

Therapist Guide: Continuum Worksheet

Purpose & Rationale

The Continuum exercise is designed to help clients challenge rigid, all-or-nothing thinking about themselves, others, or the world by placing a core belief along a spectrum rather than as an absolute truth. Clients often hold polarized core beliefs (e.g., *“I am unlovable,” “People can’t be trusted,” “The world is unsafe”*). By imagining examples of individuals across a continuum of belief strength, clients can soften extreme thinking, introduce nuance, and find a more balanced perspective on themselves.

This technique is particularly helpful in cognitive therapy for depression, low self-esteem, and schema-related work, where core beliefs tend to be global, rigid, and negatively skewed.

When to Use

- When addressing entrenched negative core beliefs (e.g., unlovable, incompetent, unworthy).
- With clients who describe themselves or others in extreme, black-and-white ways.
- As part of schema therapy or cognitive restructuring to develop more flexible and compassionate self-concepts.
- In later stages of therapy, once clients can identify their core beliefs and are ready to test or reframe them.

How to Introduce It

1. **Identify the core belief:**
 - Guide the client to name a positive alternative core belief they would like to strengthen (e.g., *“I am lovable,” “People are trustworthy,” “The world is safe enough”*).
 - Ask them to rate their current belief strength (0–100%).
2. **Define the continuum ends:**
 - On the 0% end, describe someone who fully embodies the opposite of the core belief (e.g., *“completely unlovable”*).
 - On the 100% end, describe someone who fully embodies the positive belief (e.g., *“completely lovable”*).
3. **Generate examples across the spectrum:**
 - Ask the client to think of people they know, famous figures, or fictional characters who fit at different points on the continuum.
 - Place them on the scale with a percentage.
4. **Place the client on the continuum:**
 - Invite the client to locate themselves on the spectrum and compare this placement to their original belief rating.



- Explore discrepancies (e.g., “*You rated yourself 20% lovable, but when you compared yourself to others on the continuum, you landed at 50%. What does that tell you?*”).

5. Reflection:

- Discuss what the client notices about being able to think in percentages rather than absolutes.
- Explore evidence that supports a shift toward a more balanced, compassionate belief.

Therapeutic Goals

- Challenge black-and-white thinking about self, others, or the world.
- Encourage clients to view core beliefs as flexible, not fixed.
- Normalize being “in the middle” rather than at an extreme end.
- Strengthen positive alternative core beliefs through concrete comparison.
- Increase self-compassion by highlighting similarities with others, rather than differences.

Clinical Tip: Clients who initially resist identifying people at 0% or 100% may benefit from using **fictional or historical examples**. This can make the task less threatening and ease them into placing themselves more realistically on the continuum.