

# SECTION 7: BORDERLINE PERSONALITY

Therapist's Overview

## JOURNAL AND REPLACE SELF-DEFEATING THOUGHTS

### GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

1. Identify negative, distorted cognitions that mediate intense negative emotions.
2. Learn new ways to think that are more adaptive.
3. Replace negative thoughts with more positive, realistic interpretations of situations.
4. Replace dichotomous thinking with the ability to tolerate ambiguity and complexity in people and issues.

### ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE MOST USEFUL

- Anxiety
- Low Self-Esteem
- Social Anxiety
- Suicidal Ideation
- Unipolar Depression

### SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

Borderline clients are the epitome of negative, pessimistic thinkers. This exercise helps them acknowledge this pattern and begin to replace these thought patterns with positive, realistic assessments of life. You may want to review the six types of self-defeating thought patterns that are described in the assignment as well as the alternatives to these before the client begins to journal his/her daily life experiences. In reviewing the journal material, you may have to assist the client in finding positive thoughts to replace his/her distorted pessimistic thinking.

## JOURNAL AND REPLACE SELF-DEFEATING THOUGHTS

Feeling intense emotions is preceded by the cognitive processing of external situations. When you encounter a troubling situation, you first develop a series of thoughts about that situation as you analyze it. Your emotions evolve based on how you interpret the situation based on your evaluative thoughts. Stimulus situations lead to interpretative thoughts that lead to a variety of different emotions based on those thoughts. This assignment highlights six common self-defeating thoughts that almost always lead to feelings of frustration, sadness, anger, or other negative emotions. Each of these six self-defeating thought patterns can be reversed and you can engage in more realistic positive thinking to produce more calm, confident, and affirming feelings.

### 1. Definitions of Six Self-Defeating Thought Patterns.

- A. *Black or White Thinking*: Viewing situations, people, or self as entirely bad or entirely good—nothing in between. Such thoughts almost always lead to harsh judgments and alienation from others. Example: “My supervisor is never fair and he has always hated me.”
- B. *Hopelessness*: Consistently viewing situations as having no possible positive or even neutral resolution in the future. This leads to despair and refusal to search for solutions to problems. Example: “I’ll never make any new friends who accept me and enjoy me.”
- C. *Helplessness*: Refusing to acknowledge that he/she has any ability to impact his/her world in a positive fashion, but consistently believes that bad things just happen to him/her. This results in discounting all positive traits, abilities, and successes and refusing to put forth effort to change his/her environment, becoming dependent on others to do it for him/her. Example: “There is nothing I can do to change the situation, so I might as well just give up and let what happens happen.”
- D. *Worthlessness*: Viewing self as not worthy of other people’s time, interest, or acceptance. This leads to making self-critical remarks in anticipation of rejection from others. Example: “I don’t blame them for not liking me because I’m not worth it anyway.”
- E. *Catastrophizing*: Blowing expected consequences out of proportion in a very negative direction. This results in withdrawal of effort to change things for the better and reacting to a situation as if the negative consequence has already happened. Example:

"I'll never be able to get another job. This layoff is the end of the line for me."

- F. *Negative Forecasting*: Predicting events will turn out badly without any basis in reality. This type of thinking results in pessimism, depression, and withdrawal of effort. Example: "I'll never get hired, so there's no sense in even going for the interview."
2. Each of the six self-defeating thought patterns listed can be reversed and replaced with a positive alternative.
    - A. Alternative to *Black or White Thinking*: Recognizing that there are good and bad aspects to almost anything and everyone and refusing to reject someone quickly because of some small flaw or error. This leads to a greater degree of acceptance of other people and acceptance of self. Example: "My supervisor seems to be having a bad day today but I must admit he has been good to me at times."
    - B. Alternative to *Hopelessness*: Viewing life more realistically and seeing the potential for possible resolution to negative circumstances given increased time and effort. This leads to a sense of empowerment and increased acceptance from others who view you as a "positive thinker." Example: "Everyone needs friends and appreciates kindness, so if I'm patient, friendly, and considerate, I will develop a social network."
    - C. Alternative to *Helplessness*: Acknowledging personal resources and abilities that can have an impact on negative situations and seeing opportunities to make a difference rather than waiting on others to do it for him/her. This results in taking action and feeling in control of situations. Example: "I will change my approach to this situation and I'm sure that using a different tactic will produce a positive result."
    - D. Alternative to *Worthlessness*: Seeing self as worthy of acceptance from others and recognizing his/her intrinsic value as a human being with strengths and weaknesses. This results in greater self-acceptance and the expectation of acceptance from others. Example: "I am a good and capable person who deserves respect from others whom I treat with respect."
    - E. Alternative to *Catastrophizing*: Viewing consequences in a realistic light and keeping negative aspects in a context that includes positive aspects. This type of thinking leads to the ability to build on the positive aspects of any outcome and nurtures a sense of hopefulness. Example: "This layoff is difficult to accept but I have skills and work habits that will allow me to find another job if I am diligent in my search."
    - F. Alternative to *Negative Forecasting*: Considering that all possible outcomes may occur and recognizing that without effort no positive outcome is possible. This leads to a more optimistic view of the world and generates enthusiasm. Example: "I know there is competition for this job but I'll stay positive in the interview. If I'm not hired for this job, I know there is another job for me in the future."
  3. After reviewing the material on self-defeating thoughts and the positive alternatives to these negative patterns, please record up to seven instances of your engaging in self-defeating thoughts and write down a positive alternative thought that could have/should have replaced it.

Please fill in the information requested: Describe the situation that triggered the self-defeating thought, list the self-defeating thought itself, describe the negative emotion that resulted from this thought, and finally, list an alternative positive thought that could have been used to interpret the situation differently.

<b>Entry 1</b>	Situation	
Date		
	Self-Defeating Thought	
	Negative Emotional Results	
	Alternative Positive Thought	

<b>Entry 2</b>	Situation	
Date		
	Self-Defeating Thought	
	Negative Emotional Results	
	Alternative Positive Thought	

<b>Entry 3</b>	Situation	
Date	Self-Defeating Thought	
	Negative Emotional Results	
	Alternative Positive Thought	

<b>Entry 4</b>	Situation	
Date	Self-Defeating Thought	
	Negative Emotional Results	
	Alternative Positive Thought	

<b>Entry 5</b>	Situation	
	Date	
	Self-Defeating Thought	
	Negative Emotional Results	
	Alternative Positive Thought	

<b>Entry 6</b>	Situation	
	Date	
	Self-Defeating Thought	
	Negative Emotional Results	
	Alternative Positive Thought	

<b>Entry 7</b>	Situation	
	Date	
	Self-Defeating Thought	

Thought	
Negative	
Emotional	
Results	
Alternative	
Positive	
Thought	