



WELL-BEING WEEK IN LAW

WELL-BEING WEEK IN LAW ACTIVITY PLANNING GUIDE



STAY STRONG
Physical Well-Being



ALIGN
Spiritual Well-Being



ENGAGE & GROW
Career & Intellectual Well-Being



CONNECT
Social Well-Being



FEEL WELL
Emotional Well-Being

Activity Title:	Retraining Unhelpful Thoughts
Well-Being Dimension:	Emotional Well-Being
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Activity Objective:

To alter habitual thinking patterns to enhance mental health by (1) realizing that our automatic unhelpful thoughts or cognitive distortions cause negative feelings or cognitive distortions and (2) substituting more realistic thoughts—which, ideally will lead to feeling better.

Well-Being Connection (How/Why Does this Work?)

Much research has established that cognitive behavioral therapy techniques can prevent or reduce symptoms of mental health conditions. According to cognitive behavioral therapy, our thoughts impact how we feel, which impacts our behaviors. By intentionally pushing back on automatic unhelpful thoughts we will feel better and also be able to choose behaviors (rather than acting on automatic pilot) that are in better alignment with our goals and values.

Procedure

ACTIVITY #1: Prepare a Mood Log

In the first activity, you'll prepare a Mood Log, which will help you begin to identify what your common mental triggers and habits are that generate good and bad moods that accumulate to impact mental health. Here's what to do:

STEP 1: Download the freely available [Thought Record Worksheet](#) (provided by PositivePsychology.com) as a tool to track your thoughts. You also can just use a sheet of notebook paper, if that's easier for you!

STEP 2: For at least 3 consecutive days, use the Worksheet to capture your mood and associated thoughts:

- As your mood shifts, reflect on your associated thoughts. How are the thoughts or the story running through your mind impacting your mood?
- Capture these moods and thoughts on the Worksheet.
- Review the attached Unhelpful Thinking Habits chart, which identifies common types of non-productive self-talk. Do any look familiar to you? People often have tendencies for certain types of self-talk.

Procedure

STEP 3: After you've completed the Worksheet for 3 days, review the data you've collected.

- What trends emerge?
- Do certain people, activities, or interactions tend to elicit particular moods?
- How do you naturally capitalize on the positive experiences? How do you reframe the negative experiences?

ACTIVITY #2: Practice Curbing Effects of Negative Thoughts

The next activity picks up where Activity 1 leaves off. Now that you have a sense for your mental habits, you can start practicing the intentional separation of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors by countering your unhelpful self-talk.

- Refer to the [Thought Record Worksheet](#).
- Again, for a few days, notice as your mood shifts, and reflect on your associated thoughts. How are the thoughts or the story running through your mind impacting your mood? Capture these moods and thoughts on the Worksheet.
- Now, move on to the last two columns of the Thought Record Worksheet and also record potential Alternative Thoughts and your evaluation of likely Outcomes.
- How can you more intentionally capitalize on positive experiences? How can you more intentionally notice your automatic negative thoughts and either let them go or reframe them?

KEEP PRACTICING

Unhelpful thinking habits accumulate over decades. Learning to more effectively respond to your automatic thoughts will take more than a few days' work! Learning new emotion regulation skills is a long-term (life-long) process of incremental improvement. The journey will be worth it!

To help you continue to practice and grow, you can refer to these additional worksheets that provide information and exercises to help curb unhelpful thoughts and cognitive distortions:

- [How To Be Happier? Make It A Priority](#)
- [Taming Negative Emotions](#)
- [Reframe Stress & Adversity](#)

Additional resources also are provided below.

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Resources

- Ackerman, C. E. (2020). [Cognitive Distortions: When Your Brain Lies to You](#). PositivePsychology.com.
- Russ Harris, [The Confidence Gap: A Guide to Overcoming Fear and Self-Doubt](#). Drawing on the techniques of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a cutting-edge form of cognitive-behavioral therapy, Harris explains how to transform your relationship with fear and anxiety; clarify your core values and use them as your motivation; and use mindfulness to effectively handle negative thoughts and feelings.
- Susan David (2016). [Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life](#).
- Shirzad Chamine (2012). [Positive Intelligence: Why Only 20% of Teams and Individuals Achieve Their True Potential and How You Can Achieve Yours](#).
- Steven Hayes (2015). [Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life: The New Acceptance and Commitment Therapy](#) (among the few self-help workbooks that have been the subject of research and found to be beneficial for mental health).
- Alex Korb (2015). [Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time](#).
- Susan David (2018). [The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage](#). TED Talk, 16 mins. Psychologist Susan David shares how the way we deal with our emotions shapes everything that matters: our actions, careers, relationships, health and happiness. Author of *e*
- Guy Winch (2019). [How to Turn Off Work Thoughts During Free Time](#). TED Talk, 12:16.
- Anne Brafford (2020). [Resilient Thinking For Lawyers Part I: Taming Negative Emotions](#), Lawyer Well-Being Channel, 1 hr 29 mins. Guided by a downloadable [Worksheet](#), Anne gives 6 steps for resilient thinking based on positive psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy.
- Anne Brafford (2020). [Resilient Thinking for Lawyers Part II: Boosting Positive Emotions](#), Lawyer Well-Being Channel, 1hr. Guided by a downloadable [Worksheet](#), Anne explains 8 science-backed activities for boosting positive emotions.

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Authors

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RE-TRAINING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

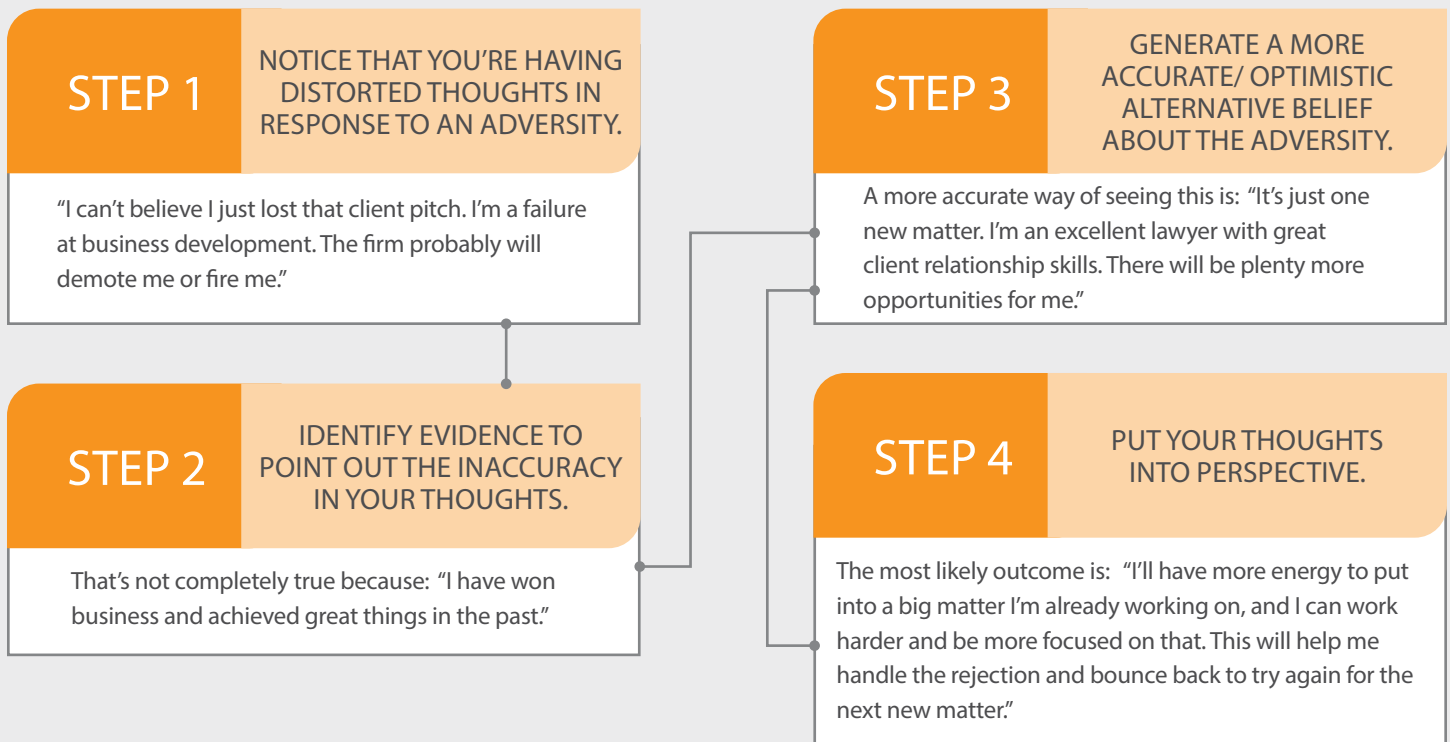


Our brains are continuously chattering at us. And while much of it is valid and helpful, a good portion of it is not. Our brains are hardwired to protect us from danger (which was critical during evolution), which means that our brains now are biased in favor of noticing bad things, predicting and worrying about threat, and ruminating about bad things that happened in the past. In short: Bad is stronger than good. The result is that we often have distorted thoughts about ourselves, others, and the world around us. These distorted thoughts often are sneaky and barely conscious, which can make them hard to detect and change.

But it's important to try because they can affect our thoughts, mood, and behaviors in ways that undermine our mental health, work functioning, and relationships.

Cognitive distortions come in many forms but there are some common patterns that most of us have. Labeling and learning them can help us detect and curb them. A chart of some of the most common cognitive distortions are in the attached chart. Below are four steps to help re-train your brain to notice distorted thoughts and take action to curb their negative effects.

4 STEPS TO CURB EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE THOUGHTS



Author: Anne M. Brafford, JD, MAPP, PhD Candidate | abrafford@aspire.legal

Sources:

Ackerman, C. E. (2020). [Cognitive distortions: When your brain lies to you](#). PositivePsychology.com.

Reivich, K., & Shatté, A. (2002). The resilience factor: 7 essential skills for overcoming life's inevitable obstacles.

UNHELPFUL THINKING HABITS



ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

Black-and-white thinking—seeing things in extremes with no shades of gray.

EXAMPLE: It's not a complete success, so it's a failure. It's not fantastic, so it's awful.



"SHOULD" STATEMENTS

Thoughts about what you or others "should" do, "ought" to do, or "must" do. When we and others don't live up to these rigid standards, we feel disappointed or angry.

EXAMPLE: I must be promoted by next year or I'm a failure.



OVERGENERALIZING

If any part of it is bad, it's all bad and probably will always be bad.

EXAMPLE: You receive some critical feedback, and you think you're a fraud and probably won't make it in your job.



PERSONALIZING

Everything has to do with you—taking everything personally and blaming yourself even when there's no logical reason for believing this.

EXAMPLE: It's all my fault that we lost that motion.



DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVE

Discounting or ignoring good things and dampening positive emotions.

EXAMPLE: You receive a compliment and discount it as someone trying to manipulate you or just be nice.



FORTUNE TELLING & MIND READING

With little evidence, feeling certain that you know what will happen or what others are thinking—and it's bad.

EXAMPLE: You think that a supervisor is mad at you and is going to give you a bad review based solely on a facial expression.



BELIEVING EVERYTHING YOU THINK

Accepting your emotions or mental chatter as fact. "I feel it or think it, so it must be true."

EXAMPLE: You feel jittery and are bombarded by mental chatter that you're a bad speaker and will screw up an upcoming presentation. Just because you feel/think it doesn't make it true.



MAGNIFY OR MINIMIZE

Exaggerate or minimize the meaning, importance, or likelihood of things.

EXAMPLE: You're good at what you do but, after one mistake, believe you're terrible at what you do. Or, you receive a glowing compliment about your work and continue to believe that you're mediocre at what you do.