COVID-19 Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet Instructions

Change how you feel by changing what you think!

Negative emotions are normal, but skills can help keep them from being too intense

- If you're feeling "negative" emotions (e.g., stressed, sad, anxious, irritable, frustrated), these feelings are entirely normal response to things happening in the world around us.
- We have these emotions because they are helpful to us in many ways. They motivate us to pay attention to and respond to important changes going on around us.
- However, sometimes these feelings are unhelpful, especially when they are too strong or when they push us to behave in ways that aren't good for us in the long term.
- Learning skills that help us manage negative emotions is important for living happy, healthy lives, even in the face of stress.
- **Cognitive restructuring** is one of these skills!

What is cognitive restructuring?

- Psychologists have long known that how we think affects how we feel. Thus, we can change how we feel by changing how we think! We call this *cognitive restructuring* (our "cognitions" are our thoughts).
- This strategy is particularly helpful when we find ourselves "jumping to conclusions" about how we interpret things going on around us. It helps us to pause and take into account other interpretations, outcomes, or pieces of evidence that can help us feel better about a situation.
- Many experiments have shown that cognitive restructuring is a powerful tool for helping people manage negative emotions, and cognitive restructuring is a key component of many successful therapies (see papers here)!
- This worksheet will take you through prompts that help you learn how to use cognitive restructuring when we may be *jumping to conclusions.* Ultimately, this skill is most effective when it becomes a *habit*, so try doing the worksheet over the period of a week or more to really master it!

Example of how to use the worksheet

- We know that focusing on changing a single habit at a time is more effective than trying to change everything all at once. So start by picking one thought or feeling that has been bothering you a lot recently.
- Let's say our example person has been feeling really worried about their family getting sick. Each time they notice that they're worrying, they try to *change their interpretation* of the situation in order to feel better about it.
- **Tip:** When you generate a new thought, try to think about *what evidence you have* that your original thought isn't true! This example does a good job of using evidence against the original thought.
- **See it in action below - then try it yourself!**

Situation	Original Emotion	Original Intensity	Original Thought	Counter evidence	New Thought	New Emotion Intensity
Dad is going to get groceries	Anxious	85/100	"My dad is going to get sick!"	*-I have gone to the store have not gotten sick yet* *-My dad is following all of the recommended guidelines*	"My dad is taking all recommended precautions, and this reduces the chance he'll get sick. There's little evidence for my fear."	30/100
Mom has a cough	Terrified	95/100	"My mom is very ill. This will be very bad for her."	*-My mom only has a cough at this point* *-She is taking care of herself and has spoken to her doctor*	"Our doctor gave us very good advice for what to do next. I trust her to keep my mom safe, so now the best we can do is follow those steps and stay optimistic."	40/100

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