WORKSHEET 62 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

The downward arrow

Going down from a thought to the belief underneath it

AIM

Identify the intermediate and core beliefs that sustain recurring automatic thoughts, by asking what the thought would mean if it were true.

WHO IT IS FOR

Thoughts that come back in different situations, self-criticism, after several thought records.

DURATION

20 min in session

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Start from a frequent automatic thought.
2. Ask: “If that were true, what would it mean for you?”, and repeat the question on the answer.
3. Stop when the answer is a general statement about oneself, others or the world.
4. Gently explore the history of that belief and its consequences today.

POINTS TO WATCH

> This exercise touches beliefs that are often painful: go slowly, validate the emotion and don’t try to “correct” the belief in the same session.

REFERENCES

Beck, J. S. (2020). Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond (3rd ed.). Guilford.

Fennell, M. J. V. (1997). Low self-esteem: A cognitive perspective. Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, 25(1), 1-26.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 62 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

My downward arrow

Best done with your psychologist

Some thoughts come back in very different situations. They often rest on a deeper belief. This exercise helps you find it, step by step.

1. Write down a thought that often comes back.
2. Ask yourself: “If that were true, what would it mean for me?”
3. Write the answer and ask the same question again.
4. Stop when you reach a general sentence about yourself, others or the world.

Thought	If it were true, it would mean that…	And if that were true…	My underlying belief

Where does this belief come from, and is it fair 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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