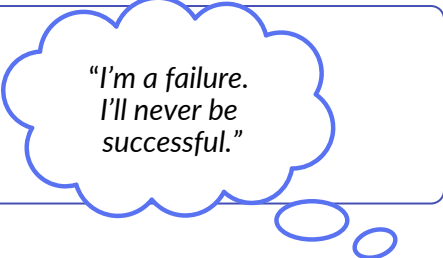


Putting Thoughts on Trial for Teens

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is kind of like being in a courtroom for your thoughts. A negative or distorted thought is on trial - but it's got a super convincing lawyer trying to defend it who uses shady tricks, like presenting "evidence" to the jury that isn't actually true. In this worksheet, we'll put a distorted thought on trial, catch the shady lawyer in the act, present real evidence, and come to a more balanced conclusion for healthier thinking.

Let's work through an example. Today's distorted thought on trial is:



"I'm a failure.
I'll never be
successful."



The shady defense lawyer prepares to give his argument. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury! My client should not be on trial today. This thought isn't 'distorted' - it's true! Once I lay out all my evidence, it will become crystal clear!"

The Defense

"evidence" supporting the thought

1. The thinker did not get any A+ grades this year
2. The thinker's teacher makes corrections when they give presentations
3. The thinker's teacher must believe the thinker is a failure!
4. The thinker's best friend got an A+ in History this semester
5. At this rate, the thinker will *never* get their dream job after graduation
6. Getting great grades and a great job is the only way be successful in life

The jury members look at each other and nod, seeming convinced by the defense. Until you yell,

"OBJECTION!"

"Some of this 'evidence' is really just interpretation or opinion! That doesn't count as evidence. We need to throw it out of the trial!"

The judge asks you which pieces of evidence you are objecting to.

Take a look at the list to the left:

- Cross out opinions or interpretations (subjective ideas based on beliefs)
- Leave any evidence or facts (objective information that can be double-checked)

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



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You say, “I object to numbers 3, 5, and 6.” The judge agrees, and those numbers are thrown out of the case.

You (the prosecution) prepare to give your argument. “Ladies and gentlemen, the thought on trial is **not** true. Let me show you why:”

The Defense

“evidence” supporting the thought

1. The thinker did not get any A+ grades this year
2. The thinker’s teacher makes corrections when they give presentations
- ~~3. The thinker’s teacher must believe the thinker is a failure!~~
4. The thinker’s best friend got an A+ in History this semester
- ~~5. At this rate, the thinker will never get her dream job after graduation~~
- ~~6. Getting great grades and a great job is the only way be successful in life~~

The Prosecution

evidence against the thought

1. Classes are tough this year and A+ grades are very rare
2. The thinker’s teacher makes corrections when others give presentations, too
3. The best friend is in a different grade
4. The thinker’s grades aren’t *perfect*, but they are high (As and Bs)
5. The thinker has met some of their other goals (made the varsity team this year)
6. We don’t actually know whether they’ll get their dream job in the future or not

The defense lawyer stands and clears his throat to shout an objection, but after a second or two, he realizes all of your evidence is **factual (not opinions, guesses, or value judgments)**. He sits back down.

With no objections to the facts presented, it’s time for the jury to deliberate. They weigh all the real evidence and announce their verdict, a more balanced, helpful, or true thought:

“The thinker is not getting the exact grades they want and they are feeling disappointed and down. But there is plenty of evidence that they are performing well at school and accomplishing other goals in their life, too.”

On the next page, you can try this with your own thought.



Putting Thoughts on Trial for Teens

Write down a thought or thoughts that are really bothering you. Often, these thoughts come along with unpleasant feelings, like anxiety, shame, sadness, loneliness, or frustration.



Write down the evidence supporting your thought in the box on the left, and the evidence against your thought in the box on the right.

The Defense
evidence supporting the thought

The Prosecution
evidence against the thought

Cross out any evidence on either side that is actually just a subjective opinion or interpretation.

Weigh all the remaining evidence, and write a more balanced, helpful, or true thought:



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