Client Worksheet

Garden of the Mind Metaphor

Trauma recovery is like creating a garden. You begin by tending to the soil—adding in the right amount of nutrients, sun, and water that create an optimal environment for growth. When planting the garden of your mind, remember that you have a choice about what seeds you are planting. You can think of kindness, compassion, and wisdom as flowers that come from a well-tended garden of the mind.

You must, at times, also pull up the weeds. These are the thoughts that tell you that you are unworthy of love, not enough, or helpless to change your circumstances. In your garden, you can take the weeds and place them into the compost. There, they can be safely held and, in time, transformed into the rich, fertile earth.

What new seeds would you like to plant in the garden of your mind? What would you like to believe about yourself now? Perhaps you want to grow a new sense of self rooted in the knowledge that you are worthy of love, kindness, and respect. You get to choose what you want to grow and flourish in yourself and in your life.

It is important to take care of the new growth in your garden. The seeds you planted may still be fresh, green sprouts that require protection and careful tending. Ultimately, with the sunlight of your awareness, you can guide yourself to bloom into your full potential.

Client Worksheet

Invite Cognitive Reappraisal

Let's take a look at the following list of common negative beliefs. Are there any you identify with? If so, do you have a sense of where this belief comes from as related to your history?

- ❒ I am not good enough.
- ❒ I am a bad person.
- ❒ I cannot trust myself.
- ❒ I am not lovable.
- ❒ I am worthless.
- ❒ I am weak.
- ❒ I am damaged.
- ❒ I should have done something.
- ❒ I should have known better.
- ❒ I did something wrong.
- ❒ It is my fault.
- ❒ I am not safe.
- ❒ I can't trust anyone.
- ❒ I can't protect myself.
- ❒ I am not in control.
- ❒ I am powerless.
- ❒ I am helpless.

Pick one negative belief that you identified on the previous list, and examine this belief by asking yourself a few questions.

Do you know for sure that what you feel or believe is true?

_____

_____

What evidence do you have for this negative thought?

Can you find any evidence that suggests this belief is not true?

Are you holding yourself to an unrealistically high standard?

[*If the traumatic event happened in childhood*] You were just a child. Do you really believe that a child could be blamed for…?

Is the belief that you carry about yourself helpful for you?

Will this thought allow you to achieve your goals?

If a close friend of yours knew that you were having this thought, what would they say to you?

If someone you love was having this thought, what would you tell them?

Imagine receiving advice from your future self. What would the future you like to tell you? How does this information change your thoughts or beliefs about yourself?

_____

_____

Now let's take a look at the following list of positive beliefs. What would you like to believe about yourself now?

- ❒ I am good enough.
- ❒ I am a good person.
- ❒ I can trust myself now.
- ❒ I am lovable.
- ❒ I am worthy of love.
- ❒ I am strong.
- ❒ I am healthy and whole.
- ❒ I did the best that I could.
- ❒ I am doing the best that I can now.
- ❒ I can learn from difficult experiences.
- ❒ It was never my fault.
- ❒ It is over and I am safe now.
- ❒ I can choose whom to trust now.
- ❒ I can protect myself and take care of myself now.
- ❒ I have choices now.
- ❒ I can stand up for myself now.
- ❒ I am empowered.

Client Worksheet

Assessing Your Own Patterns of Thinking

It is possible to change thoughts that aren't serving you well or that are blocking you from your goals. But before you can do this, you need to become aware of the underlying thought patterns that you have in the first place. On this worksheet, you'll find a series of checklists that will help you to assess your typical patterns of thinking. You may find that you interpret situations in ways that may not make sense or may not be necessary in your current life. Then you can consider and observe how these thoughts affect your life.

Pessimism

One of most common patterns of thinking that increases worry, stress, and anxiety is *pessimism*. If you tend to expect the worst to happen, you are causing yourself to suffer, even before anything distressing has actually occurred. Read through the following statements to gauge the extent to which you engage in pessimistic thinking, checking off those that apply to you.

- ❒ When someone is late, I often imagine that something has gone wrong.
- ❒ I often believe that there is no use in trying. Things will never work out for me.
- ❒ When I want to make a request of someone, I expect that they will say no.
- ❒ When I need to accomplish something, I frequently expect to have difficulties.
- ❒ To prepare myself, it is best to expect that something is likely to go wrong.
- ❒ It is just my luck that things are not going to work out for me.
- ❒ I often prepare myself for bad things that never happen.
- ❒ I have found that most people will let you down in the end.
- ❒ It is hard for me to try because things seem so hopeless.

If you checked off more than three of these statements, you may have a tendency toward pessimistic thinking. But you don't have to interpret situations according to these expectations. You can replace these thoughts with coping thoughts, which allow you to experience less anxiety and distress. Coping thoughts for pessimism include statements

like "I don't know what is going to happen," "Let's wait and see before assuming anything," or "I can handle whatever happens." These thoughts are less likely to cause distress. Even if the situation does turn out badly, you will have reduced the amount of time you had to suffer. Why start suffering before you even experience anything negative?

Anticipation

Another common thought pattern you may experience is *anticipation*, in which you spend a great deal of time thinking about an upcoming event, considering different outcomes, and rehearsing how you could respond. While anticipation can be helpful in planning, it can lead you to focus too much time on potential problems that may never be relevant. Anticipation so often feels worse than the anticipated event itself! Check off any of the following statements that apply to you.

- ❒ I frequently find myself considering a problem from a variety of angles.
- ❒ It is difficult to stop myself from thinking about things that make me anxious.
- ❒ I try to have solutions for a variety of outcomes, no matter how unlikely.
- ❒ I need to think about an upcoming situation in detail in order to prepare myself.
- ❒ I frequently prepare responses to criticisms I expect (but don't receive) from others.
- ❒ When an important event is coming up, my thoughts about it interfere with my sleep.
- ❒ I am never sure that I have prepared myself enough for an upcoming event.
- ❒ I know that I dwell on upcoming events, but it seems necessary.
- ❒ When I daydream, it is almost always about negative events, not positive ones.

If you checked off more than three of these statements, you may be overusing anticipation. You may benefit from coping statements like "I have thought about this enough, and I will get through it" or "I can figure out what to do once I'm in the situation." Another way to replace anticipatory thoughts is to keep yourself engaged with other situations, activities, or topics that have a present-moment focus. This helps ground you to what is happening *right now* so you can stop thinking so much about the future. Engage in activities that are entertaining so you can enjoy each day as you experience it.

Mind Reading

Some people spend a great deal of time trying to figure out what other people are thinking in the hopes that they can please others or manage their reactions. While it is important to be considerate of what others might be thinking, it's easy to go too far and make assumptions that are based more on your own worries. This type of *mind reading* can increase distress because it focuses your attention on critical or negative thoughts that others *may* have about you or about something that concerns you. When you spend time trying to determine what is happening in another person's mind, you often make incorrect assumptions in the absence of any real evidence. To determine how much you may be mind reading, consider if any of the following statements apply to you.

- ❒ I often hear other people's criticisms of me in my mind, even when they've said nothing.
- ❒ I frequently prepare responses to people's statements before they have spoken.
- ❒ I expect others to have a negative view of me and am surprised by compliments.
- ❒ I frequently get the sense that I am a disappointment to others.
- ❒ I often assume that others are irritated with me, even when they deny it.
- ❒ I want to be prepared to defend myself against other people's opinions of me.
- ❒ I hesitate to ask for anything from others because I expect rejection.
- ❒ When I hear that someone is upset, I tend to assume I have something to do with it.
- ❒ I often don't believe what other people tell me they think, especially about me.

If you checked off more than three of these statements, you may have a tendency to engage in mind reading. Humans are social creatures, so we are often very concerned with the possibility of others criticizing or rejecting us. However, when there is no evidence to suggest that someone else has negative thoughts about you, you could benefit from replacing mind-reading thoughts with thoughts like "I can't know what they are thinking without discussing it with them" and "I can't please everyone, and it is not my job to do so anyway." You can also ask yourself, "Did the other person really say that, or am I just assuming?" Sometimes we worry too much about pleasing others, even people we barely know or may never see again! Although there are some people we need to be concerned about, like our work supervisors or family members, it is really

unnecessary (and impossible) to be liked and approved of by everyone. It's not always worth it to worry about what others think.

Catastrophizing

Catastrophizing involves responding to a small setback or minor difficulty as if it is a catastrophe. When your expectations are not met or when something goes wrong, it makes sense to feel frustrated or disappointed, but it doesn't mean your whole day has to be ruined. If you have ever lost your temper when you've been stopped by a red light, or completely panicked when you couldn't find your keys for several minutes, you have catastrophized. Catastrophic thoughts like "I'm going to be late and be seen as incompetent!" or "I won't be able to drive my car all day!" are just the kind to cause distress because they present the situation as one that is very threatening. Consider the following statements to see if you have a tendency to catastrophize.

- ❒ When something goes wrong, I tend to imagine the worst possible outcome.
- ❒ I tend to overreact to small setbacks.
- ❒ I often feel like giving up when I hit a snag in something I am working on.
- ❒ When something breaks, I have a tendency to see it as disastrous.
- ❒ I often feel like I can't cope with even one thing going wrong.
- ❒ I frequently get infuriated when someone makes a mistake that affects me.
- ❒ I admit that I can often make a mountain out of a molehill.
- ❒ I notice that other people interpret problems more calmly than I do.
- ❒ People have told me that I overreact to minor difficulties.

If you checked more than three of these statements, you may have a tendency to catastrophize. To calm yourself, try replacing catastrophic thinking with more realistic thoughts, like "Getting stuck at this traffic light will only make me arrive a minute later, and I can handle that" or "This is not the worst thing that could happen." The next time you encounter a difficulty that makes you want to catastrophize, take a breath and give yourself a few moments to adjust. Try not to jump to the conclusion that all is lost when you could be more hopeful about what the rest of the day will bring.

Perfectionistic Thinking

Although you might not realize it, *perfectionistic thinking* puts you in a constant state of fear: the fear of being imperfect. However, no one is perfect, so perfectionism creates a standard that is impossible to achieve. We will all inevitably fail, mess up, or have setbacks at times, and the immense self-criticism and disappointment that result from perfectionism create a sense of danger. Look over the following statements to consider whether you have a tendency toward perfectionistic thoughts.

- ❒ I have a great deal of difficulty admitting or accepting my mistakes.
- ❒ I believe there is a best way to do things, and I don't want to compromise.
- ❒ I try to hold myself to very high standards.
- ❒ It's important to expect a lot of myself and not allow any excuses.
- ❒ I want to be a careful, conscientious, and hard worker every day.
- ❒ I expect myself to be a high achiever in everything I undertake.
- ❒ I rarely am satisfied with my performance.
- ❒ It is hard to forgive myself for errors. Even minor ones haunt me.
- ❒ I expect myself to perform better than others in most situations.

If you checked off more than three of these statements, you may have a tendency toward perfectionistic standards. Many of us have been raised to believe that we should always do our best, and we may equate that with perfectionism, which is an exhausting and unreasonable ideal. Often, perfectionism involves the constant need to outshine others, do everything correctly, and know more than others. It comes with the expectation of complete and utter flawlessness, which is simply unsustainable. The reality is that we all have strengths and weaknesses. Further, you don't *always* need to do your best. If you were to give 100 percent when performing every single task (e.g., brushing your teeth, making your bed, preparing breakfast), you would be exhausted from the constant pressure by the end of the day. It's healthier to choose what to do your best at.

Perhaps the most obvious coping statement to replace perfectionistic thoughts is the simple reminder that "no one is perfect." When you catch yourself criticizing your imperfections or mistakes, let yourself off the hook and say, "I have talents and skills,

but I can't be perfect." It is healthy to see mistakes and imperfections as a normal part of being human.

Cognitive Fusion

When we take our thoughts too seriously—becoming so "fused" with them that it's hard to disentangle them from reality—we are experiencing *cognitive fusion*. We worry that simply thinking about something means that it will definitely happen, either through our own or others' actions. For example, someone might have the thought that their partner is cheating on them, and then believe that having this worry makes it true. However, it is actually very common for people to have random thoughts pop into their minds, and overestimating the importance of those thoughts is the source of the problem. For instance, someone who has intrusive thoughts about how deadly it would be to drive in front of a semitruck on the highway may be surprised to learn that most people experience thoughts like this—and having these thoughts does not mean they are in danger of killing themselves. Here are some statements to help you determine whether you experience cognitive fusion.

- ❒ When I have a worry, I often think that my worry is very likely to come true.
- ❒ I take my anxiety to be a clear indication that something is going to go wrong.
- ❒ Some of my thoughts truly frighten me.
- ❒ I often worry that I may act on thoughts that I have, even though I don't want to.
- ❒ When I think something will go wrong, it usually means that it will.
- ❒ I worry about what certain thoughts mean and what I will do as a result of them.
- ❒ If I think I can't do something, I know it's best to just give up.
- ❒ When images come into my mind, I can't help but think they will come true.
- ❒ I think it is important to take my thoughts very seriously.

If you checked off more than three of these items, you may have a tendency to overvalue your thoughts. To cope with the effects of cognitive fusion, remember not to accept thoughts without verification. Instead of taking them at face value, ask yourself, "What evidence supports this thought?" Remind yourself that simply having a thought doesn't mean that it will come true. Label your thoughts as only thoughts—for example: "I'm having the thought that I'm going to fail, but that doesn't mean I will." Try to be

observant of your thoughts and approach them with a healthy skepticism: "Although I'm aware of this pesky thought, I have no reason to put faith in it." Remind yourself that these thoughts have been wrong in the past.

Shoulds

When you frame your goals as *shoulds*, you are putting pressure on yourself that is not necessary for change to occur. These should statements can come in the form of thoughts about the need to behave in a correct way ("I *should* always be patient with my child and never lose my temper") or be a better person ("I *should* be more organized"). Because these statements increase guilt and shame, they typically increase distress rather than supporting the change process.

If the should statement is focused on something a person did that was objectively wrong ("I *should* not have said hurtful things to my friend in the heat of the argument"), the ensuing guilt can be helpful in encouraging the person to seek forgiveness, correct the behavior, and make a commitment to not repeat it. But guilt can be unhealthy when it comes from should statements that impart unrealistic self-blame or rigid, high standards. And should statements that cause shame are never healthy, as they simply make you believe that you are worthless or hopelessly flawed, while offering no clear way to resolve the situation or feel more positively about yourself. Consider the following statements to see if you have a tendency to "should" yourself.

- ❒ I know I should be a better person.
- ❒ I frequently tell myself what I should do or how I should be.
- ❒ While I don't necessarily say "I should…" out loud, I frequently think it to myself.
- ❒ I beat myself up when I've hurt someone's feelings.
- ❒ I have high expectations for myself.
- ❒ When I set a goal for myself, I can be very hard on myself.
- ❒ I tend to be harder on myself than on other people.
- ❒ I hate it when I feel like I've let someone down.
- ❒ It is difficult for me to tell someone no.
- ❒ I often suspect that others are disappointed with me.

- ❒ If someone wants something, it's easy for them to guilt me into doing it for them.
- ❒ I feel ashamed about who I have become.

If you checked off more than three of these statements, you may often feel like you are not measuring up to some standard. However, it's important to ask yourself where this standard came from. Oftentimes, we set unreasonable expectations for ourselves that only serve to perpetuate anxiety, guilt, and shame. While expectations can motivate you to improve yourself and your relationships with others, when you are constantly "shoulding" yourself, you are holding on to guilt and shame that will increase your suffering. Part of you may believe it would be wrong to stop suffering, but do guilt and shame lead to beneficial results for you and others, or are you stuck in a useless cycle of suffering?

One way to overcome self-critical should statements is to replace "I should" with a preference statement, such as "I want to," "I would prefer it if," or "I would like to." These statements are less emotionally charged and don't get you stuck in the same cycle of anxiety, guilt, disappointment, frustration, and shame. For example, instead of berating yourself by saying "I should exercise more," see what it's like to use a preference statement instead: "I would like to exercise more."

In addition, if you find that you are "shoulding" yourself in response to some healthy standard—for example, perhaps you didn't treat someone as kindly as you would have liked to—you can benefit from making reparations and then practicing thoughts that focus on the present and future: "The best thing I can do is commit myself to engaging in better behaviors today and in the future" or "Guilt and shame keep me focused on the past. What do I want to do *today* that makes a difference in someone's life?" You can also work to let go of the guilt and shame by replacing should statements with coping statements, such as "When I acted that way, I did not intend to create the harm I did" or "I was not the only cause of the situation; other people's decisions and actions played a role too."

Client Worksheet

Combating Negative Automatic Thoughts

To get into the habit of challenging negative automatic thoughts, read through the following example, which takes you through the steps involved in modifying a distressing thought and replacing it with a more useful coping thought. Then practice applying the steps to a negative automatic thought of your own using the blank template.

Negative automatic thought	When I attend the church potluck, I'll say something that will make people laugh at or criticize me.
Has this ever happened? How many times? What was the situation?	This has happened, but not at church. Several times I was laughed at and criticized in a group setting like this. That was in high school.
Evidence that this is (or is not) likely to occur	The people at church tend to be kind with me and with one another. I chose this location for this step because I know that.
Actual chance of this happening (0%–100%)	I think I can be cautious about what I say, and because they are kind, the probability is only about 5%–10%.
How to cope	If someone does laugh or criticize, I can laugh along at myself or I can listen to them and say, "That's a good point."
Coping thought	I don't have to be perfect, and I can handle possible criticism. I just need to stay there and get through it and I'll have succeeded.

Combating Negative Automatic Thoughts

Negative automatic thought	
Has this ever happened? How many times? What was the situation?	
Evidence that this is (or is not) likely to occur	
Actual chance of this happening (0%–100%)	
How to cope	
Coping thought	