



Oasis Mental Care

EMOTIONAL TOOLKIT

Thought Diary

*A tool for examining
what anxiety tells you*

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Print and write by hand

Psychoeducational material. It does not replace medical or psychiatric care.

TO BEGIN

Your thoughts are not facts

When we are anxious, the mind works like a distorting lens: it magnifies risks and shrinks our sense of being able to cope. It is not a failure of intelligence or will — it is how an alert brain works.

This diary comes from cognitive behavioral therapy, a model developed by psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck from a simple observation: between what happens and what we feel there is a thought, and that thought can almost always be examined.

The point is not to “think positive”. It is to treat the thought as what it is — a hypothesis — and check what evidence supports it.

What to expect, and what not to

- With practice, it helps you notice automatic thoughts before they carry the whole emotion with them.
- Examining the evidence is one of the better supported components within cognitive behavioral therapy.
- **A diary is not therapy.** It works best alongside treatment, and recent reviews show more modest effects than is usually assumed.
- If you are in a crisis, this guide is not the right resource. Call or text **988**.

Common thinking traps

Naming them is already part of the work. Almost nobody uses only one.

- **Catastrophizing.** Assuming the worst will happen. “If I make a mistake in the presentation, I’ll be fired.”
- **Mind reading.** Believing we know what others think of us, without evidence. “He went quiet: he doesn’t like me.”
- **All-or-nothing.** Seeing things in two absolute categories. If it wasn’t perfect, it was a complete failure.
- **Emotional reasoning.** Taking what we feel as proof of what is real. “I feel afraid, so there must be danger.”
- **Overgeneralizing.** Turning one event into a permanent rule. “This always happens to me.”
- **Negative filter.** Keeping only what went wrong and ignoring the rest. Ten good comments and one bad one, and we only remember the bad one.

How to use the diary

Fill it in when you notice anxiety rising, or afterwards, once it has come down a little. Writing takes the thought out of your head and puts it somewhere you can look at it.

1**Describe what happened**

Only observable facts. No interpretations.

2**Write down the thought**

Exactly as it appeared, in your own words. And how much you believed it.

3**Look for the evidence**

For and against. Take the side of a fair observer, not a prosecutor or a defense lawyer.

4**Write a balanced version**

Neither optimistic nor catastrophic: the one the evidence you just gathered supports.

YOUR DIARY

Entries

There are two entries here. If you need more, download the guide again or reprint this page.

Entry 1

Date and time _____

1. What happened

Only the facts, as a camera would record them.

2. What I thought at that moment

The thought exactly as it appeared. How much did you believe it, 0 to 100?

3. Evidence for the thought

Real data, not impressions.

4. Evidence against the thought

What anxiety was leaving out.

5. A more balanced way to see it

Neither optimistic nor catastrophic: what the evidence supports.

Entry 2

Date and time _____

1. What happened

Only the facts, as a camera would record them.

2. What I thought at that moment

The thought exactly as it appeared. How much did you believe it, 0 to 100?

3. Evidence for the thought

Real data, not impressions.

4. Evidence against the thought

What anxiety was leaving out.

5. A more balanced way to see it

Neither optimistic nor catastrophic: what the evidence supports.

References

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- *Efficacy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Anxiety-Related Disorders: A Meta-Analysis of Recent Literature.* Current Psychiatry Reports, 2022.
- *Efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy in treating repetitive negative thinking, rumination, and worry — a transdiagnostic meta-analysis.* 2025.
- *Experimentally unpacking cognitive behavioral therapy: The effects of completing a thought record on affect and neuroendocrine responses to stress.* Psychoneuroendocrinology, 2017.
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Sources last reviewed: August 2026.