

Self-Critical Thought Challenging Record

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) suggests that how we think affects how we feel. Everyone has hundreds of 'automatic' thoughts each day. Unless you pay attention to them, you might not be aware that they're happening.

If you are self-critical, you will tend to ignore your achievements and successes and instead focus on your flaws or mistakes. As a result, you might see yourself as inadequate or wholly bad, attacking yourself with thoughts like "I never get things right" or "I'm such a waste of space". Thoughts like these can be very distressing.

Keeping a thought record can help you become more aware of your automatic thoughts and evaluate whether they are accurate or useful. The *Self-Critical Thought Challenging Record* offers a step-by-step process for challenging your self-critical thoughts and developing a more balanced view of things.

The image shows a thumbnail of the 'Self-Critical Thought Challenging Record' form. It is a table with four columns: 'Situation', 'Emotions or body sensations', 'Self-critical thoughts', and 'Alternative perspectives'. Each column has a small instruction above it. The 'Situation' column asks 'What were you doing? What were you thinking? What were you feeling?'. The 'Emotions or body sensations' column asks 'What did you feel? How strong were those feelings?'. The 'Self-critical thoughts' column asks 'What were you telling yourself? What were you believing? What were you assuming?'. The 'Alternative perspectives' column asks 'What other ways are there of thinking about this situation?'. The form is titled 'Self-Critical Thought Challenging Record' and has 'PSYCHOLOGYTOOLS' at the bottom left.



How could this tool help me?

- It can help you to think in a fairer and more balanced way, improving your mood.
- It can help you practice the process of questioning your self-critical thoughts by examining the evidence, rather than accepting them as facts.
- It can help you address unhelpful biases in your thinking.



How should I use it?

It is best to practice completing your thought record with your therapist first. Once you are familiar with the process, fill in the *Self-Critical Thought Challenging Record* whenever you notice a self-critical thought or a sudden change in your mood.

Each column will prompt you to record a different part of your experience.

- **Situation.** Describe the event that triggered a strong response in you.
- **Emotion or body sensations.** What did you feel, emotionally and physically? How strong were those feelings?
- **Self-critical thoughts.** What went through your mind? What were you saying to yourself? What tone of voice did that automatic thought have?
- **Alternative perspective.** How would a good friend make sense of this situation? Is the self-critical thought 100% true or is there another (kinder) way of looking at what happened? Would I be so harsh to someone else?
- **Outcome.** How do you feel after considering alternative perspectives?



Helpful tips

- Practice completing the form with your therapist at least once.
- Try to fill the record in as soon as possible after your automatic thought, while your memory of it is still clear.
- To develop an alternative perspective on your self-critical thought, pretend it is 'on trial' in a courtroom. What facts or evidence would you present against this thought?
- Thought records take time to master: the more you practice, the easier and more helpful they will become.

Self-Critical Thought Challenging Record

Situation Who were you with? What were you doing? Where were you? When did it happen?	Emotions or body sensations What did you feel? (Rate intensity 0–100%)	Self-critical thoughts What went through your mind? (Rate degree of belief in each thought 0–100%)	Alternative perspectives What other ways are there of looking at these thoughts?	Outcome How do you feel now? (Rate degree of belief in each thought now 0-100%)

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Cooking dinner for family and burned the potatoes.	Despair and anger with self – 80%	I'm pathetic – 100%	Labelling myself like this doesn't help solve the problem. It's just like how mum used to treat me.	Calmer, not as angry at myself. Belief – 50%
Watching my toddler play with other children at a playground – she pushed another child out of her way.	Embarrassment and sadness – 70%	I'm a bad mother. Other children who are raised properly don't act like bullies – 90%	She's only two and doesn't know what she's doing – she's just excited to get on the slide. I'm forgetting that I saw my friend's son do exactly the same thing a few weeks ago and we laughed about it	I feel faintly ridiculous. It's almost funny that my mind could judge me so harshly and so quickly. Belief – 0%
		If you had an image or memory, what did it mean to you?	What is the evidence that my self-critical thought is true? What am I trying to achieve? Is this way of thinking likely to help me achieve that goal? In what ways could my thinking be inaccurate?	