

Automatic Thoughts for Teens

In Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), automatic thoughts are the words or images that *first pop into our heads when something happens*. Automatic thoughts are important to catch because they can affect our emotions and choices. This worksheet is designed to help you get familiar with them.

People can have all sorts of automatic thoughts. They can be:

- Silly or serious
- Helpful or unhelpful
- Negative or positive
- Realistic or unrealistic
- True or untrue

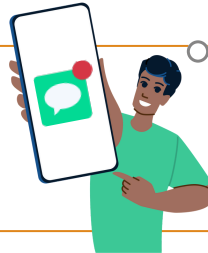
For example, if you and your friends just stayed up late watching a horror movie, and you suddenly hear a loud crash in the next room, your first thought might be...



MONSTER!!!

(even if it was just the cat)

If you're having a really awesome day and everything is going perfectly, and then you see that your crush just texted you, your first thought might be...



Omg, I knew they liked me back!

(maybe, maybe not!)

Or, if you're having a terrible week and you're feeling down on yourself, and you go online and see that your test grade is in, your first thought might be...



Ugh, this is going to be so bad...

(even if you're doing well in this class)

Why are these thoughts important, even if they're sometimes silly, untrue, or unhelpful?

- 1 Automatic thoughts can be influenced by our moods (including anxiety, depression, and stress)
People with mental health struggles tend to have more negative, untrue automatic thoughts
- 2 Automatic thoughts can influence how we feel in the moment
If we dwell on negative, untrue automatic thoughts, we're more likely to feel down
- 3 Automatic thoughts can influence what we do
We might be more likely to criticize ourselves, isolate, lash out, etc.

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



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The good news is that CBT is designed to help us learn new ways to **push back** against negative, unhelpful, untrue automatic thoughts. CBT has been around for a long time and is a treatment for anxiety, depression, and stress that works.

The first step is to **catch automatic thoughts in the moment**. Here's a way to practice. Imagine you are facing each situation, once while in a great mood, then once while in a bad mood. Write the first words that pop into your head. We've provided an example in row one. You can tackle the situations one-by-one, do all the "great mood" thoughts first, or do all the "bad mood" thoughts first - whatever works!

Situation	Thoughts if I were in a great mood	Thoughts if I were in a bad mood
You text someone something important and they take a strangely long time to respond	<i>"They must be busy today!"</i>	<i>"Did I do something wrong?"</i>
You walk past two people who stop talking when you get close		
Your teacher says, "We need to talk later," and walks away		
On your way home, your sibling texts you, "We've got a problem"		

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Situation	Thoughts if I were in a great mood	Thoughts if I were in a poor mood
Your friend is praised for their hard work on a group project, but no one mentions your hard work		
During a tough week at school, you see on social media that your friend just got the highest grade in your class		
When hanging out in a group, your significant other seems oddly quiet		
When doing a chore at home, your sibling tells you they know a better way to do it		
Your friend cancels plans at the last minute, saying that they're busy		



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Situation	Thoughts if I were in a great mood	Thoughts if I were in a poor mood
You share an idea in class and your teacher just ignores it		
Someone tells you, "You really made an impression at that party last night..."		
When waiting to hear back from a job interview, you receive an email titled, "Hiring Decision"		

Do your thoughts tend to differ based on your mood?

Read your "good mood" thoughts. Are they helpful, realistic, or fair?

Read your "bad mood" thoughts. Are they helpful, realistic, or fair?



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