WORKSHEET 140 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

Finding meaning in a difficult situation

When I can’t change the situation

AIM

Support meaning-focused coping (Folkman) in a lasting, unchangeable situation: drawing on one’s values, revising goals, noticing the positive moments that remain.

WHO IT IS FOR

Illness (one’s own or a loved one’s), carers, bereavement, a blocked work or administrative situation, exile.

DURATION

20 min, then a few minutes each evening

HOW TO RUN IT

1. First validate the difficulty and the pain: finding meaning doesn’t mean seeing the situation as “positive”.
2. The person notes what still matters to them in this situation (values).
3. They revise a goal that has become impossible to turn it into an achievable one.
4. Each evening, they note a small positive or meaningful moment, however minimal.

POINTS TO WATCH

> Don’t offer it too soon after a blow or a loss, or as an obligation (“you have to look on the bright side”). Positive emotions coexist with suffering; they don’t replace it.

REFERENCES

Folkman, S. (1997). Positive psychological states and coping with severe stress. Social Science & Medicine, 45(8), 1207-1221.

Folkman, S. & Moskowitz, J. T. (2004). Coping: Pitfalls and promise. Annual Review of Psychology, 55, 745-774.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 140 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

Finding meaning in a difficult situation

Some situations can't be changed, at least for now. The psychologist Susan Folkman observed that, even in very hard situations, leaning on what matters, revising goals and noticing small positive moments helps people keep going. It doesn't take the pain away: it keeps it company.

1. Write what still matters to you, despite the situation.
2. Think of a goal that has become impossible and turn it into an achievable one.
3. Each evening of the week, note a small positive moment or a moment that had meaning.
4. At the end of the week, reread your notes.

Day	A small positive or meaningful moment	What matters to me about that moment

My revised goal, achievable today:

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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