

Therapist Guide: Examining the Evidence Worksheet

Purpose & Rationale

This worksheet is a core **cognitive restructuring** tool used in CBT to help clients evaluate the validity and helpfulness of their beliefs. Many maladaptive thoughts and core beliefs persist because they are accepted without question or selectively reinforced by biased attention to supporting evidence. By examining both the evidence *for* and *against* a belief, clients learn to adopt a more balanced, flexible perspective and generate alternative beliefs that are more accurate and adaptive.

This technique is particularly effective for addressing automatic thoughts, negative core beliefs, and overgeneralizations that drive distress and maladaptive behaviour.

When to Use

- With clients experiencing strongly held negative automatic thoughts (e.g., “*I always fail*”).
- When working on core beliefs about self, others, or the world.
- To address cognitive distortions such as catastrophizing, mind-reading, or all-or-nothing thinking.
- In anxiety, depression, PTSD, and low self-esteem interventions.

How to Introduce It

1. **Explain the rationale:**
 - “*Sometimes our mind tells us things that feel very true but aren’t the full picture. This worksheet helps you look at all the evidence, not just the parts your mind focuses on when you’re upset.*”
2. **Identify the belief:**
 - Write down the thought or belief to examine, and have the client rate how strongly they believe it (0–100%).
 - Encourage specificity (e.g., “*I will embarrass myself if I speak in the meeting*” vs. “*I’m worthless*”).
3. **List evidence for the belief:**
 - Gather supporting evidence, including facts and examples.
 - Normalize this step: validating the reasons the client holds the belief reduces defensiveness.
4. **List evidence against the belief:**
 - Encourage the client to consider counterexamples, exceptions, and overlooked facts.
 - Use guided Socratic questioning if needed (e.g., “*What would you say to a friend who thought this?*”).
5. **Generate an alternative belief:**
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- Based on the evidence reviewed, collaboratively develop a more balanced, realistic belief.
 - Example: “*Sometimes I struggle in meetings, but I’ve also spoken up successfully before.*”
 - Rate how strongly the client believes this alternative (0–100%).
6. **Re-rate the original belief:**
- Compare the new rating of the original belief with the initial one.
 - Highlight shifts, even if partial, as evidence of cognitive flexibility.

Therapeutic Goals

- Increase awareness of cognitive distortions and biased thinking.
- Help clients view beliefs as hypotheses to be tested rather than facts.
- Strengthen more balanced, adaptive beliefs.
- Reduce conviction in maladaptive beliefs, thereby lowering emotional distress.
- Empower clients to apply structured thinking skills outside of sessions.

Clinical Tip: Clients may initially struggle to identify “evidence against” their belief. Gentle Socratic questioning, role reversal (imagining what they’d say to a friend), or behavioural experiments can support richer evidence generation.