WORKSHEET 03 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

Helpful or going round in circles?

Telling helpful reflection apart from rumination

AIM

Learn to spot when you are “going round in circles” (abstract questions, “why…?”) and switch to concrete thinking, focused on the next action.

WHO IT IS FOR

Anxious or depressive rumination, a tendency to analyse endlessly, rumination after a mistake or a conflict.

DURATION

15 min in session, then at each episode of rumination

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Explore a recent episode: what the thoughts were about, how long it lasted, how the person felt afterwards.
2. Introduce the two modes: abstract (“Why does this happen to me? What does it say about me?”) and concrete (“What exactly happened? What is the next small step?”).
3. Try the three-question test on page 2 with the chosen episode.
4. Practise the switch: rephrase a “why” question as a “how” or “what” question.
5. Identify the triggers (time, place, mood) to plan an alternative activity.

POINTS TO WATCH

> Reflecting is not bad in itself: the point is to spot the reflection that leads nowhere. Avoid letting the person blame themselves for ruminating, as that feeds a new loop.

REFERENCES

Watkins, E. R. (2016). Rumination-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Depression. Guilford.

Watkins, E. R. (2008). Constructive and unconstructive repetitive thought. Psychological Bulletin, 134(2), 163-206.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 03 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

Helpful or going round in circles?

Thinking can help. Going round in circles, much less so. These three questions help you see the difference.

1. Am I moving towards a solution or a decision? (yes / no)
2. Am I understanding something new? (yes / no)
3. Do I feel a little better or worse? (better / worse)
4. Two “no”s and “worse”: it is probably a loop. I switch to the concrete question: “What is the next small step, and when?”

Question going round in circles (“why…?”)	Concrete version (“how / what…?”)	Next small step	When

What helps me get out of the loop (activity, place, person)?

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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