

Exercise sheet

I COMBAT NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS



Why pay attention to your automatic thoughts and the emotions they generate?

We've seen that during a depressive illness, our view of the world changes: we tend to see only the negative aspects of our daily lives, to anticipate only failures, to be receptive only to what's not going well... But above all, we no longer are objective, and tend to think that reality is « really like that », without seeing that it's us who amplify certain sinister aspects of life.

What can we do about it?

Cognitive therapists often ask their patients to write down their thoughts and emotions in 'column charts', based on everyday situations in which they've felt distressed. In this way, we gradually discover that while part of our mood swings and negative emotions are, of course, due to life's difficulties, another part comes from the way we interpret them. Little by little, we can reduce the number and intensity of unnecessary negative emotions.

It's obviously a long-term process, often requiring the help of a therapist, but you can already start practising this method with the help of the examples and column charts below. At the end of the book, you'll find a number of books that go into more detail about this method.

How to complete your own statements

- 1 In the first column, make a note of the situations in which you felt distressed, or which were distressing during the day.
- 2 In the second column, try to describe the emotion you felt at the time (sadness, anger, worry, guilt, etc.) or the physical sensations you experienced (tiredness, tenseness, the urge to cry, etc.).

Exercise sheet

I COMBAT NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS

3 In the third column, detail your train of thought at the time of the situation: before, during and after. Sometimes you don't need to identify your thoughts, which are often automatic or subconscious. But in general, if you think about it and relive the situation in your mind, you'll get close to how you felt.

4 The last column is for what are known as « alternative thoughts », which represent another way of looking at what's happened to you. In general, your automatic thoughts will point you to negative and sometimes catastrophic interpretations (« seeing everything black »). Your job in this exercise is to imagine what someone who's not depressed would realistically say to themselves. Even if you don't agree with this way of seeing and thinking at the moment, make an effort to imagine it and write it down. Think of a democratic debate in an assembly: there's not just one party (the « Party of Depression ») on the floor, you also need to listen to the arguments of the opposition (« the Positive Party », or the « Nuanced Party »). Even if you then 'vote' for the Negative Party, making the effort to think about events in a different way will gradually get you used to thinking in a way that's not depressive.

Your statement

For the period
5 September to 11 September

Example: Emilie 51, teacher

| Situation | Emotions | Automatic thoughts | Alternative thoughts |
|--|----------------------------|---|---|
| Home from work in the evening | Sad, on the verge of tears | I'm home alone again | Maybe it's not such a good idea to go straight home and do nothing. Maybe I should join a gym, go shopping, go to the cinema... |
| No messages on my answering machine, no mail in my letterbox | Disappointed, unhappy | No one's interested in me, I'm forgotten in my corner | It's true that for several months I've been cutting ties and playing dead. It's also up to me to get moving.... |
| Confronted with the housework to be done... | Discouraged | I'll never manage | My shrink told me to do one thing at a time, to split the tasks into steps... |

Exercise sheet

I COMBAT NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS

For the period
5 September to 11 September

Example: Henri, 36, salesperson

| Situation | Emotions | Automatic thoughts | Alternative thoughts |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| My car won't start | Annoyed, angry | It can't be true! It's always at the worst time! | It's the first time it's broken down, there's a garage next door to me |
| Clash with my boss | Tension, Worry, Dejection | He's doesn't want to understand me, he's going to want to get rid of me | We've always had this kind of relationship, he knows I do my job well |
| My wife doesn't ask me about my day's work | Sad, feeling alone and misunderstood | She's no longer interested in me, no longer loves me | She's tired and has problems at work, I shouldn't always expect her to come to me... |

Exercise sheet

I COMBAT NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS

For the period
from to

| Situation | Emotions | Automatic thoughts | Alternative thoughts |
|-----------|----------|--------------------|----------------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Source: inspired by « L'Almanach du patient déprimé », Christophe André.