

Therapist Guide: Advantages / Disadvantages Worksheet

Purpose & Rationale

This exercise helps clients evaluate the function of a belief or behaviour by systematically weighing its perceived benefits against its costs. It draws on cognitive-behavioural and motivational interviewing principles, encouraging both cognitive restructuring (examining the accuracy/helpfulness of beliefs) and ambivalence resolution (exploring readiness for change). It is particularly useful when a client feels “stuck” in a pattern that is simultaneously comforting or reinforcing but also distressing or limiting.

When to Use

- With clients ambivalent about change (e.g., substance use, avoidance, perfectionism, maladaptive coping).
- When challenging an entrenched belief that the client sees as both protective and harmful.
- As a bridge between psychoeducation and active behaviour change.

How to Introduce It

1. **Normalize ambivalence:** Explain that most beliefs and behaviours serve a purpose in the short term but may also have long-term costs.
 - Example: *“Many people find there are both upsides and downsides to the way they cope. This exercise helps make those patterns clearer.”*
2. **Identify the target:** Ask the client to write down one belief or behaviour they’d like to explore. Guide them toward specificity (e.g., “I avoid social situations” rather than “I’m anxious”).
3. **Explore advantages first:** Encourage clients to list the genuine benefits without judgment. This validates their experience and reduces defensiveness.
4. **Shift to disadvantages:** Prompt them to consider broader impacts (emotional, relational, occupational, physical).
5. **Discuss the balance:** Review both sides together. Highlight patterns (e.g., many short-term benefits vs. many long-term costs).
6. **Assess motivation:** The percentage rating at the bottom gives a concrete measure of readiness for change or further cognitive testing. It can be revisited in later sessions to track shifts.

Therapeutic Goals

- Increase insight into the function and consequences of beliefs/behaviours.
- Reduce defensiveness by acknowledging both positives and negatives.
- Enhance motivation to experiment with change strategies.
- Provide a structured tool that can be revisited as motivation fluctuates.

In practice, this worksheet often works best as part of a **motivational dialogue**, rather than as homework alone. Clients may benefit from the therapist’s support in articulating both advantages and disadvantages, especially if self-critical or resistant.