Thought Record

Part 1. What happened and my reactions

Item	Entry
Name	
Date	

The situation

Include: when and where it happened, who was there and what happened just before my mood changed.

My automatic thoughts

Include: each thought or image in my own words, and how much I believed it from 0 to 10.

Thought or image	How much I believed it

My emotions

Include: each emotion in one word, such as sad, anxious, angry or ashamed, and how strong it was from 0 to 10.

Emotion	How strong it was

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Part 2. Testing my hot thought

My hot thought

Include: the thought from Part 1 that goes with my strongest emotion. This is the thought I will test.

Evidence is what happened: facts that anyone who was there would agree on. My feelings, guesses and ideas about what other people were thinking belong in Part 1.

Evidence for my hot thought	Evidence against my hot thought
What happened that seems to back up the thought?	*Which facts point the other way, even small ones? What would I point out to a friend in my place? What have I handled well before that this thought leaves out?*

The part of my hot thought that fits the facts

Include: anything in the hot thought that the evidence supports, and what I could do about it.

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Part 3. A balanced view and the outcome

My balanced response

Include: a way of seeing the situation that takes in the evidence on both sides, in my own words.

How much I believe my balanced response

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

How much I believe my hot thought now

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

My emotions now

Include: the emotions from Part 1 and any new ones, with how strong each one is now from 0 to 10.

Emotion	How strong it is now

What I will do next

Include: one step that would help, such as solving part of the problem, testing a prediction or talking with someone.

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Clinician guide: using the thought record

- **When it fits.** Bring out the thought record once you and the client have questioned an automatic thought aloud and its emotional pull has dropped. J. S. Beck (2021) checks that a client can fill in a worksheet in session before suggesting it for home practice. For some clients, teach Part 1 in one session and Parts 2 and 3 in the next, as J. S. Beck does with the columns of her Thought Record.
- **Pick one specific moment.** Choose a recent, concrete situation in which the client's mood dropped or the client did something unhelpful. A record about a general situation, such as "my family never listens to me," tends to become an intellectual debate (Persons et al., 2001).
- **Sort thoughts from emotions and find the hot thought.** Clients often describe a thought as a feeling, as in "I felt like I'd ruined everything" (Persons et al., 2001). Move it to the thoughts table. The hot thought is the one tied to the strongest emotion, and it is usually the one most worth testing (Greenberger & Padesky, 2016).
- **Keep the evidence factual and evenhanded.** Help the client list the evidence for the hot thought first and the evidence against it next, since automatic thoughts usually hold a grain of truth (J. S. Beck, 2021). Feelings, perceptions and assumptions stay out of the evidence columns (Persons et al., 2001). The evidence against is often the hardest column, and it gets easier over a few weeks of practice (Greenberger & Padesky, 2016).
- **Rate, review and plan.** Ratings before and after show whether the record helped (Persons et al., 2001). J. S. Beck (2021) and Greenberger and Padesky (2016) rate belief and emotion from 0 to 100%, so a 7 on this worksheet equals 70%. Agree on how many records to complete, when and for how long, and review them at the next session (Persons et al., 2001). Ask about thoughts of suicide as part of your usual assessment, and follow your setting's crisis protocol whenever a situation involves risk.

Adapted from the descriptions of thought records in A. T. Beck et al. (1979), J. S. Beck (2021), Greenberger and Padesky (2016) and Persons et al. (2001). The layout and wording are original.

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Completed example: Mei (a fictional client)

Mei, 36, is a high school biology teacher in outpatient CBT for depression. She filled in this thought record with her therapist, K.L., at her sixth session, on December 9, 2026, about something that happened two days earlier. Mei, her therapist and every detail of the case are invented.

Part 1. What happened and my reactions

Item	Entry
Name	Mei
Date	December 9, 2026

The situation

Monday, December 7, after school. The principal watched my third-period class and left a note saying the lesson needed more student discussion. She didn't stop to talk.

My automatic thoughts

Thought or image	How much I believed it
"The principal thinks I'm a bad teacher."	8
"I'm not cut out for teaching anymore."	7
"I'll get a poor evaluation this year."	6

My emotions

Emotion	How strong it was
Sad	8
Anxious	7
Ashamed	6

Part 2. Testing my hot thought

My hot thought

"I'm not cut out for teaching anymore."

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Mei and K.L. listed the evidence together, starting with the evidence for the hot thought.

Evidence for my hot thought	Evidence against my hot thought
The note said the lesson needed more student discussion. Two students were on their phones. I've felt tired and less prepared since September.	The note also said my explanations were clear and the lab was well organized. My students' test scores went up this semester. Two former students wrote this fall to thank me. Every teacher in my department gets notes after observations.

The part of my hot thought that fits the facts

The lesson could use more discussion. I can ask Ms. Ortiz, who runs great discussions, for two activities to try.

Part 3. A balanced view and the outcome

My balanced response

One observation gave me one thing to work on. My students are learning, and I can add more discussion to my lessons.

How much I believe my balanced response

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	**7**	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

How much I believe my hot thought now

0	1	2	**3**	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't believe it at all										*I believe it completely*

My emotions now

Emotion	How strong it is now
Sad	4
Anxious	3
Ashamed	2

What I will do next

Ask Ms. Ortiz for two discussion activities on Thursday and try one in third period next week.

K.L. and Mei filled in Part 1 together. Mei had first written "I felt like I'm not cut out for teaching" as an emotion, so they moved it to her thoughts. She found the evidence for the hot thought quickly and needed K.L.'s questions to find the evidence against it. Her belief in the hot thought fell from 7 to 3, and her sadness from 8 to 4. They agreed that she would complete two more records before her next session, on Thursday and Monday after school, for about 10 minutes each, and bring them with her.

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References and further reading

Books for clinicians

Beck, A. T., Rush, A. J., Shaw, B. F., & Emery, G. (1979). *Cognitive therapy of depression*. Guilford Press. ISBN 978-0-89862-919-4.

Beck, J. S. (2021). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-4419-6.

Persons, J. B., Davidson, J., & Tompkins, M. A. (2001). Using the thought record. In *Essential components of cognitive-behavior therapy for depression* (pp. 129–169). American Psychological Association. ISBN 978-1-55798-697-9.

Books for clients

Greenberger, D., & Padesky, C. A. (2016). *Mind over mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-2042-8.

Research

McManus, F., Van Doorn, K., & Yiend, J. (2012). Examining the effects of thought records and behavioral experiments in instigating belief change. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, 43*(1), 540–547.

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