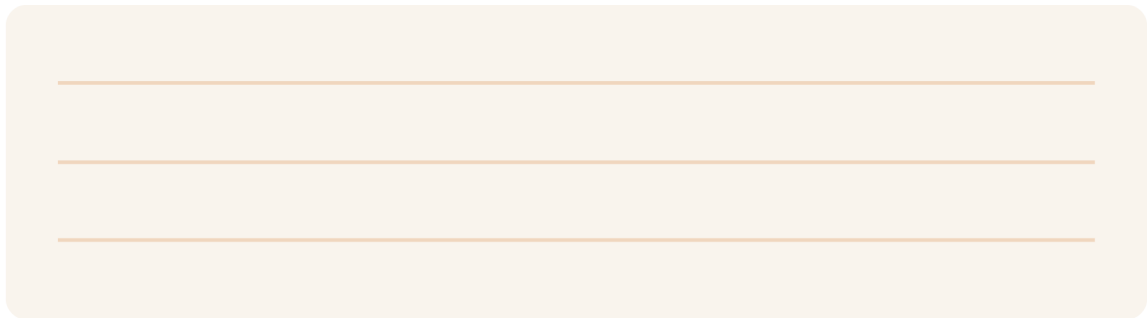
Carry this flashcard with you to make it easier to remember the process for identifying, disputing and reframing thoughts. Go to:

bonuses.serenachoo.com/ecbt-unlock-your-bonuses where you'll get access to downloadable flashcards you can print and refer to whenever you need them. You can also scan the QR code if you don't like typing. It's completely free.

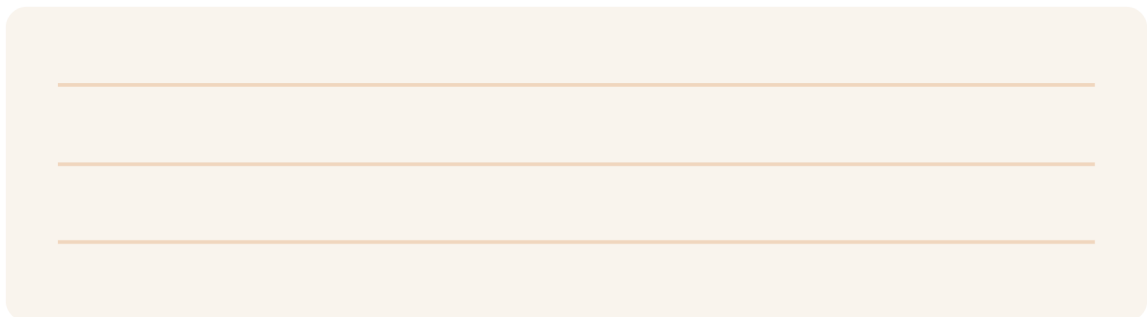
Chapter Reflections

Thanks to the tools in this chapter, you have now started to change some of your common but unhelpful and habitual patterns of thinking, many of which were unconscious. You are now hopefully feeling some of the benefits of these changes and are feeling lighter, with more “space” in your mind. Keep practicing. In the next chapter, we’ll dive into some strategies to help reduce stress and anxiety in the heat of the moment when you most need it. Now go back over this chapter and review what you’ve done. Think about your experiences and reflect on the following questions to integrate your learnings and insights.

What was the most valuable insight you gained from this chapter and why?



How did your thoughts or emotions change as you worked through this chapter?



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What challenges did you face while working on the exercises, and how did you overcome them?

How can you apply what you've learned in this chapter to your everyday life?

What small steps will you take next to continue improving your thinking and emotional well-being?



”

“The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.”

WILLIAM JAMES



Chapter 4: Strategies for Instant Stress and Anxiety Relief

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU will learn techniques you can use to deal with anxiety and stress in the heat of the moment, which is when most people often most need it. You will be able to understand yourself and the cause of your stress and anxiety better so that you come to a different, more supportive relationship with yourself. You will also be able to use other skills like setting boundaries and managing your time better to manage stress and anxiety before they escalate into something more severe.

In this sense, CBT is a preventive tool that increases your emotional strength and resilience.

Stress vs. Anxiety

When you encounter a situation your mind perceives as a threat, your brain sends signals to your body to prepare for either fighting the threat or fleeing from it. This response is natural and automatic and involves the release of stress hormones like epinephrine (also known as adrenaline) and cortisol. These increase your heart rate, sharpen your senses, and activate your nervous system—which we feel as body sensations and often refer to as stress or nervousness.

Stress is how we react when we feel under pressure or threatened. It usually kicks in when we're faced with situations that feel beyond our control, like a looming deadline at work or a

heated argument with a friend, and typically fades once the situation is resolved. The stress response is crucial for dealing with immediate dangers—you need all your senses about you and the jolt of energy to jump out of the way of something coming at you, for example. And in moderate doses, stress is beneficial and known as “eustress.” It gives you the “get up and go” to complete tasks and keeps you alert. But when you experience too much stress that it becomes “distress” or is prolonged and becomes chronic, it can start to affect your physical, emotional, and mental health.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is the anticipation of a perceived danger or threat, often without a clear or immediate trigger. This leads to worry, which is the thought component of anxiety. A little anxiety may be helpful as it keeps us alert and focused on the problem at hand, but when it is too severe, too frequent, or prolonged, it creates a constant background hum of unease that can be debilitating.

For example, an upcoming event might initially cause stress which can be helpful in motivating you to get things done. But if you start to worry excessively about the event, this worry can turn into anxiety which can become a persistent fear of similar situations, of potential failure or of being judged. The anxiety can lead to overthinking and spirals of negative thinking. You might start to doubt your abilities or fear future events even when there’s no immediate threat. Over time, it can become a self-feeding cycle where you feel anxious but no longer know why you’re feeling anxious or what you’re anxious about.

We all experience stress and anxiety differently. Whatever the situation, common symptoms of both stress and anxiety can include physical symptoms like fatigue, digestive issues, headaches, muscle tension, and disrupted sleeping patterns, in addition to feeling overwhelmed, irritable, helpless, or having difficulty concentrating.

We also cope with stress and anxiety differently. To cope, we adapt our behavior in an effort to gain relief. But some people adapt in a way that provides temporary relief but ultimately worsens their situation. James, for example, numbed his feelings and emotionally disengaged from his family in his effort to “escape,” but he felt guilty about it, which led to bottling up even more feelings and more overthinking. Other people might resort to people-pleasing, saying “yes” even when it causes them to feel more stressed. Many people may try to avoid a similar situation altogether, and use procrastination to cope, as an example. As these behaviors

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may provide initial and short-term relief from the anxiety, the brain learns that they cause the symptoms to go away which then results in an automatic pattern of thinking and behaving that deepens over time.

Examples of unhealthy coping behaviors	Examples of healthy coping behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination<input type="checkbox"/> Overeating<input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping too much or too little<input type="checkbox"/> Aggression<input type="checkbox"/> Drug or alcohol use<input type="checkbox"/> Social withdrawal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Exercise<input type="checkbox"/> Relaxation strategies (e.g. deep breathing)<input type="checkbox"/> Healthy eating<input type="checkbox"/> Talking about your challenges<input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving techniques<input type="checkbox"/> Seeking professional help

WORKSHEET 27: TRACK YOUR STRESS AND ANXIETY TRIGGERS

In this exercise, you'll increase your awareness around what triggers you to overthink, feel stressed or anxious and identify alternative actions and proactive steps you can take to address them before they become a problem or lead to bigger issues. For example, if you know that tight deadlines are a trigger for you, you might plan your tasks better, break your tasks down, or build in breaks to reduce stress. Equally, you might catch your pattern of thinking and choose alternative and more helpful thoughts.

Remember that this exercise is not about judging yourself or trying to figure out “why” but about bringing your patterns to your awareness so that you can choose more helpful actions. Track your triggers using this worksheet each time you feel stressed or anxious over the next week.

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Describe what appears to be triggering your feeling of stress or anxiety	
What happened right before you started feeling stressed or anxious?	
Who were you with when you felt this way?	
What were you thinking about or doing when the stress or anxiety started?	
How did you feel physically and emotionally during the episode?	

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At the end of the week, review your entries and examine them for patterns using the following questions. You may find it helpful to categorize your triggers into groups (e.g., work-related, relationship issues, health concerns) to better understand their impact.

What specific situations tend to make you anxious?

Are there particular places or events that increase your anxiety?

What thoughts or beliefs seem to trigger your anxiety?

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Are there recurring worries or fears that you notice?

After you have identified your common triggers, think about alternative behaviors or ways to reframe your thoughts. For each trigger, decide on a healthier coping strategy or alternative behavior.

Situation	<i>Work deadline approaching</i>
Thoughts	<i>“I’m never going to finish this on time.”</i>
Feelings	<i>Anxiety (7/10)</i>
Physical Symptoms	<i>Feeling hot, elevated heartbeat, tense neck and shoulders</i>
Alternative Thoughts	<i>“Yes, there’s lots to do, but I can only focus fully on doing one thing at a time. One by one, it will get done and on time.”</i>
Action	<i>Created a to-do list, put aside the things to be done after this current step.</i>
Outcome	<i>Felt relieved and less stressed. Was able to focus better. Finished the task and made progress on to the next one.</i>

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Situation	
Thoughts	
Feelings	
Physical Symptoms	
Alternative Thoughts	
Action	
Outcome	

Situation	
Thoughts	
Feelings	
Physical Symptoms	
Alternative Thoughts	
Action	
Outcome	

Your Anxiety-Relieving Toolkit

WORKSHEET 28: PLAY THE POSITIVE WHAT-IF GAME

This is a simple exercise that’s quick and powerful. We get anxious when we anticipate something we are afraid of. We tend to play out “what-if” scenarios in our mind, overthinking and imagining negative outcomes.

Reframing a negative what-if into a positive one that’s equally possible can be a fun exercise that helps you have a different experience. Play with coming up with positive what-ifs for at least a minute each time—don’t stop too soon.

Negative What-if	Positive What-if
<i>What if I fluff my presentation?</i>	<i>What if I give the best presentation I've ever done? What if they love it? What if I love it? What if I'm inspired while presenting and share some great insights?</i>

WORKSHEET 29: TACKLE YOUR ANXIOUS THOUGHTS

Anxiety can skew our thinking to the extent that we buy into the idea that something awful will happen and overestimate its likelihood. In this exercise, you'll practice balancing anxious thoughts with more rational thought patterns.

Identify a common situation that triggers your anxiety		
What is the worst potential result of this situation?		
What is the best potential result of this situation?		
What do you feel is the most likely result of this situation?		
Imagine the worst outcome actually happens. Would it still matter...	1 week from now	
	1 month from now	
	1 year from now	

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Using your “worst” and “best” possible outcomes above, now describe your:	
Anxious/irrational thoughts	
Objective/rational thoughts	

WORKSHEET 30: BREATHE DEEPLY FOR INSTANT CALM

Deep breathing is a powerful technique to quickly reduce stress and anxiety. It involves taking slow, deliberate breaths to calm your nervous system and focus your mind. By engaging your diaphragm and taking full breaths, you can activate your body’s relaxation response. This worksheet will guide you through the process of using deep breathing to find calm in moments of tension.

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Keep your back straight and shoulders relaxed.
- If you are in a place where you can close your eyes, do so, to minimize distractions and help you stay focused in the present. But even if you can’t, this exercise can still help bring you into a state of calm.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose, counting to four as you fill your lungs with air. Imagine the air moving all the way down into your abdomen. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. The hand on your belly should rise more than the one on your chest.
- Hold your breath for a few seconds.
- Breathe out slowly through your mouth—a long slow breath out. Imagine releasing all the tension and stress with your breath.
- Continue this cycle for 3-5 minutes, or until you feel more relaxed.

You can also imagine a calming scene or use a soothing color (like blue or green) to enhance relaxation. Experiment with sitting upright, lying down, or even standing to find what works best for you. The idea is to be able to practice deep breathing during stressful situations or when you are feeling anxious to calm yourself.



FREE BONUS GIFT #4: SMILING MEDITATION

Reduce stress and anxiety, promote mental and physical health, and enhance relaxation with this one-minute smiling meditation. Go to:

bonuses.serenachoo.com/ecbt-unlock-your-bonuses where you'll get access to a downloadable recording you can take with you anywhere. You can also scan the QR code if you don't like typing. It's completely free.

WORKSHEET 31: BREATHE TO A RHYTHM FOR INSTANT ANXIETY-RELIEF

Controlled breathing involves using specific techniques to regulate your breath. It engages the body's parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for rest and relaxation, and helps calm your nervous system. By concentrating on your breath, you can reduce the levels of stress hormones like cortisol, while also distracting your mind from anxious thoughts to bring you back to the present moment. Stress and anxiety often result in us holding our breath or breathing shallowly, so as you perform this exercise, if you feel light-headed, back off a little and build up the duration gradually. The key is to bring your attention to your heart area and breathe smoothly through each cycle, following the steady rhythm of the count.

The 4-7-8 Breathing Technique

- Get comfortable in a quiet space.
- Breathe in quietly through your nose for a count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Breathe out completely through your mouth for a count of eight.
- Practice this cycle for 4-8 rounds.

“

When the mind is agitated, change
the pattern of the breath.

-Patanjali, Yoga Sutras

”

WORKSHEET 32: 5-4-3-2-1 GROUND YOURSELF TO REDUCE ANXIETY

Grounding techniques help to control anxiety by turning your attention away from the worries, thoughts, and memories causing anxiety and refocusing on the present moment. Use this exercise whenever you need to bring yourself back to the present moment.

Sit or stand comfortably in a quiet space. Take 2-3 deep breaths to help center yourself and prepare for the exercise. Do your best to notice small things that your mind would normally tune out, such as textures or distant sounds, like the rustle of the leaves, the squeak of a chair, or the sound of the air-conditioning.

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Notice 5 things you can see



What are 4 things you can feel?

Pay attention for 3 things you can hear

“Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet”—Thich Nhat Hanh

Acknowledge 2 things you can smell

What is 1 thing you can taste?

Take a moment to notice how engaging your senses has affected your mood and anxiety levels. Pay attention to any changes in your feelings of calm or relaxation.

WORKSHEET 33: DO A BODY SCAN MEDITATION

Body Scan Meditation is a mindfulness-based practice that originates from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). It's designed to increase body awareness and promote relaxation by focusing attention on different parts of the body.

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position where you can relax without distractions. Ensure you're in a quiet environment.
- Take a few deep breaths to help center yourself. Inhale deeply through your nose, hold for a moment, and exhale slowly through your mouth.
- Bring your attention to your toes. Notice any sensations in this area. If you feel any tension, just acknowledge it and imagine it gradually releasing as you breathe.
- Shift your focus to the soles and tops of your feet. Notice any sensations, such as warmth, coolness, or tingling. Continue to breathe deeply and imagine any tension melting away.
- Direct your attention to your ankles, calves, and shins. Notice how these areas feel. Are there any areas of tightness or relaxation? Breathe into these areas, visualizing relaxation spreading through your lower legs.
- Move your awareness to your knees and thighs. Observe any sensations in these areas. Allow your breath to help release any tension as you exhale.
- Repeat these scans through your hips and pelvis, abdomen and lower back, upper back and shoulders, neck, and finally to your face and head.

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- Take a few moments to notice how your entire body feels. Reflect on any changes in tension or relaxation.
- Slowly bring your awareness back to the present moment. Open your eyes and take a deep breath before resuming your day.



FREE BONUS #5: DEEPEN YOUR RELEASING

If you want to deepen your ability to let go of your stress and anxiety with this mediation, go to: bonuses.serenachoo.com/ecbt-unlock-your-bonuses where you'll get access to a downloadable recording so you can listen to the meditation and relax more deeply. You can also scan the QR code if you don't like typing. It's completely free.

Practical Techniques for Reducing Stress

WORKSHEET 34: GAUGE YOUR STRESS

The best way to use the Stress Thermometer is as an early warning system. It is a visual tool that helps you measure and track your stress levels, so you can gauge your stress on a scale and take action before your stress gets too high. It will also help you become more aware of how stress affects you throughout the day and give you concrete data on which you can develop strategies for managing stress. You can also use it as non-judgmental way to easily and effectively communicate your current stress levels to others, so they know, for example, to leave you alone when you are showing high on the Stress Thermometer.



9-10—Crisis.

High or extreme stress: Can't think clearly, feeling out of control, intense physical or emotional distress, approaching breakdown, or can't function.

7-8—Very stressed.

Demanding but unsustainable, irritability, racing thoughts, difficulty concentrating. Generally okay for short periods of time. Take action before your stress escalates.

5-6—Moderately stressed.

Demanding but sustainable, starting to feel overwhelmed but manageable, tension in neck/shoulders, shallow breathing. Use stress-reduction breaks to keep your stress manageable.

3-4—Mildly stressed, comfortable.

Use preventive techniques such as mindfulness or short breaks.

1-2—Relaxed, alert.

0—Peaceful and calm.

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1. **Pause for a moment** at various times during the day and ask yourself how stressed you are feeling. Then use the thermometer to rate your stress levels at different times of the day or week.
2. **Log your stress levels** so you can track it over the course of each week. Record the date, time, and your stress rating.

Date /Time	Stress Level (0 to 10)	Trigger/Situation	Physical Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms	Stress Management Strategy Used	Outcome / Stress Level After (0-10)
<i>9 a.m.</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Starting the workday</i>	<i>Slight tension in shoulders</i>	<i>Mild worry about tasks</i>	<i>Took a 5-minute stretch break</i>	<i>2</i>

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At the end of the week, reflect on your Stress Thermometer Record.

1. **Look for patterns.** Do certain situations regularly lead to higher stress levels? Are you more prone to feeling stressed at certain times of the day?

2. **Assess your strategies.** Did the strategies you used help to reduce your stress levels? Which ones were most effective?

WORKSHEET 35: BREAK DOWN YOUR PROBLEMS

Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed and stressed when thinking about a problem (or task). This can happen when something feels too big to tackle and you can't seem to get your head around it. Breaking the problem down into smaller, manageable parts can eliminate some of the stress and overwhelm, and help you know how to prioritize your actions. In CBT, this is called the problem-solving technique.

1. **Define the problem** as clearly as you can.
2. **Break the problem into smaller chunks.** It can be helpful to write down everything you may already know as well as the questions you need answered. This process itself can help you get some clarity on what some of the solutions may be.
3. **Think of possible solutions.** Cross off any which are not a viable option for you, if any.
4. **Choose between one and three items** on your list that feel 10/10 do-able and break these down into smaller chunks or next steps.

Here's an example.

You've taken on more responsibility at work and are feeling overwhelmed.

1. **Define the problem:** *I have too much to do at work. I feel overwhelmed and stressed, and I also feel guilty because I'm not spending enough quality time with my family.*
2. **Break the problem into smaller chunks.**
 - Too many meetings at work, I have no time to do my work.*
 - Too many projects with conflicting priorities.*
 - Too many emails.*
 - Not leaving work on time and getting home late.*
 - No relaxation time or time for self-care.*
 - Too tired when I get home to pay much attention to the family.*
 - Thinking about work even when I'm at home.*

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3. Think of possible solutions.

- Evaluate all meetings that I'm asked to attend.
- Review and prioritize projects and tasks.
- Identify what can be delegated.
- Check if I need to be on all email circulation lists.
- Block out non-negotiable time blocks for me so I can focus on my own work.
- Set a boundary for when I'll leave work and when it's okay to work longer hours.
- Schedule relaxation time and practice letting go of always thinking about work.
- Speak with family and find a balance that works.

4. Choose between one and three items on the list and break these down further.

Chosen Solution(s)	Next Steps
<i>Evaluate all meetings that I'm asked to attend.</i>	<i>Look at my calendar for the last month and work out which meetings I can drop out of. Delegate those to my assistant manager (John). It will be good for his growth, and we can have weekly updates so I'm still informed.</i>
<i>Review and prioritize projects and tasks.</i>	<i>Speak with boss (Anna) and check my understanding. Maybe I'm making some assumptions which are not valid. Use prioritization matrix to schedule my tasks more effectively.</i>
<i>Block out non-negotiable time blocks for me so I can focus on my own work.</i>	<i>Mark times on calendar and tell team members those times are not available for other meetings.</i>

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How has chunking down my problem helped me? What went well? What didn't go quite right?

The next exercise will help you to organize these tasks.

WORKSHEET 36: ORGANIZE YOUR DAILY ACTIVITIES

Sometimes the stress we experience is because we have taken on more than we can carry. Time is limited and fixed, but you can take charge of your tasks and how you manage your energy to reduce overwhelm, stress, and anxiety. This worksheet will help you gain perspective on how you are using your time and energy, and deal with potential stressors before they escalate by figuring out what tasks have more priority and attending to those first. It can also free up time so you can do more of what you enjoy. Although this exercise is not part of CBT itself, it works very well with it because it can help with reducing overwhelm that leads to stress and anxiety.

These are everyday strategies to apply as a matter of habit. They help to keep you focused and reduces worry that you will forget something.

Now, maybe you're feeling some resistance, "I've come across this before and I've tried it already," or "I don't have the time to do this." This is natural because what works has to work in the context of *your* life. So, it's about you finding your own system within the concepts of what I'm about to share with you. Remember the 10/10 concept about making something so

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easy, it's a done deal? This is a great place to apply it. As you go through the concepts in this section, how can you break it down into a small enough chunk that you start?

It isn't a "one and done" deal, and one's inbox is never empty—there's always something coming in. Also, it isn't necessarily something you get right on your first go. So, set aside just ten minutes to begin with to run through the process. Implement some of it. Then the following week, add a bit more. Over time, you'll find your own groove with it and it will then be *your* system.

Step 1: Create a to-do list

Don't carry your to-do list around in your head; make a list of all the tasks that you have to do. This will help to reduce stress. As long as it comes to your mind as something that needs to get done, it goes on the list—big or small.



Two empty rounded rectangular boxes with horizontal lines for writing a to-do list. Each box contains ten horizontal lines for text entry.

Step 2: Eliminate and prioritize

Mark the activities that need to be addressed this week. Then group them into the 4 sections on the matrix. Anything that doesn't make it to the matrix stays on your to-do list as "backlog" items.

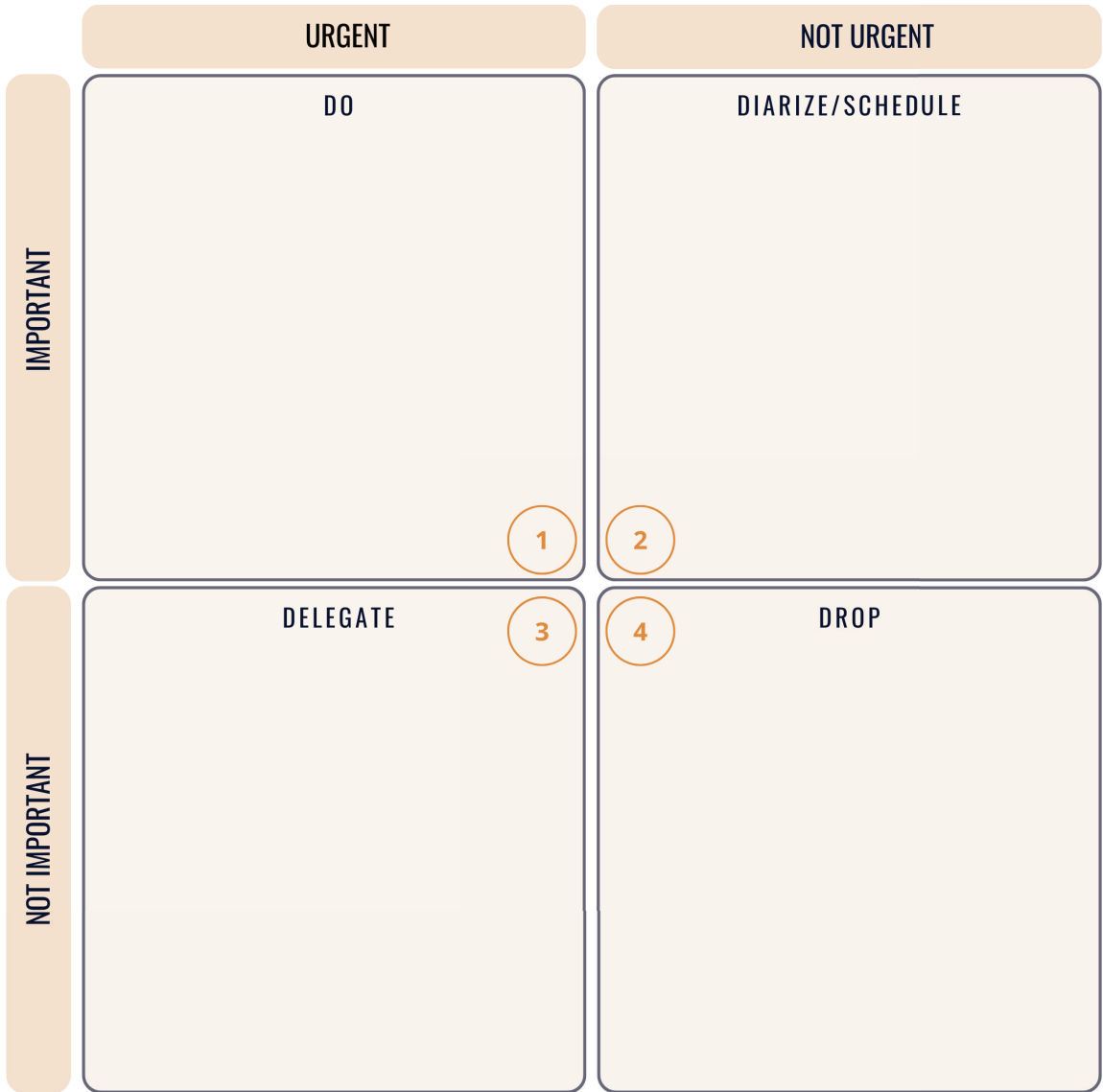
Quadrant 1 - Urgent & Important—When a task on your list must be done now and has clear consequences, it belongs in this quadrant. Most times, these tasks are at the front of your mind and likely bringing you the most stress. These are the tasks to do first.

Quadrant 2 - Not Urgent & Important—Include tasks that are not urgent but are still important. These tasks don't need to be done right away. You can attend to them as soon as you finish with the tasks in the Quadrant 1.

Quadrant 3 - Urgent & Not Important—A task belongs here if it is urgent, but not important. It is wise to delegate these activities to other people. It will help you reduce your workload and the demand on your time, while still being able to oversee the activity.

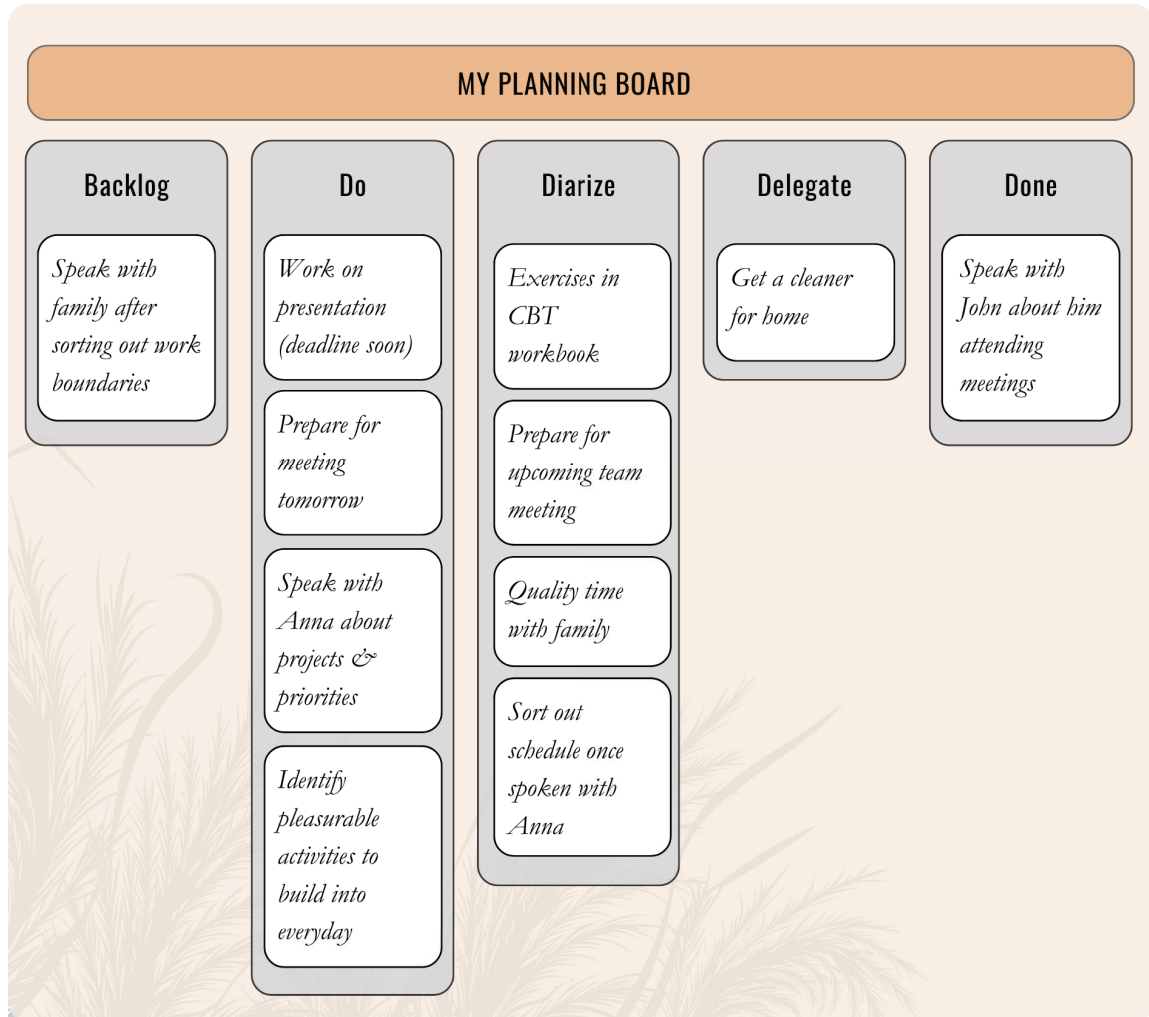
Quadrant 4 - Not Urgent & Not Important—After you have added the tasks in your list to the other three quadrants, anything that remains likely falls in this quadrant. These tasks are often distractions; see if you can drop or eliminate them altogether. However, before you do, take a step back and consider whether you have items in here which are, in fact, important. For example, you may have allocated "cleaning your home" as not important and not urgent but a clean home always enhances your sense of well-being and reduces your stress and overwhelm. If this is the case, "cleaning your home" would be better suited to one of the "important" quadrants. Other items that may need to be similarly reconsidered are activities like self-care.

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Here is an example of how you can track your to-do list using a “kanban board” in a tool like Trello which makes it easy to move things around if priorities change and to the “Done” list when tasks are completed.



Step 3: Cross items off your to-do list. As you attend to the items, cross them off your to-do list. Enjoy the feeling.

Step 4: Take stock. Wrap up the day by taking stock of what’s been done and what’s left. This helps your mind to feel at ease; it’s like reorganizing your mind and giving it an overview of

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what's to come the next day. You may find that some of the items can be moved to a different quadrant or perhaps eliminated altogether.

At the end of the week, spend a few more minutes in taking stock. Review your backlog and carry forward what needs to go into the new week. Ask yourself what worked well and what wasn't quite right yet and adjust your approach accordingly.

Tip: If you use a paper version of keeping track of your to-do list, create a new list every so often, carrying forward any remaining items, so you don't feel out of control due to a cluttered and messy list.

How has keeping a to-do list kept you focused and reduced your stress?

WORKSHEET 37: TIME-BLOCK & TIME-BOX YOUR ACTIVITIES

In the previous exercise, you organized your activities for less stress and overwhelm. In this exercise, you will allocate those activities to either time blocks or time boxes in alignment with your natural energy patterns.

In time blocking, you assign specific blocks of time for certain activities throughout the day, without strict limit on how long the activity should take within that time block. Use time blocking for dedicating time to your urgent and important activities or “deep work” (work that requires focus and concentration) to carve out blocks of time for specific tasks. You could block out short periods of time for managing your email at a particular time of day, for example.

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Time boxing, on the other hand, sets a strict limit on how much time you will spend on that task. You came across an example of this in the Worry Time Box exercise. When the allocated time is up, you stop the activity, even if it isn't complete. Time boxing is a good strategy for those activities that are not urgent but are still important.

Also pay attention to how your energy flows during different times of day. For example, you may be most creative in the mornings and better at doing less brain-intensive activities in the late afternoons. Schedule those types of activities so they align with your own energy flow. You may also find it helpful to find your sweet spot for how long your ideal time block is. One of my clients would get fidgety and lose focus after about forty minutes. It was perfect for him to take a short break at that time. For you, it might be shorter or longer than that. Experiment to see what's most effective for you.

Step 1: Identify the tasks you allocated as “important” from the previous exercise.

Step 2: Allocate time blocks for each urgent and important task. Estimate the time needed for each task and allocate the relevant number of time blocks (generally between 25- to 55-minute sessions each) needed. Slot them into the day or days when you will do these tasks. End each time block with a five-minute break.

Step 3: Decide on a time box for your important but not urgent tasks. Slot these into your calendar; they may fit well in between your time blocks. Remember, this is a strict box of time; it is not the goal to complete the task but to stop and carry it over to the next time box.

Use your own calendar scheduling system to organize your days. Here's an example.

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Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00 a.m.	<i>Emails (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Emails (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Emails (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Emails (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Emails (Time Blocked)</i>
9:30 a.m.					
10:00 a.m.	<i>Deep work (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Management meeting (Time Boxed: 1 hr)</i>	<i>Research (Time Boxed: 1 hr)</i>	<i>Deep work (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Deep work (Time Blocked)</i>
10:30 a.m.					
11:00 a.m.					
11:30 a.m.			<i>Client calls (Time Boxed: 1 hr)</i>		
12:00 p.m.		<i>1-1 meeting with John (Time Boxed: 30 mins)</i>		<i>Deep work (Time Blocked)</i>	
12:30 p.m.	<i>Prepare for meeting tomorrow (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Meeting with Anna (Time Blocked)</i>		
1:00 p.m.	<i>Lunch</i>			<i>Lunch</i>	
1:30 p.m.		<i>Review any last updates for meeting (Time Boxed: 30 mins)</i>	<i>Lunch</i>		
2:00 p.m.	<i>Client calls (Time Boxed: 1 hr)</i>	<i>Steering Group meeting (Time Boxed: 1 hr)</i>			<i>Lunch</i>
2:30 p.m.					
3:00 p.m.	<i>Team meeting (Time Boxed: 1 hr)</i>			<i>Admin work (Time boxed: 30 mins)</i>	
3:30 p.m.					

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Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
4:00 p.m.			<i>Take stock at end of day (Time Blocked)</i>		
4:30 p.m.		<i>Admin work (Time Boxed: 30 mins)</i>	<i>Leave for daughter's school concert</i>		<i>Take stock for the week at end of day (Time Blocked)</i>
5:00 p.m.			<i>Daughter's school concert (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Take stock at end of day (Time Blocked)</i>	
5:30 p.m.	<i>Take stock at end of day (Time Blocked)</i>	<i>Take stock at end of day (Time Blocked)</i>			
6:00 p.m.					
6:30 p.m.					
7:00 p.m.				<i>Pleasure activity</i>	
7:30 p.m.	<i>Dinner with family</i>	<i>Dinner with family</i>	<i>Dinner with family</i>	<i>Dinner with family</i>	<i>Date night with partner (Time Blocked)</i>
8:00 p.m.					
8:30 p.m.	<i>CBT workbook exercises (Time Boxed: 30 mins)</i>	<i>CBT workbook exercises (Time Boxed: 45 mins)</i>	<i>CBT workbook exercises (Time Boxed: 30 mins)</i>	<i>CBT workbook exercises (Time Boxed: 30 mins)</i>	
9:00+ p.m.	<i>Pleasure activity</i>		<i>Pleasure activity</i>	<i>Pleasure activity</i>	

Were you able to accomplish all that you set out to do? What lessons did you learn from the scheduling activity and what adaptations will you make as a result?

WORKSHEET 38: SET PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Personal boundaries are the rules and limits we set for ourselves within relationships. When you have healthy boundaries, you can recognize tasks, activities, or demands on you, your time, and your energy that cause stress, and participate only when you are able to. A person with healthy boundaries can say “no” when they need to and “yes” when they have the capacity for it. This makes it an incredible time and energy management tool.

Clear boundaries communicate to others and help educate them on how you wish to be treated, fostering mutual respect in relationships. They help you maintain a balance between work and personal life, reducing stress and improving overall quality of life.

You may need a boundary if:

- You’re frequently interrupted during your relaxation time by family members asking for help.
- A friend often asks you for favors that disrupt your personal plans.
- You receive work emails late at night and feel pressured to respond immediately.
- Your workload has increased, leading to stress and long hours.

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Part 1: Think about recent situations where you felt overwhelmed or stressed. What were the common factors? Detail them as much as you can.

Part 2: Reflect on where you need to set clear boundaries.

Part 3: Describe the boundary you would like to set and how you will enforce it.

Area of Stress	Boundary to Set	Steps to Implement

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As you create your boundaries, keep the following in mind:

- Boundaries should be based on your values—what truly matters and is important to you. For example, if you value spending time with family, you need boundaries about working late.
- Boundaries are meant to protect you, not to control others. In enforcing them, make sure you focus on your behavior, not other people's.
- You always have a right to say “no”. When you do, be clear and respectful in your communication. Also, remember: Saying “no” is saying “yes” to you.

WORKSHEET 39: PLAY STRESS RELIEF SCAVENGER HUNT

By using this worksheet, you can hunt for stress-relieving activities and figure out different options for activities that help you lower your stress levels.

Part 1: Identify your stress-relieving activities. From the list of categories below, come up with three ideas of activities you enjoy or would like to try. This will be your personalized scavenger hunt list for the week.

- An activity that involves movement (like going for a walk or dancing to your favorite music).
- Something that makes you laugh (e.g., watch a funny movie, read a humorous book).
- A relaxing hobby or craft (like knitting, painting, or gardening).
- Moments of mindfulness or meditation (e.g., practice deep breathing, do a guided meditation).
- Connecting with nature (visit a park or take a nature hike).
- A social activity that brings you joy (like having coffee with a friend).
- An activity that engages your creativity (like trying a new recipe or creative journaling).
- Something spontaneous to practice gratitude or a random act of kindness—this can be in relation to yourself too (gift a friend, send a thank you note or call someone to thank them for something they did).

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Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3

Part 2: Engage in the activities you listed over the course of the next week. Use the table below to track each activity, note when you did it, and reflect on how it impacted your stress levels.

Activity	Date	How I Felt Before	How I Felt After	Reflection

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Part 3: After completing your scavenger hunt, reflect on the overall experience.

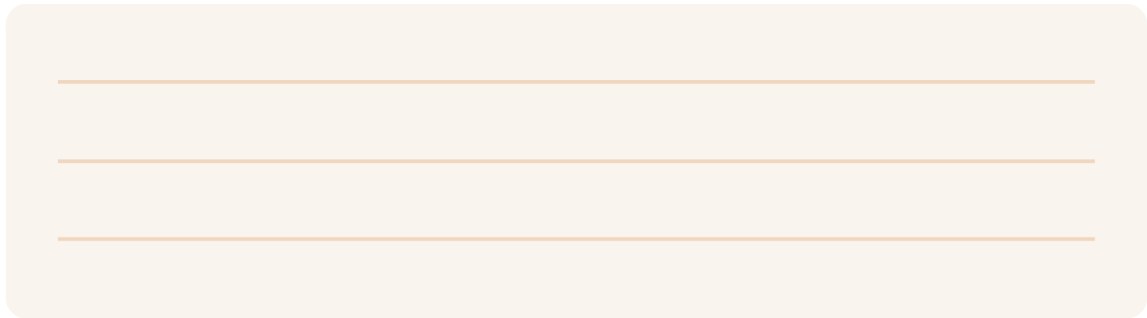
- Which activities were most effective in reducing your stress?
- Were there any activities that did not have the desired effect? If so, why do you think that was?
- Did you discover any new favorite stress-relieving activities? How can you integrate it into your routine?

Repeat your scavenger-hunt until you've found your own personal list of stress-relieving activities that you can integrate easily and enjoyably into your everyday.

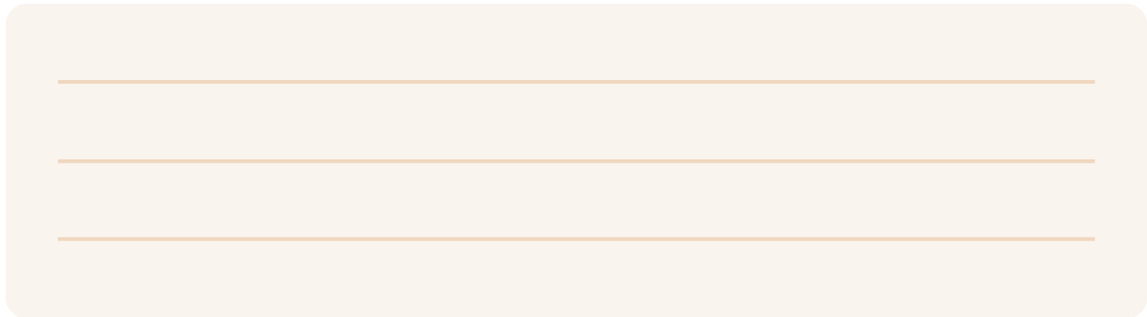
Chapter Reflections

In this chapter, you learned different skills and techniques for reducing stress and anxiety particularly when you need some instant relief. Through working with CBT, it's likely that you will already have seen a positive change in how you feel about yourself. In the next chapter, you will build further on this through practices on accepting and valuing yourself. Right now, go back over what you've done in this chapter and reflect on the following questions to integrate your learnings and insights.

What was the most valuable insight you gained from this chapter and why?



How did your thoughts or emotions change as you worked through this chapter?



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What challenges did you face while working on the exercises, and how did you overcome them?

How can you apply what you've learned in this chapter to your everyday life?

What small steps will you take next to continue improving your thinking and emotional well-being?



”

“Sometimes your joy is the
source of your smile, but
sometimes your smile can be
the source of your joy.”

THICH NHAT HANH



Chapter 5: Breaking the Cycle of Depression

WE OFTEN USE THE word “depressed” to communicate when we are in a low mood or feeling “flat” or down. But this may not necessarily mean that you’re depressed. It’s normal to experience mood fluctuations and for moods to go up and down throughout the day or over time. For example, moods can change naturally in response to energy levels, life circumstances, and even how you sleep and what you eat. These are generally short-lived, tied to specific events, and tend to pass on their own so you return to your baseline mood.

With depression however, moods tend to be persistent and more intense. They are less connected to immediate events and, unlike healthy fluctuations, don’t resolve on their own. Those with depression often feel they’re like wading through treacle with a heavy fog around them clouding their thoughts and dimming their sense of hope. Their everyday and the future often seem gray and lackluster, with negative thoughts and beliefs amplified. Everyday activities can feel difficult and challenging, and with severe depression, this can start to affect ability to function.

Depression occurs on a continuum that can range from mild or moderate to severe. If you or someone you know is possibly experiencing depression, it’s highly important to seek professional help and support. If you’re ever in doubt, be safe and consult a qualified therapist.

CBT has been shown to be effective for mild and moderate depression and this workbook can help if you’re at this end of the continuum. James was still able to function well at work but would likely have needed professional therapy support had he not taken action as soon

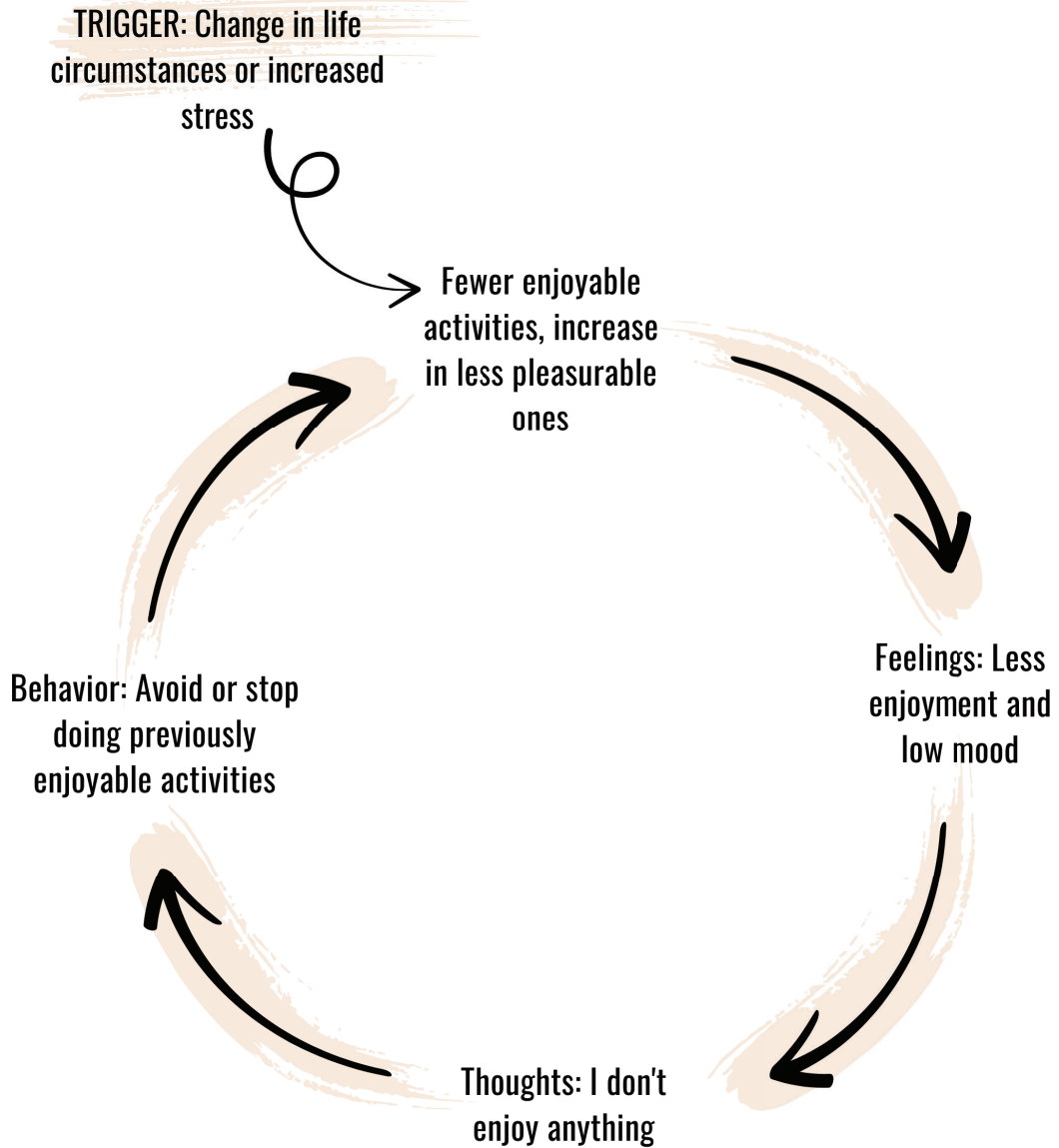
as he recognized something wasn't right. This workbook can also help if you're already working with a mental health professional who has recommended it to you. The earlier chapters in this workbook set the foundation for breaking the cycle of depression because they help you identify, challenge, and reframe the unhelpful thinking patterns that can fuel your depression. Don't skip them. In this chapter, you'll build on those by addressing the "actions" part of the CBT triangle.

Behavioral Activation

When you're feeling low or stuck in a cycle of negative thinking, it's easy to feel like doing nothing and withdrawing from activities—like James who mostly wanted to shut out the world. Depression often starts when changes in life circumstances or increased stress lead to fewer enjoyable activities and an increase in less pleasurable ones. Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are so closely interrelated that engaging in fewer enjoyable activities can lead to low mood, and then, the level of enjoyment derived from those enjoyable activities also reduces. This sets up a cycle where less engagement in positive activities reinforces low mood and vice versa.

Engaging in enjoyable or meaningful activities can help break this cycle. Our physiology is closely connected and deeply influenced by how we think and feel, and so, we can interrupt our pattern of thinking and feeling by changing our physiology through our actions or behavior. In CBT, this is called, "behavioral activation."

Here's a quick experiment you can do that demonstrates this. When you picture a sad person, how would you describe them? Most likely, you'd say that they are sitting in a hunched over position, head down, mouth turned downwards, and their arms close to their body. On the other hand, when you picture a person who's feeling upbeat, it's likely you'd describe their physiology as more upright and open, their head is held high, maybe they're smiling, and their arms are not held closely to their body in the same way. Holding your body in either of these different positions will affect how you feel. This is how behavioral activation works—by getting you to interrupt the cycle through re-engaging more with enjoyable activities that can lift your mood.



WORKSHEET 40: PRACTICE GRATITUDE

A gratitude practice is a small but powerful action that can improve mood and help you feel more in control. It is not about simply being thankful for the sake of an exercise, or because things have gone well, but understanding and recognizing that all our experiences—whether we think of them as “good” or “bad”—have value. It doesn’t make the bad times go away but can help you gain a more balanced perspective. It can serve as a reminder that there are always positive aspects to life, even though things may be difficult at the time. Research also shows that those who practice gratitude have a more optimistic outlook, are more satisfied with what they have, and are less prone to negative emotions.

Building a gratitude practice is not difficult but it takes application and awareness. The more you focus on what you’re grateful for, the more you’ll find to be thankful for. That said, when I first came across the idea of practicing gratitude, I found it difficult because it felt inauthentic—I couldn’t see or feel much to be thankful for at the time, and I couldn’t find it in myself to find gratitude for the small things. But remember the power of language? I found that I could use the word “appreciation” instead, which took away my resistance. So, I practiced appreciation instead—and that worked. Use what works for you.

Observe your reactions

Start by paying attention to how often you say, “thank you” and how you feel when you do. Is it a quick, automatic response? Do you say it more out of habit than genuine feeling? Are you moving on quickly or are you present? Take a moment to check in with yourself.

Focus on one interaction a day

Choose one moment each day when you might naturally say, “thank you.” Pause for a moment and reflect on what you can be grateful for in that situation. Try to go beyond the immediate gesture and think about why you can appreciate it. It may be something that think is insignificant, but in truth, isn’t—such as someone holding the door for you—think about how their simple act made your day easier.

How did focusing on gratitude impact your mood or interactions?

“

Some people grumble that roses have thorns; I am grateful that thorns have roses.

- Alphonse Karr

”

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Start a gratitude journal. Use one of the following prompts a day to guide your journaling.

Monday	What is one thing you are grateful for today? Describe a specific thing, person, or event that you appreciate.
Tuesday	Who or what made you smile today? Describe what happened in detail.
Wednesday	What is something you can appreciate about yourself? It could be a personal quality, achievement, or something you did.
Thursday	What is a small act of kindness you experienced today? Describe a gesture or action, no matter how small, that made a difference to you.
Friday	What is one thing you learned today that you're grateful for? Reflect on how that learning benefits you.
Saturday	What positive change have you noticed in your life recently? Write about an improvement or positive shift that has occurred and how it affects you.
Sunday	What is one enjoyable activity you did today? What did you enjoy about it?

How have these experiences impacted on how you feel?

WORKSHEET 41: TRACK YOUR ACTIVITIES AND MOOD

Tracking your activities and the accompanying moods is a valuable part of the process of interrupting the depression cycle. It reveals trends over time and can help differentiate between typical ups and downs or fluctuations in response to specific triggers or events and a pattern that may be depressive with a consistent downward trend. Also, knowing which activities or behaviors feel pleasurable and help us feel energized and which ones feel energy-draining is the first step in being able to consciously choose your activities.

Remember, it's okay to have some level of emotional fluctuation—moods ebb and flow—and one doesn't have to be in a “good” mood every day, as moods can feel neutral too; be compassionate with yourself. The aim of this exercise is to help you identify your own baseline and how your mood fluctuations relate to your everyday, so you can make the changes you need.

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Use the following table to capture your activities and your related mood over five days, to include both weekdays and weekend days. 0 is a low mood and 10 is a good mood.

	Day 1		Day 2		Day 3		Day 4		Day 5	
Time	Activity/Mood		Activity/Mood		Activity/Mood		Activity/Mood		Activity/Mood	
Wake-up										
Morning										
Lunch-time										
Afternoon										
Evening										
Bedtime										

Using your mood tracker above as a guide, allocate the activities to “energy-giving activities” or “energy-draining activities.”

Energy-Giving Activities	Energy-Draining Activities

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Is there a pattern to your activities? For example, can you identify what's causing your low moods? Are there times during your day when you're more at risk of a low mood?

In the next exercise, you'll schedule some of these activities into your calendar.

WORKSHEET 42: PLAN YOUR BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATIONS

In the beginning, you may not feel like doing this or you might feel that it's not working. This is normal—it's like waiting for the pot of water to boil; you don't see anything happening until the water reaches a specific temperature. So, in the early days, you may have to simply follow the plan rather than how you may feel. Know that results are on their way. Think, "I just haven't seen the results *yet*."

1. Add to your list

Add any other activities that you find pleasurable or fulfilling to your list from the previous exercise. Think about activities that make you happy or give you a sense of accomplishment. These may be hobbies, social interactions, or any other energy-giving activities that you look forward to or may have looked forward to in the past but have since stopped doing. Sometimes it can be as simple as, "There was a TV program that my partner and I loved watching together. Then the series ended, and we stopped doing that."

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- What activities have brought you joy in the past?
- What hobbies or interests do you have?
- What activities help you relax or feel accomplished?
- Are there any new activities you've wanted to try?

Activity 1	
Activity 2	
Activity 3	
Activity 4	
Activity 5	



FREE BONUS GIFT #6: SPARK YOUR IDEAS

Would it be helpful to look at a list of 120 activities to help you spark ideas of pleasurable activities? Go to: bonuses.serenachoo.com/ecbt-unlock-your-bonuses to get access to the list to download list. You can also scan the QR code if you don't like typing. It's completely free.

2. Schedule Your Activities

Using the list from the previous section, select activities to schedule throughout the week. Include a mix of social, physical, and creative activities, both solo and with others, to keep things engaging. You may already be doing some of these activities, in which case you may choose to expand on those activities first and then gradually weave new activities into your daily routine to ensure they become a regular part of your life.

Don't be tempted with an "all-or-nothing" approach. Begin with a few manageable activities and gradually increase as you get comfortable. Remember the 10/10 concept mentioned in the introduction? Make the changes small enough that it is guaranteed you'll do it. Clearly define when and where you will engage in each activity and set reminders to help you stay consistent with your planning.

Day	Activity	Time	Location	How I Felt
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

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3. Reflect on how you felt before, during, and after each activity

After completing each scheduled activity, reflect on how you felt before, during, and after the activity, and consider how it affected your mood and stress levels.

Activity	Before I Felt	After I Felt

WORKSHEET 43: CREATE A MOOD-LIFTING MUSIC PLAYLIST

Creating a playlist of songs that make you feel happy, calm, or energized can help you manage your emotions and support more balanced thinking. Use your favorite music player to create the playlist. It could be as long as you like, but a 30-minute playlist is a good place to start.

Listen to your playlist and pay attention to how each song affects your mood, thoughts, and feelings. Take out the ones that don't help you feel better. I say this because there was a time when I discovered that I felt sad when listening to some of my favorite songs—I can listen to them now and feel expansive rather than sad. So, I pass this on to you too.

WORKSHEET 44: IMMERSE YOURSELF IN GUIDED IMAGERY

Guided imagery used together with CBT is a powerful technique for that can help provide relief from depression. It involves following a structured script to envision calming or helpful mental images while engaging all your senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. This can transport you to a different mental space which can help shift your focus away from negative thought patterns, reduce stress and anxiety, and promote relaxation. Some people find that using guided imagery before sleep relaxes their mind which helps them sleep better.

- Find a quiet, comfortable place where you won't be disturbed. Sit or lie down in a relaxed position.
- Picture yourself in a beautiful, tranquil garden. You see vibrant flowers and hear the gentle rustle of leaves in the breeze.
- Walk slowly along a path, noticing the colors and the smell of the flowers. Feel the soft grass under your feet and the warmth of the sun on your face.
- Sit down on a comfortable bench or blanket. Feel completely supported and at ease in this peaceful space.
- As you sit, imagine any stress or worries melting away, absorbed by the serenity of the garden. Allow yourself to feel completely relaxed and at peace.



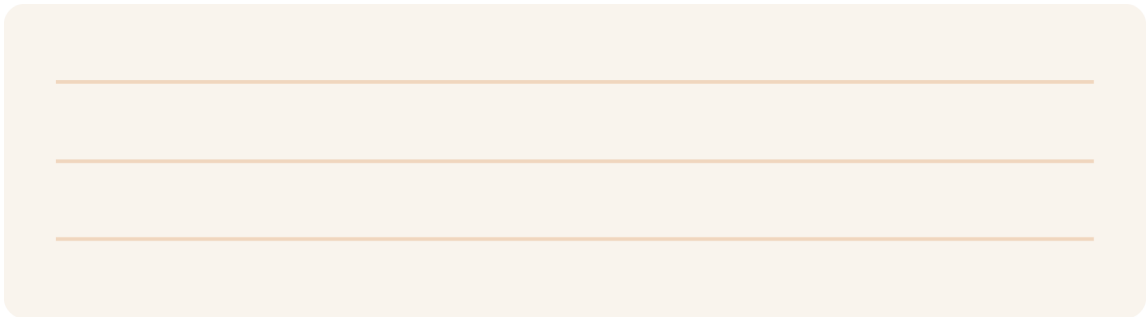
FREE BONUS GIFT #7: GUIDED IMAGERY IMMERSION

If you want to deepen your experience and improve the benefits of guided imagery, go to: bonuses.serenachoo.com/ecbt-unlock-your-bonuses where you'll get access to a guided imagery recording with soothing music to help you truly relax. You can also scan the QR code if it's easier. It's completely free.

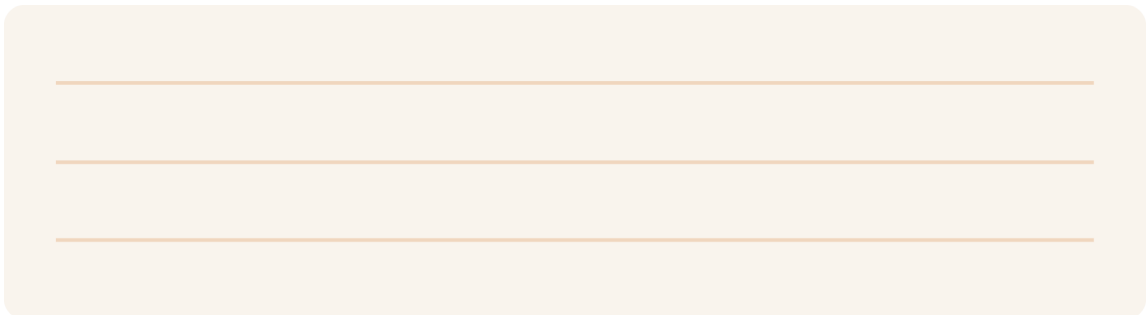
Chapter Reflections

In this chapter, your focus was on “activating” yourself, to engage in more activities that bring you enjoyment and pleasure. Although it may feel like an effort at the beginning, I encourage you to keep doing those activities and harness the power of small gains adding up to something significant over time. Go back over the exercises and review what you’ve done. Think about your experiences and reflect on the following questions.

What was the most valuable insight you gained from this chapter and why?



How did your thoughts or emotions change as you worked through this chapter?



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What challenges did you face while working on the exercises, and how did you overcome them?

How can you apply what you've learned in this chapter to your everyday life?

What small steps will you take next to continue improving your thinking and emotional well-being?



”

“Tension is a habit. Relaxing is a habit. Bad habits can be broken, good habits formed.”

WILLIAM JAMES



Chapter 6: Integrating CBT Into Your Everyday

HABITS ARE ROUTINE BEHAVIORS that you do without having to really think about them. You have repeated them often enough and consistently enough that have become automatic patterns that work on autopilot and you no longer have to consciously think about it.

We are all creatures of habits—for better or worse. You wake up and brush your teeth—for better. On the other hand, you may be in the habit of overthinking. That’s for the worse. Through this workbook, you have a better understanding of the habits you have that sustain overthinking, stress, and anxiety. You have also taken some actions to address these habits.

Forming new habits and breaking old ones is typically challenging because it requires changing the neural pathways in your brain. These are like well-worn paths that have been used time and time again over the years. At first, it will involve shifting your awareness so that the frontal lobe is in charge of your behavior. You must do this consistently and repetitively to change those neural pathways and create new ones, and it takes time. And you have already begun with the exercises in this book.

Establishing an Everyday CBT Routine

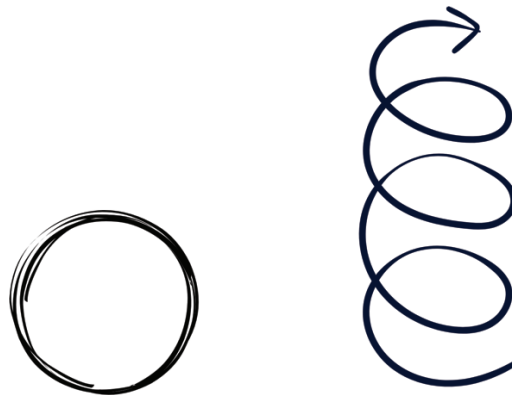
Establishing an Everyday CBT routine is not about “doing” CBT every day. Rather it is about changing your habitual way of thinking and behaving. As you’ve been going through this workbook, you will have learned individual tools and skills. You’ll have learned which tools are more effective for you and when, and how to use them in the moments that you need it.

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As you begin to integrate these into your everyday, you'll learn to combine these skills and apply them in a way that's best suited to you—you'll make them your own

As you're going through this process, I want to encourage you not to think about “relapse” in the traditional sense. Just as we have seasonal changes through the year, we too are not static—we are always changing, and life is always changing too. If one day you find you're unable to break free from a cycle of overthinking, stress, and anxiety, it's okay. As the Japanese proverb: “Fall down seven times, stand up eight.” Keep going— “this too shall pass” and “tomorrow is another day.”

Similarly, if you forget to use a tool that you thought you had mastered, it's alright. Come back to the book and refresh your memory. Think of any setbacks as part of the natural spiral of learning. If you look at it one-dimensionally from the top, you might think you're just going around in a circle. But you're not. Imagine your journey as a spiral staircase: As you walk up the spiral, it may seem like you've come to the same point as before, but you're actually always moving upward as you gain more insight and experience with each step.



Start small and build your routine gradually. Begin with a few simple CBT techniques that resonate with you. Incorporate CBT practices into your daily schedule at specific times, such as in the morning or before bed, and set a consistent time each day to practice techniques like thought records or relaxation exercises.

If you need them, set reminders on your phone or use sticky notes in visible places to prompt you to engage in CBT practices. Keep a journal or use a tracking app to note your daily CBT

activities and reflections. Record any changes in your mood or thought patterns to see how the practices are affecting you. Be patient with yourself and be flexible. Understand that building a new habit takes time and effort. If you miss a day or face challenges, simply get back on track without self-judgment.

Always, evaluate what's working and what not quite right yet in your CBT practice. If certain techniques don't fit your lifestyle or needs, adjust them or try new methods that better suit you.

WORKSHEET 45: BUILD AN EVERYDAY MICRO CHALLENGES PLAN

Any of the exercises in this workbook is an appropriate place to start. You can fill out one of the worksheets a day as a way to begin integrating CBT into your daily life. What's most important is that whatever you choose feels 10/10 hands down you'll do it because it feels easy enough for you to fit it into your every day. This is where micro challenges come in.

By using micro challenges, you can practice and integrate what you've learned in bite-sized pieces without it becoming overwhelming, in addition to pulling out and applying the "bigger" skills as and when you need them, such as Breaking Down Problems or Organizing Your Daily Actions. This helps you build consistency and positive habits over time which will make a meaningful difference in reducing your overthinking, stress, and anxiety, but in a way that won't cause you to be overwhelmed.

Go over all the different worksheets and for each day, choose one CBT skill or area to focus on. Break the worksheet or area you've chosen into tiny tasks or challenges. For example, if you're working on challenging negative thoughts, your micro-challenge could be: "Identify one ANT and replace it with a balanced alternative." Keep each micro challenge short—around 5-10 minutes a day, so it's easy for you to stick with it. Remember, small changes and habits add up over time. Every day, write down what you did, how you felt, and any insights you had—you can do this as you go along (possibly easier while it's still fresh) or when you have a few minutes at the end of the day. Celebrate each micro challenge and appreciate

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yourself for doing it and being consistent—then in time, notice the positive impact of your practice.

Day	Micro Challenge	Reflections
Day 1	<i>Identify one ANT and replace it with a balanced alternative</i>	<i>I had this negative thought today: “I should have finished this by now, I’m so slow.” But I caught myself and reframed it: “I haven’t done this before, I’m still learning. I will get faster.” This made me feel more comfortable and I was proud of myself that I caught the thought and changed it.</i>
Day 2	<i>Write down three things I’m grateful for</i>	<i>My morning walk—felt energized and loved hearing the birds singing. Being at work and having a laugh with colleagues at lunch-time—it made the day feel lighter and more enjoyable. The end of the day. The afternoon turned out to be really hard and I felt really stressed. So, I’m glad today is now at an end and tomorrow will be a new day.</i>
Day 3	<i>Practice one mindfulness exercise</i>	<i>Did the body scan meditation. Felt very relaxed and calm.</i>

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Now your turn—come up with your own plan for the week.

Day	Micro Challenge	Reflections
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

WORKSHEET 46: BUILD IN SELF-COMPASSION

There will be occasions when you go through some kind of challenge and think that you should be further along with integrating CBT into your everyday. At times like this, it's likely that you become even more self-critical. We often do that because we think that the more we beat ourselves up, the more we will give ourselves the impetus to do better. Many of us have learned to be hard on ourselves—much harder on ourselves than we would ever be with someone else. Is this you too?

Think of a child who's learning to walk. They take a step or two, then take a pause or fall over. But we don't frown and say, "You're such a failure, stop already, why bother with walking, you can't do it." Instead, we whole-heartedly encourage them, knowing that baby steps are perfect for their success. The same applies to all of us, to you—we all need positive reinforcement and a degree of self-compassion to thrive.

No matter where you are on this journey, or where you happen to be in life, there is no judgment—there is no failure. It's understanding and trusting that your experiences—whether you may think of them as “good” or “bad”—are always happening *for* you at some level, even though you may not be able to see it until later. It means accepting that everything is a part of your learning as you gather understanding and wisdom through the experience—in the same way as you would allow little children to learn at their own pace.

Embracing this idea empowers you to let go of harsh self-judgment and honor yourself and the experiences you encounter as you journey through life. It enables you to approach yourself with understanding and kindness instead—to show yourself compassion when things are not as you would like them to be.

Whenever you notice that you are being self-critical or experiencing difficult emotions, take a self-compassion break.

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1. Recognize and name the difficult situation or emotion you're experiencing.

Example: "I'm feeling overwhelmed by this project."

2. Remind yourself that it's okay to feel this way and that others experience similar feelings.

Example: "It's normal to feel overwhelmed when facing a big task."

3. Use language or gestures that help you feel more at ease. This could be a reassuring phrase or a gentle touch.

Example: "I'm doing my best, and it's okay to take a break."

4. Write it down.

The more of your senses you engage, the more it helps you to better integrate the impact of this practice. Write yourself a self-compassion letter, as if you were writing to a close friend who is struggling. Address yourself warmly, acknowledging the difficulties you're facing and share understanding and compassion for the challenges you're experiencing. Provide positive and encouraging words to help you feel supported.

Dear *[Your Name]*,

I know you're going through a tough time right now... *(describe what is happening)*

(Describe how you are feeling as a result) ...it's completely understandable to feel this way, and you're not alone in this. You are doing your best, and that's enough. You have the strength to get through this.

With love and understanding,

[Your Name].

How did taking the break make a difference to how you felt? How did it feel to offer yourself such support and kindness?

“

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something—your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever.

- Steve Jobs

”

WORKSHEET 47: BUILD YOUR CONTINGENCY PLAN

This final worksheet is intended to help you create a personalized “contingency” plan that integrates various strategies and practices you’ve learned in this book into your day to manage anxiety, stress and overthinking. Think of this as your guideline or plan for how you can apply what you’ve learned, in the moment you need it most—when you’re faced with a distressing moment.

It’s not just about adding CBT to your routine; it’s also about pre-deciding that you will not let anxiety, overthinking, and stress take the day. Preparing for “trouble” ahead of time makes us more able to deal with the challenge. That is what this exercise is about—creating a contingency plan. And remember that it’s just that—a contingency, meaning that you may not need to use it because you’ve integrated many of the changes and you’re already tackling things as they happen—on autopilot.

When...	I will...
<i>Someone breaks a boundary, and I feel angry.</i>	<i>Spend some time reflecting on how to set the boundary and how to enforce it and then go ahead and do so.</i>
<i>I notice myself anxious about a project because of how big it is.</i>	<i>Use the Break Down Problems worksheet to break things down so I can stop worrying about it.</i>
<i>I’m feeling stressed and I’m not sure why.</i>	<i>Listen to my mood-boosting playlist and do the grounding exercise.</i>

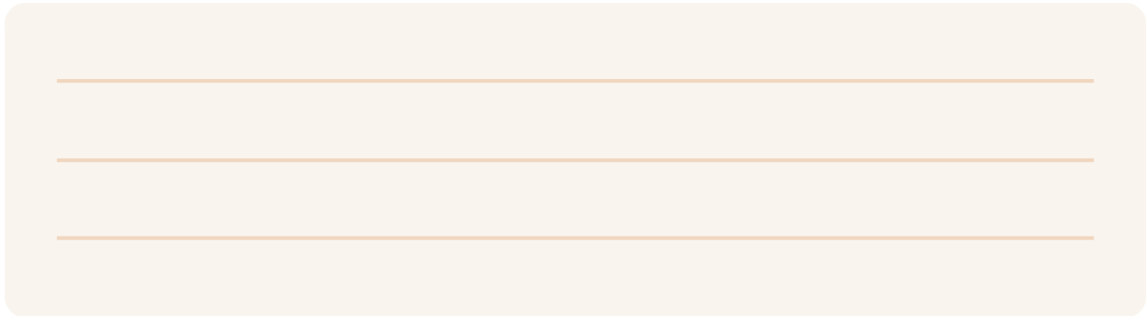
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Now you've completed your contingency plan, how does it feel?

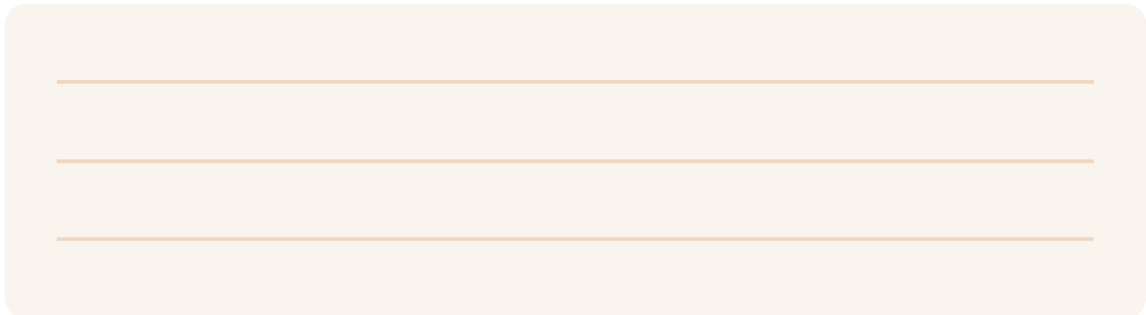
Chapter Reflections

Take some time to reflect on your Everyday CBT journey and plans. Remember to celebrate your progress, no matter how small. Acknowledge the moments when you successfully implement your strategies and celebrate yourself.

How have your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors changed since you started this workbook?

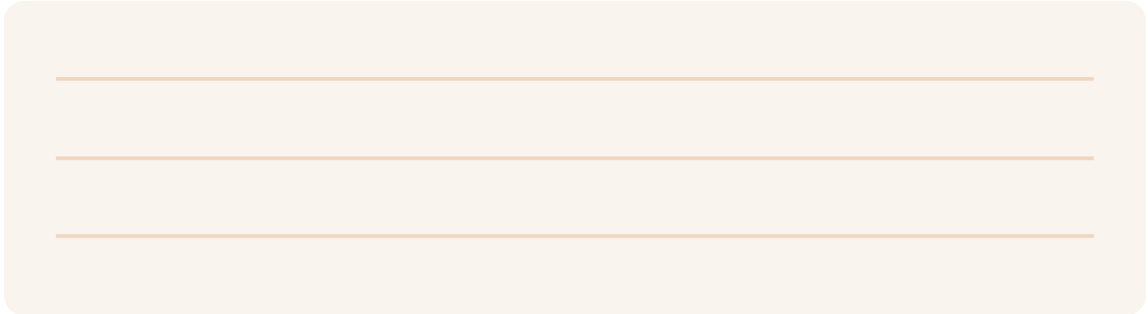


What are the key takeaways you have obtained that you want to carry with you into the future?

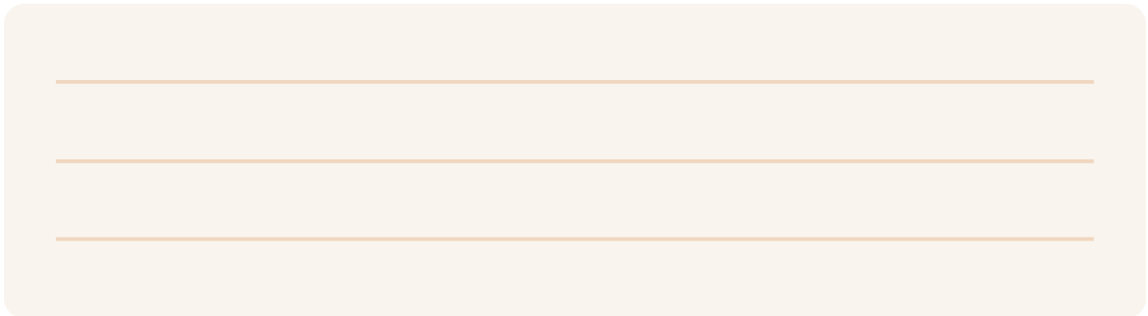


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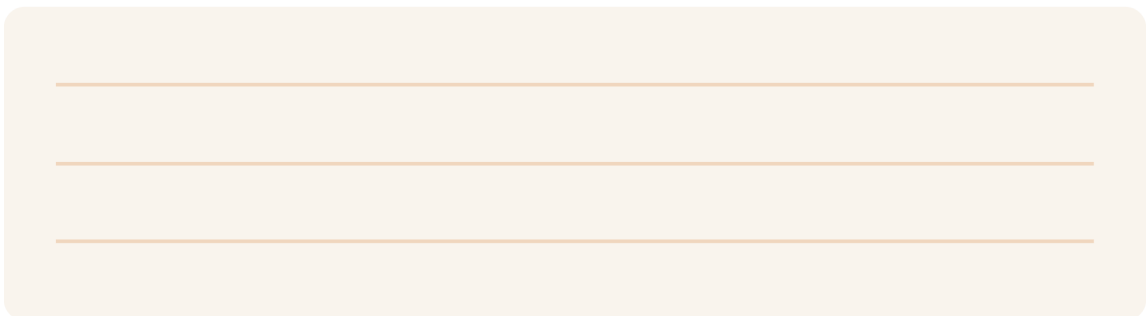
Which techniques or strategies from the workbook have become part of your everyday routine?



What challenges do you anticipate moving forward, and how will you use what you've learned to overcome them?

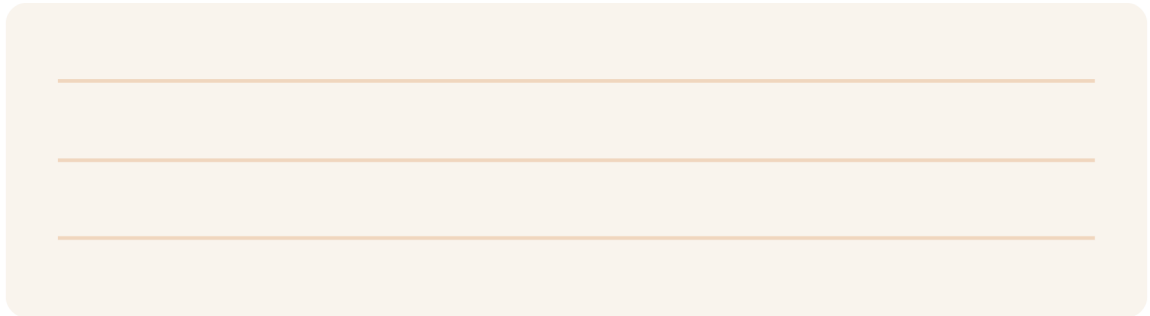


What's the next small step you can take to continue improving your mental well-being?



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What are you looking forward to the most?



A light beige rounded rectangular box with three horizontal lines for writing.



”

“Start by doing what’s
necessary, then do what’s
possible, and suddenly you
are doing the impossible.”

FRANCIS OF ASSISI



Onward!

WHEN WE BEGAN WORKING together, James had little energy. He felt tired and his days felt gray. On the outside, everything seemed fine, but inside, he was struggling. When he learned about CBT, he was skeptical about whether he could ever be free from the low moods that had become his norm. It was hard for him to imagine a version of himself that wasn't consumed by anxiety and stress. But something inside him told him he had to try anyway, even if he didn't yet believe. In the early days, things didn't feel much different. Some days were tough. Some of the exercises felt unfamiliar and difficult. But slowly, week by week, he started noticing small shifts. As he continued to work with the exercises, James realized that his anxiety was decreasing. The constant hum of stress in the back of his mind had quieted. He could sleep better at night, and for the first time in months, he started to feel more like himself again.

Today, he looks back and wonders how he ever got to that place of dread and is still amazed at how the small steps he took right at the beginning made such a big difference over time. He recognizes it's not just his anxiety and depression that are gone. He feels stronger, more in control of his thoughts and emotions, and more confident in handling challenges. He feels different, not just in himself but also in his relationships, and his sense of satisfaction and outlook on life.

Are there still moments when James catches himself overthinking and feeling stressed? Yes. But now he spots it when it happens and can stop it from getting the better of him. The worry

and anxiety that used to come over him no longer consume him and rob him of his well-being—he now has the tools to manage his mind in a way he didn’t know how to in the past.

Like James, you may have felt skeptical and uncertain at the start of this workbook. But as you’ve gone through this workbook, you, too, will have changed—perhaps in ways that you may never have expected. You’ve learned practical and simple CBT techniques to use every day to tackle stress, anxiety, and overthinking. You now know how your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all connected, and how you can change the cycle to positively influence your mental and emotional health. In the beginning, your thoughts were running away with you, but you’ve since learned how you can run them instead. You learned that you’re the one in charge.

You now know how to challenge your thoughts and deliberately choose alternative ones, how to problem-solve by breaking down problems into smaller chunks and how to put distance between you and your inner critic. Instead of getting caught up in negative spirals of overthinking, stress, and anxiety, you catch yourself and show yourself compassion. Mood tracking helped you to understand your emotional ups and downs—and that these ebbs and flows are okay. And you now have a deeper sense of control over your thoughts and emotions—because now, you have the tools—tools that you can apply in real-time whenever you need it, every day—for life.

As we wrap up this workbook, pull out the letter you wrote to your Future Self and take a moment to reflect on the journey you’ve taken.

Although you may think that you’re not yet fully there, one thing is sure—you are different now. The future in front of you is wide open, filled with possibilities that you couldn’t have seen when you first began. What can you now achieve that you couldn’t consider when you first started this workbook?

What is the life that you truly want to live, now that you know you can shape your thoughts, your emotions, and your future?

I encourage you to continue practicing these techniques until they become a natural part of who you are. Take small steps each and every day and remember that every positive change

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you make adds up over time. You will not only enhance your ability to function more effectively but one day, you'll look back and see how you've harnessed your power to create a more joyful, balanced life.

And in knowing that, I could not be happier.

Thank you.

Serena

A Special Request

Did you find the *Everyday CBT Workbook for Adults* helpful in any way?

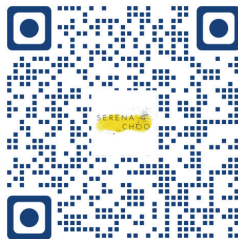
If you did, would you do me a small favor and leave a rating on the book? It will take no more than three clicks and you don't need to write anything unless you want to.

Posting a rating, and if you can, a one or two sentence review, is the best and easiest way to support my work. Your words will also encourage other people who could benefit from the book too.

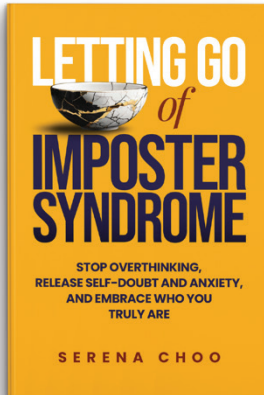
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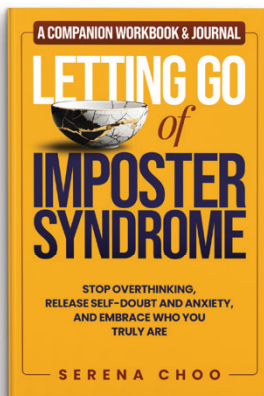


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Serena Choo has been a coach in the field of personal transformation for over 25 years, after working in the corporate worlds of accounting and investment banking.

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Serena would love to hear from you and reads every email she receives. If you have questions, or simply wish to let her know how her books have helped, please email her at serena@serenachoo.com.

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