

Lesson Plan 1: Challenging Negative Thoughts (CBT)

Objective:

Clients will learn to identify and challenge negative automatic thoughts using cognitive restructuring techniques to improve emotional regulation and reduce depressive thinking.

Introduction (5 Minutes): Begin by discussing how depression often involves negative automatic thoughts that impact emotions and behaviors. Explain that today's session will focus on identifying and restructuring these thoughts.

Psychoeducation (10 Minutes):

- **Definition of Negative Thoughts:** Negative automatic thoughts are the reflexive, unhelpful thoughts that arise in response to situations. They are often distorted and contribute to depression by reinforcing negative feelings and behaviors.
- **Cognitive Distortions:** Explain common cognitive distortions, including:
 1. **All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Viewing situations in extreme terms, with no middle ground (e.g., "If I fail once, I'm a complete failure.").
 2. **Overgeneralization:** Drawing broad negative conclusions based on a single event (e.g., "I always mess things up.").
 3. **Mental Filtering:** Focusing only on the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive.
 4. **Disqualifying the Positive:** Dismissing positive experiences by saying they "don't count."
 5. **Catastrophizing:** Expecting the worst-case scenario to happen.
 6. **Personalization:** Blaming oneself for things outside of one's control.
 7. **Mind Reading:** Assuming others are thinking negatively about you without evidence.

8. **Fortune Telling:** Predicting negative outcomes without factual basis.
 9. **Emotional Reasoning:** Believing that negative emotions reflect reality (e.g., “I feel worthless, so I must be worthless.”).
 10. **Labeling:** Assigning a negative label to oneself or others instead of recognizing behavior as situational (e.g., “I’m a loser.”).
- **Therapist Prompt:** “Have you ever caught yourself thinking something negative about yourself or a situation that turned out not to be true? Let’s explore that.”

Skill Building Activity (15 Minutes):

- **Thought Record Exercise:** Provide a worksheet with three columns: Situation, Thought, Alternative Thought.
- Have the client identify a recent negative thought and work together to reframe it using evidence-based reasoning.

Reflection & Discussion (10 Minutes):

- Discuss how challenging thoughts can influence emotions.
- “What was it like to reframe that thought? Did it change how you felt?”

Homework (Choose One):

1. Keep a thought record for three days and identify negative automatic thoughts.
2. Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of a supportive friend.
3. Practice replacing one negative thought per day with a realistic or positive one.