

CBT for Kids Workbook

Learn and practice core ideas from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), an effective treatment for many childhood mental health disorders

- **Thought Record for Kids**
- **Cognitive Distortions for Kids**
- **Fear Hierarchy for Kids**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment for many mental health disorders and can be useful for children as young as six. **This workbook is designed to introduce the core ideas behind CBT for children, and help kids and parents practice CBT techniques at home.** By engaging with these worksheets, you can take active steps toward better mental health and well-being for your child.

Here is a brief introduction to each worksheet included in this package:

Thought Record for Kids

This worksheet helps kids and their parents break experiences down into thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors. This exercise helps kids and parents slow down, understand their difficult thoughts and big feelings, and decide how to cope.

Cognitive Distortions for Kids

This worksheet helps kids and parents identify and challenge negative thoughts, and replace them with more balanced and positive ones. This exercise can reduce negative thinking and promote a healthier mindset.

Fear Hierarchy

This worksheet helps kids and parents break a child's fear down into manageable pieces and make a plan to tackle it together. This exercise helps kids break the connection between their fear and their anxious response, one step at a time.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*



Thought Record for Kids

When our kids have big emotions, it can be helpful to check in with their thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors. This check-in process helps them slow down, so you can understand their experience and you can decide how to cope together. We've written in a few examples below to show you how to use this worksheet.

What happened? Write about what happened. What caused your big feeling?

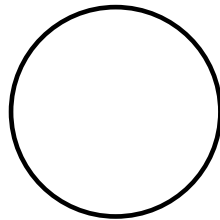
- *Someone teased me during recess and other kids laughed*
- *I got blamed for something that wasn't my fault*
- *My friend told me she can't come over to my house this weekend like we planned*

What did you think? What words or pictures went through your head?

- *Everyone must think I'm dumb. I don't think I can show my face at school tomorrow*
- *This always happens to me! It's not fair!*
- *Is she mad at me? Did I do something wrong? Does she not like me anymore?*

How did you feel?

Choose from the emojis below, or draw your feeling.



How did your body feel?

Check off any body sensations.

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fast heartbeat | <input type="checkbox"/> Tired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fast breathing | <input type="checkbox"/> Slouched |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shaky or dizzy | <input type="checkbox"/> Curled up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tense muscles | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweaty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too much energy | <input type="checkbox"/> Frozen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fidgety | <input type="checkbox"/> Unsteady |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flushed face | <input type="checkbox"/> Pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teeth clenching | <input type="checkbox"/> Numb |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lump in my throat | <input type="checkbox"/> Pain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too hot | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too cold | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

What did you do? What actions did you take? Or, what did you feel like doing?

- *I just stood there and looked at the ground. I felt like crying and running away*
- *I clenched my fists and stomped my feet. I felt like yelling and throwing something*
- *I just said "Okay" and walked away. I didn't want her to look at me*

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Thought Record for Kids

When our kids have big emotions, it can be helpful to check in with their thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors. This check-in process helps them slow down, so you can understand their experience and you can decide how to cope together. This page is blank so you and your child can write in their answers.

What happened?

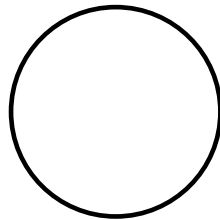
Write about what happened. What caused your big feeling?

What did you think?

What words or pictures went through your head?

How did you feel?

Choose from the emojis below, or draw your feeling.



How did your body feel?

Check off any body sensations.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Too cold | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

What did you do?

What actions did you take? Or, what did you feel like doing?

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Thought Record for Kids

Our kids' thoughts and feelings are important! They give our kids (and you) important information. But sometimes, thoughts and feelings can be so out of proportion that kids may need some help regulating. Here are four sets of questions to help your child regulate using their thoughts, sensations, feelings, and/or behaviors.

Thoughts

- Is my thought helpful, true, or kind?
- If not, is there another way to think about this situation?
- Learn about cognitive distortions
- Is there a problem to solve? Who could help me with that problem?

Sensations

- Is my environment too hot, loud, bright, or crowded?
- Is my environment too cold, quiet, or dark?
- Is my body feeling too tense or energetic?
Can I stretch, exercise, or take deep breaths?
- Is my body feeling too sluggish? How can I get my body moving again?

Feelings

- Do I need to let my feelings out?
 - Talk to a family member, friend, or pet
 - Draw or write about my feelings
 - Sing, hum, dance, or move to music that helps me feel better

Behaviors

- Do I need to take a break?
- Is there something I can do to get my mind off my feelings?
 - Make or draw something
 - Play a game, take a walk, ride my bike
 - Relax with music, reading, or a bath
 - Spend time with someone I love

What did you try?

Did a regulation idea work the way you hoped?

What will you try next time?

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Cognitive Distortions for Kids

When our kids are feeling really worried, sad, angry, or overwhelmed, sometimes their brains can get stuck in certain “modes,” or ways of thinking. These are ways of thinking that aren’t *actually* true, but *feel* true in the moment. For example, if your child makes one mistake, their brain might go into All-or-Nothing Mode and think, “I’m bad at everything,” even though that is not true. When we help them name these modes, it can be easier to help them see a situation from a new perspective. Here are six common modes and some examples of what they sound like.

Fortune Teller Mode

Our brains are in fortune teller mode when they predict that the *worst* possible outcomes are going to happen in the future. This is also called “catastrophizing.”

I think I failed my math test today. I’m probably going to flunk for the rest of the year. What if I have to repeat the whole grade?!



Mind Reader Mode

Our brains are in mind reader mode when they take guesses at what other people are thinking. However, our brains feel *really sure* that their guesses are right.

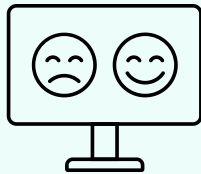
My first day at my new school was awkward. I bet the other kids think I’m shy and weird. I bet none of them want to be friends.



All-or-Nothing Mode

Our brains are in all-or-nothing mode when they only see things in extremes. This is also called “black and white thinking.”

If this audition doesn’t go well, then I’ll be a total failure at dance. It doesn’t matter that I was good at dance in the past.



All My Fault Mode

Our brains are in all my fault mode when they are *sure* something is all our fault, even if that’s not really true.

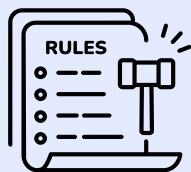
I missed my friend’s text when he was upset. If I had answered, he would have felt better. So it’s my fault that he had a bad day.



I Should / I Must Mode

Our brains are in I should / I must mode when it seems like there are rigid rules about how you are always supposed to behave, with no room for mistakes.

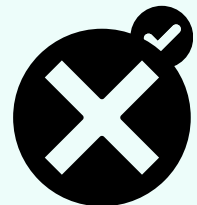
I can’t believe I dropped that pass. I should always give 100 percent. I can’t ever make a mistake.



Ignoring the Positive Mode

Our brains are in ignoring the positive mode when a mix of good, bad, and neutral things happen, but only the bad things seem to matter.

My grades just got posted. It’s not important that I got my grade up in Science - my grade in Social Studies is still low.



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Cognitive Distortions for Kids

To help you or your child become more familiar with this, draw a line to match the examples to each mode.

To be a good friend, I always have to be fun. I can't ever be in a bad mood.

1

It doesn't matter that I got chosen for a part in the play. I didn't get the lead role.

2

My classmate got in trouble. He must be a really bad person.

3

She didn't laugh at my joke. She doesn't think I'm funny at all.

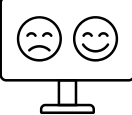
4


My teacher punished the whole class, but it's probably because I was too loud.

5

I haven't made any friends yet. I'll never make friends in my whole life.

6


A  **All-or-Nothing Mode**
Black and white; no room for gray

B  **Mind Reader Mode**
"Knowing" what someone is thinking

C  **Ignoring the Positive Mode**
When only bad things seem to matter

D  **Fortune Teller Mode**
Predicting the worst future outcome

E  **All My Fault Mode**
Being sure something is your fault

F  **I Should / I Must Mode**
Rigid rules about what you have to do

Answers: 1=F, 2=C, 3=A, 4=B, 5=E, 6=D

Is your child experiencing a cognitive distortion? Write down their thought below:

.....

.....

Which cognitive distortion does the thought match? Why?

.....

.....

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Cognitive Distortions for Kids

If your child is experiencing a cognitive distortion, you can help them practice looking at a situation in a new way. Use the ideas and examples below to try a new perspective.

Ask, what would you say if your best friend said this?

Focus on what you know in the present moment

Get more flexible by brainstorming “maybe”s

Balance the positives and negatives with “and”

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Mind Reader Mode “Knowing” what someone is thinking | <i>She didn't laugh at my joke. She doesn't think I'm funny at all.</i> | → | <i>Maybe she didn't like that joke or she's heard it before. Maybe she has a different sense of humor from mine.</i> |
| Ignoring the Positive Mode When only bad things seem to matter | <i>It doesn't matter that I got chosen for a part in the play. I didn't get the lead role.</i> | → | <i>I didn't get the lead in the play - AND - I was the first choice for the role I did get.</i> |
| Fortune Teller Mode Predicting the worst future outcome | <i>I haven't made any friends yet. I'll never make friends in my whole life.</i> | → | <i>Right now, I'm still working on making friends. I'm going to keep trying.</i> |
| All My Fault Mode Being sure something is your fault | <i>My teacher punished the whole class, but it's probably because I was too loud.</i> | → | <i>You probably weren't the only person being loud if the whole class got in trouble.</i> |
| I Should / I Must Mode Rigid rules about what you have to do | <i>To be a good friend, I always have to be fun. I can't ever be in a bad mood.</i> | → | <i>Everybody gets into a bad mood sometimes. That doesn't mean you're a bad friend, just human!</i> |
| All or Nothing Mode Black and white; no room for gray | <i>My classmate got in trouble. He must be a really bad person.</i> | → | <i>Maybe he was just having a bad day. Maybe good kids can make mistakes. Maybe the teacher was being unfair.</i> |

With your child, try writing a new, more balanced thought to replace their distorted thought:

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Fear Hierarchy for Kids

This worksheet is designed to help you and your child overcome their fears, one small step at a time. Start by helping them identify their primary fear, then break the fear down in to smaller examples and have your child rate each from least to most anxiety-provoking. Next, you and your child will tackle each example together, starting with the least anxiety-provoking. As you work through each example, your child's nervous system will begin to break the connection between the fear and their anxiety symptoms.

STEP 1: What is your primary fear?

Example: Fear of thunderstorms

STEP 2: List smaller challenges that are related to your primary fear

Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone

Standing outside in the rain (with no thunderstorm present)

Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show

Seeing and hearing a thunderstorm through a window

Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)

Watching the weather forecast

Opening the front door and looking outside during a thunderstorm

STEP 3: Rate these challenges with the Anxiety Scale

| Challenges That Trigger Your Fear | Anxiety Level |
|---|---------------|
| <i>Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone</i> | 2 |
| <i>Standing outside in the rain (with no thunderstorm present)</i> | 6 |
| <i>Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show</i> | 4 |
| <i>Seeing and hearing a thunderstorm through a window</i> | 7 |
| <i>Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)</i> | 5 |
| <i>Watching the weather forecast</i> | 3 |
| <i>Opening the front door and looking outside during a thunderstorm</i> | 8 |

Anxiety Scale

10 panic

9 

8 fearful

7 

6 afraid

5 

4 worried

3 

2 okay

1 

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Fear Hierarchy for Kids

STEP 4: Prepare for challenges

What makes this technique effective is **staying in the situation until your child's anxiety naturally comes down on its own**. This process is what helps your child's nervous system to learn that the feared situation is tolerable (and teaches your child's mind that situations are not as scary as they may think!).

As you can imagine, facing your fears and waiting for your anxiety to come down is difficult! So here are two ways to prepare for the challenge.

List effective coping skills in case they're needed

If a situation is far more challenging than anticipated, you and your child may need to use coping skills like taking a break, deep breathing, listening to music, hugs, or taking a walk. List effective coping skills for your child to the right.

deep breaths, favorite song, hugs

.....

.....

.....

Plan some appropriate rewards

Facing fears takes practice and motivation! Use the space to the right to consider small, appropriate rewards you are willing to give like stickers, tokens towards a larger reward, small treats, or similar.

tokens for new stuffed animal, LEGO

stickers, hot chocolate

.....

.....

STEP 5: Plan your challenges and rewards, starting with the least scary

| Challenges That Trigger Your Fear | Anxiety Level | Reward Per Try |
|---|---------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone</i> | 2 | <i>sticker</i> |
| <i>Watching the weather forecast</i> | 3 | <i>sticker</i> |
| <i>Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show</i> | 4 | <i>token towards toy</i> |
| <i>Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)</i> | 5 | <i>token towards toy</i> |
| <i>Standing outside in the rain (with no thunderstorm present)</i> | 6 | <i>token towards toy</i> |
| <i>Seeing and hearing a thunderstorm through a window</i> | 7 | <i>treat</i> |
| <i>Opening the front door and looking outside during a thunderstorm</i> | 8 | <i>treat</i> |






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Fear Hierarchy for Kids

STEP 3: Do challenges together and record your progress

At the beginning of each challenge, use the Anxiety Scale to help your child rate their anxiety. Your goal together is to **stay in the scary situation until your child's anxiety naturally comes down on its own**. Every so often through the challenge, ask your child to re-rate their anxiety. You can stop the challenge when their anxiety has come down significantly (at least halfway). Unless a challenge is much too difficult or your child gets really stuck, try not to use coping skills. When the same challenge causes less *starting* anxiety, you'll know your child is ready to move on to the next.

| Date | Challenges That Trigger Your Fear | Anxiety At: | | Anxiety Scale |
|--------|--|-------------|-----|---|
| | | Start | End | |
| May 3 | Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone | 2 | 1 | 10 panic |
| May 4 | Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone | 1 | 1 | 9  |
| May 5 | Watching the weather forecast | 1 | 1 | 8 fearful |
| May 6 | Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show | 5 | 2 | 7  |
| May 7 | Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show | 4 | 1 | 6 afraid |
| May 8 | Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show | 2 | 1 | 5  |
| May 9 | Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise) | 7 | 6 | 4 worried |
| May 10 | Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise) | 5 | 2 | 3  |
| May 11 | Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise) | 3 | 1 | 2 okay |
| May 12 | Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise) | 2 | 1 | 1  |
| May 13 | Standing outside in the rain (with no thunderstorm present) | 6 | 2 | |

As you work through the challenges, use these spaces to reflect and adjust if needed.

| How does it feel to "wait out" anxiety with my child? | Do any of the challenges need to be adjusted? | Are rewards and coping skills (if necessary) working? |
|--|---|---|
| <p><i>It was initially hard for me to see my child experiencing anxiety.</i></p> <p><i>After a few challenges, it became slightly easier for me to tolerate.</i></p> | <p><i>May 9: construction noise downtown was way too scary.</i></p> <p><i>May 10: construction noise at the park worked better.</i></p> | <p><i>May 6: Tokens towards a stuffed animal seem to be working well.</i></p> <p><i>May 9: needed to use coping skills for downtown construction noise.</i></p> <p><i>Deep breathing worked okay, but listening to music worked better.</i></p> |

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Fear Hierarchy for Kids

OPTIONAL: Create a Worry Monster or Progress Bar

If they would like, help your child draw a “Worry Monster” that represents their fear. As they complete each challenge, cover the Worry Monster with a sticker. As the challenges add up, the Worry Monster will be slowly covered up and defeated.

My Worry Monster



Kids may also enjoy creating a progress chart similar to an Experience Points (XP) bar in a videogame. For each challenge, they can color in a section and watch their progress grow.

Challenge Progress Bar



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STEP 1: What is your primary fear?

STEP 2: List smaller challenges that are related to your primary fear

STEP 3: Rate these challenges with the Anxiety Scale

| Challenges That Trigger Your Fear | Anxiety Level |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
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Anxiety Scale

- 10 panic
- 9 
- 8 fearful
- 7 
- 6 afraid
- 5 
- 4 worried
- 3 
- 2 okay
- 1 

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Fear Hierarchy for Kids

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As you can imagine, facing your fears and waiting for your anxiety to come down is difficult! So here are two ways to prepare for the challenge.

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.....

.....

.....

Plan some appropriate rewards

Facing fears takes practice and motivation! Use the space to the right to consider small, appropriate rewards you are willing to give like stickers, tokens towards a larger reward, small treats, or similar.

.....

.....

.....

STEP 5: Plan your challenges and rewards, starting with the least scary

| Challenges That Trigger Your Fear | Anxiety Level | Reward Per Try |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
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Anxiety Scale


10 panic 

9 


8 fearful

7 


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5 

4 worried

3 

2 okay

1 

As you work through the challenges, use these spaces to reflect and adjust if needed.

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>How does it feel to “wait out” anxiety with my child?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> | <p>Do any of the challenges need to be adjusted?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> | <p>Are rewards and coping skills (if necessary) working?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> |
|--|--|--|

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Challenge Progress Bar

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.

