

Cognitive Restructuring Questions

Many of our thoughts have an unrealistic negative tinge to them, and asking these questions of our thoughts can give us more perspective and a balanced view. Fill out the whole form for one of your distressing thoughts. See which questions are the most helpful for you in de-escalating your negative thinking. Then use that subset of questions for future cognitive restructuring of thoughts. The more you ask these questions of your thoughts, the more your mind will start to do this on it's own and have a more balanced perspective in the situations you struggle in.

Situation that causes distress or avoidance:

List your thoughts related to this situation:

Choose one salient thought from above. If this thought is true, why is this a problem (to get to your deeper concern)?

TRUTH OF THOUGHTS

1. Do I know for certain that this is true? Am I 100% certain that it is true? Can I absolutely know if this is true? Would I bet a loved one's life that this is true?
2. What are some alternative ways of viewing this? What is the evidence against the thought? Are there times I have thought this and it has not come true? What are examples from others' lives that refute this thought? How might others see this situation? How important will this situation be when I am 80?
3. What could be the effect of changing my thinking? Of releasing my attention from this one small portion of this situation and looking at the situation as a whole?

FUNCTION OF THOUGHTS

4. How old is this line of thinking for me? How familiar is it? Has it been around for awhile?
5. What is the function of this thought?
6. What behavior does it make me want to do? How does it make me want to act towards others & myself?
7. When thinking this thought, how do I feel in my body? Do I feel lighter, freer, more spacious? Do I feel heavier, denser, more constricted?

WORKABILITY OF THOUGHTS

8. Does believing these thoughts and doing the behaviors they tell me to do work for me? Has this worked in the long run as a way of fully facing and engaging with what I value in my life?
9. How does thinking this way work for me in terms of living a rich and full life? If I let myself really believe this thought...if I allow it to have influence over my actions, does this thought help me live a meaningful life?

10. If somehow this thought could be extracted from my mind and I could no longer think it... Who would I be without this thought? How would my body feel? How would I think and feel? How would I act?

11. Just because thoughts arise in my head, I do not have to buy into them and give them my full attention. What would be the effect on my life if I repeatedly moved my attention from this thought to action directed in line with my values?

ANXIOUS THINKING

12. What is the worst that can happen? Can you live through the worst that can happen? What is the best that can happen? What is the most likely?

13. The Gun Test is an aid to help you distinguish between what you intellectually and logically know from the emotional feeling of certainty you want. Imagine there is a gun pointed at you, and you get a single guess about your concern (for example, Will this particular contamination kill your children? Does this pain in your chest mean you have cancer?). You will only have one guess, and if you guess wrong, you and they will be killed. You don't have to be confident in your guess, but you do have to guess, what is your guess?

BOLSTERING OPTIMISM

14. 3 Positive outcomes: What are 3 ways that the current situation could work out to my advantage?

15. Victim Story to Hero Story: If I triumphed over the current situation in 2 years, what would I be thinking and feeling? What is one way your path could go where you overcome this situation and you are living a much more fulfilled life? What would a hero story look like?

16. What are 3 things that are going well or right in your life right now? List big or small things that are working out in your life today (e.g., your body is functioning, you have food, someone cares about you etc...)

17. If I chose this set of circumstances before this life-time so I could learn, grown and evolve into a whole other level of myself in this lifetime, what is the lesson I am learning here? What is this experience shaping me into?

REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE: After thinking through the questions above, what is a more workable way to view and relate to the original negative thought?
