

## Therapist Guide: Comparing Then and Now Worksheet

### Purpose & Rationale

This worksheet helps clients distinguish between past experiences (often linked to trauma, difficult relationships, or formative events) and current situations. Many clients automatically interpret present events through the lens of “then,” leading to heightened emotional reactions and behaviours that may not be adaptive in the present. By comparing *then* vs. *now*, clients can begin to update their assumptions, reduce reactivity, and strengthen grounding in the current moment. This tool draws from cognitive therapy for PTSD, schema therapy, and trauma-focused CBT, where a key goal is helping clients recognize when old schemas or beliefs are triggered and then re-orient to present-day safety and realities.

### When to Use

- With clients experiencing trauma reminders, flashbacks, or strong emotional reactions to current events.
- When maladaptive assumptions from childhood or earlier experiences resurface in adult relationships or situations.
- For clients struggling with schema activation (e.g., abandonment, mistrust, failure).
- As part of trauma processing, schema work, or cognitive restructuring.

### How to Introduce It

1. **Explain the rationale:**
  - *“Sometimes situations in the present can feel overwhelming because they remind us of difficult experiences in the past. This exercise helps you sort out what belongs to ‘then’ and what belongs to ‘now.’”*
2. **Identify a triggering situation:**
  - Have the client write down a recent situation that evoked strong feelings.
3. **Compare “Then” vs. “Now”:**
  - Work through each row:
    - *How I made sense of the situation* (old vs. updated interpretation).
    - *How I felt* (then-intense emotions vs. now-more grounded emotions).
    - *What I did* (coping responses then vs. new behavioural options now).
    - *Underlying assumptions* (schemas that were activated in the past vs. current realities).
    - *Core beliefs* (deep-seated beliefs about self/others/world from “then” vs. new beliefs that are possible “now”).
4. **Present-moment reorientation:**
  - At the bottom, help the client generate grounding reminders:
    - *“Now is different than then because...”*
    - *“I can remind myself that I am safe / older / have choices now.”*
    - *“The people around me now are different from those in the past.”*



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### **Therapeutic Goals**

- Differentiate past-based interpretations from current realities.
- Reduce automatic emotional reactivity driven by trauma or schemas.
- Update maladaptive assumptions and core beliefs with more accurate, balanced ones.
- Increase grounding and present moment focus during triggering situations.
- Build self-compassion by recognizing growth and resilience since the past.

**Clinical Tip:** This worksheet is most effective when paired with **in-session processing** (e.g., imaginal rescripting, grounding exercises, or schema dialogues) to help the client emotionally integrate the distinction between past and present.