

## “REC” YOUR THOUGHTS & CHANGE YOUR MOOD

The following explains how to use the attached chart as a means of changing your mood by **R**ecording, **E**valuating and **C**hanging your thinking.

**Feeling**—The easiest place to start is with the 3rd column -- “Feeling”. Try to identify the distressing emotion with one word. Then, rate the intensity of the feeling on a 0 – 100 scale (0 = absence of the feeling; 100 = most intense imaginable).

**Thought**—Now, go to the 2nd column and try to identify the thought(s) that preceded or accompanied the emotion. The thought could be particular words, images, memories, beliefs, convictions, rules, interpretations or meanings. What went through your mind? What were you saying to yourself? If there was more than one thought, try to pick out the hot thought, i.e. the one that causes you the most distress. You will want to focus your evaluative efforts on the hot thought.

**Event**—Now, go to the 1st column. Were you remembering a past event, interpreting a current one, or reflecting on a future one? Describe the basic facts.

**Evaluation**—Now, go to the 4th column. Below are helpful questions for evaluating thinking:

- What effect is my thinking having on me (emotionally, physically, spiritually, socially, vocationally)? How do I feel about that?
- What effect is my thinking having on others? How do I feel about that?
- What are the chances of my thoughts really happening or being true?
- If my belief was true or came to pass, what’s the worst thing that could happen to me? What is so bad about that? If it did happen, what would I do to deal with it?
- What good things might happen to me if this belief was true or came to pass?
- What evidence exists to support this belief?

- What evidence exists that would contradict this belief?
- You can further weigh the evidence for/against your belief by testing it out. This can be done through observation, conducting experiments or doing some research (as in asking experts or surveying others). Try an observational exercise, start by looking for one piece of evidence each day **that is contrary to** your belief. Try this for one week. In the second week look for two pieces of evidence each day. After this kind of observation ask yourself if your belief needs to be modified.
- Have I had experiences that show this belief is not completely true all the time?
- If my best friend knew I believed this, what would she/he say to me? What evidence might she/he point out that would suggest that this belief is not always 100% true?
- If I went to an expert on this matter, in order to get an opinion, what would she/he say?
- Is my thinking an example of any of the following cognitive patterns that cause people trouble? (from “Self-Esteem” by McKay & Fanning; and “Feeling Good” by David Burns)
  1. **Overgeneralization**—From one isolated event you make a general, universal rule. “You failed once, you’ll always fail.”
  2. **Global labeling**—You automatically use pejorative labels to describe yourself, rather than accurately describing your qualities. “I am such a loser.”
  3. **Filtering**—You selectively pay attention to the negative and disregard the positive.
  4. **Polarized thinking**—You lump things into absolute, black & white categories, with no middle ground. “You have to be perfect or you are worthless.”
  5. **Self-blame**—You consistently blame yourself for things that may not really be your fault.
  6. **Personalization**—You assume that everything has something to do with you, and you negatively compare yourself to everyone else.
  7. **Mind reading**—You assume that others don’t like you, are angry

with you, don't care about you, and so on, without any real evidence that your assumptions are correct.

8. **Control fallacies**—You either feel that you have total responsibility for everybody and everything, or feel that you have no control, that you are a helpless victim.
9. **Emotional reasoning**—You assume that things are the way you feel about them.
10. **Disqualifying the positive**—You reject positive experiences by insisting that they don't count for some reason or another. You then maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.
11. **Magnification or minimization**—You exaggerate the importance of things or shrink them.
12. **Catastrophic thinking**—You expect, even visualize disaster. You notice or hear about a problem and start asking, “What if?” “What if tragedy strikes?” “What if it happens to me?”
13. **Shoulding**—You have a list of ironclad rules about how you and other people should act. People who break the rules anger you, and you feel guilty when you violate the rules.

**Change** - Now, go to the 5th column. You may find yourself wanting to modify your belief after having evaluated it. Look for alternative explanations of the event that are less costly, more accurate and less troubling than the original interpretation. Write your alternative belief on the chart. Here are some questions that could help in this process:

- Is there a different way of interpreting this situation that is less costly, more accurate and less troubling?
- If someone I cared about was in this situation, with these thoughts and this information, how would I suggest they view the situation?

- If my best friend, or someone who really cares about me, knew I was thinking this thought, what would she/he say to me?

Once you come up with an alternate belief, think how you might test it out. Give it a test drive, try it out for several weeks and see how it feels. Also, ask yourself what behaviours would be consistent with this belief. Try one or two of these out as well.

**Feeling**—Now, go to the last column. Once you have written an alternate way of viewing the situation rate the original feeling again. Has it changed at all?

Use thought records as often as you can. With practice you won't require the formality of the chart, you'll find that you are able to go through the process just in your mind, wherever you happen to be. You'll become increasingly adept at seeing the connections between life's events, your thoughts and your feelings. Further, you'll be empowered to evaluate and alter your thinking, which will result in a more positive emotional existence.

Adapted from Mind Over Mood by Greenberger & Padesky