

Thinking Traps Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Life is full of challenges, and our minds often try to make sense of them by jumping to conclusions, focusing on the negatives, or predicting the worst. These patterns, known as thinking traps, are common and can shape how we feel, how we act, and how we see the world. While these traps can feel automatic and believable, they often limit our ability to see situations clearly and respond effectively.

This worksheet is designed to help you identify and understand your thinking traps, challenge unhelpful patterns, and reframe your perspective in a healthier, more balanced way. By taking the time to reflect and question your thoughts, you can reduce emotional distress, improve decision-making, and foster a greater sense of control over your life.

Type of thinking trap	Definition	Example
Catastrophizing:	Assuming the worst-case scenario will happen.	"I'll fail this test, and my career will be ruined."
Black-and-white thinking:	Viewing situations in extremes, ignoring the nuances.	"I didn't get the job; I'm a complete failure."
Mind reading	Believing you know what others think about you.	"They think I'm incompetent."
Fortune telling:	Predicting a negative outcome without evidence.	"This meeting will be a disaster."
Filtering:	Focusing only on negative aspects and ignoring positives.	"I messed up on one point, so my whole presentation was bad."
Over-generalization:	Applying one negative event to all similar situations.	"I always mess up in interviews."
Emotional reasoning:	Assuming your feelings reflect reality.	"I feel anxious, so something bad must be happening."
Labeling:	Using negative labels to describe yourself or others.	"I'm stupid," or "They're lazy."
Exaggerated responsibility:	Believing you're entirely at fault for bad outcomes.	"It's all my fault the project failed."
Unrealistic standards:	Setting unattainable expectations for yourself or others.	"I should never make mistakes."

Overcoming your thinking traps

Recognizing and overcoming thinking traps takes practice, but it's a skill that can make a big difference in how you navigate life's challenges. Next time you're feeling upset or overwhelmed by a situation, take a moment to pause and work through the following steps. This process can help you gain clarity, challenge unhelpful thoughts, and find a more balanced way to approach the situation:

Step 1: Identify thinking traps

What is the situation?

Start by describing the event or scenario that is upsetting or overwhelming you. Getting it down on paper can help make it feel more manageable.

What are your initial thoughts?

Write down everything that's going through your mind. Don't filter or judge—just let your thoughts flow.

What are you feeling?

Try to describe the emotions you are feeling right now ?

Can you identify any thinking traps?

Refer to the thinking trap list on the first page. Do you think any of these could be affecting your perspective on the situation? List them here:

Step 2: Challenge your thoughts

Take a moment to question your thoughts and see if they hold up. Use these prompts to guide you:

What evidence supports this thought?

What makes you think this thought is true? Are there facts or examples that back it up?

What evidence contradicts this thought?

What examples and suggests this thought might not be accurate? What facts or experiences challenge it?

What would you say to a friend in this situation?

If someone you care about was in this same situation, what advice or reassurance would you give them?

What are the possible outcomes, and how realistic is each one?

Think about the range of outcomes—from worst-case to best-case scenarios. How likely is each outcome, realistically?

Step 3: Moving past the negative thoughts

Reframe your thinking

Now that you've explored your thoughts, take a moment to reframe them. What's a more balanced, realistic way to view this situation?

Plan your next steps

Based on your new perspective, think about the practical steps you can take to improve the situation and best move forward.

What actions can you take to address the problem or ease your stress?

What resources, people, or strategies could help?

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