

TOOL

Challenge That Thought



This product is the intellectual property of Elena Aguilar and Bright Morning.
Unauthorized use, reproduction, or distribution is prohibited.

Challenge That Thought

This is another activity that you've got to do in writing. Think about this as making a case against a thought, and by writing it down you can more clearly see what you believe and think. Use it when you notice that you're having a strong uncomfortable emotion. Try to engage in this reflection as soon as you can after experiencing the emotion.

This is a useful practice to do in response to those things that keep you up at night. Writing down your thoughts gets them out of your head so that you can start to figure them out. Writing also helps you internalize the steps and prompts so that you can draw on them more readily in a moment of emotional upset.

Do this activity at least twice this week. Following is an example of this exercise.

Challenge That Thought: Example

<i>Prompting Event:</i> What triggered the distress? Include the who, what, where, and when.	A student came in for help 15 minutes before school on a day that a major assignment was due. I yelled at the student (not my proudest moment) that she should have asked for help sooner. She stormed out of the room and skipped class that day.
<i>Feeling:</i> Name the feelings (see "The Core Emotions" in Chapter 2).	Anger—specifically, frustrated, irritated, resentful.
<i>Clarify Your Interpretation:</i> What were your thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions about the situation?	I've dedicated five hours of class time to this assignment on top of what students should be doing at home. By waiting till the last minute, it's clear she's not taking the assignment seriously and doesn't respect my time. I bet her assignment is a mess. It's too late for me to give her any help.
<i>Unhelpful Thought Patterns:</i> Which category of distorted thinking did you fall into?	Jumping to conclusions. If I pause, I can see that there's a lot I'm assuming about why her request for help is coming at this particular moment

(continued on next page)

Challenge That Thought

Challenge That Thought: Example (continued)

Challenging Evidence:

- Is there any other way to look at this?
- What advice would I give to someone I love in this situation?
- What evidence might someone else point out to show me that my thoughts aren't completely true?
- Am I focusing on weaknesses and not considering my strengths?
- What have I learned from past experiences that could help me now?
- Might I see this situation differently in a few months, or years, than I do today?
- Am I blaming myself, or someone else, for something I, or he or she, can't control?

The student had missed a few days of school recently, so I really didn't know what state her assignment was in. She's doesn't typically seek help outside of class, so something motivated her to do so this time. Moreover, she's usually guarded in class about revealing her weaknesses or confusion; it's unusual for her to ask for help at all. Finally, her class isn't until after lunch, so maybe she was planning to work on the assignment then

More Balanced Interpretation: Rewrite your thoughts about the triggering event in a more balanced way. Stick to the facts.

This student really had to swallow her pride to see me for help, knowing it was last minute. The fact that she bothered at all is probably evidence that she did care about the assignment. I wish I had responded with curiosity and maybe even a little compassion. Maybe I could have helped her after all; she would have turned in the assignment on time, and our relationship wouldn't have been damaged.

Challenge That Thought

Challenge That Thought - Event 1

<p><i>Prompting Event:</i> What triggered the distress? Include the who, what, where, and when.</p>	
<p><i>Feeling:</i> Name the feelings (see “The Core Emotions” in Chapter 2).</p>	
<p><i>Clarify Your Interpretation:</i> What were your thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions about the situation?</p>	
<p><i>Unhelpful Thought Patterns:</i> Which category of distorted thinking did you fall into?</p>	
<p><i>Challenging Evidence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any other way to look at this? • What advice would I give to someone I love in this situation? • What evidence might someone else point out to show me that my thoughts aren’t completely true? • Am I focusing on weaknesses and not considering my strengths? • What have I learned from past experiences that could help me now? • Might I see this situation differently in a few months, or years, than I do today? • Am I blaming myself, or someone else, for something I, or he or she, can’t control? 	
<p><i>More Balanced Interpretation:</i> Rewrite your thoughts about the triggering event in a more balanced way. Stick to the facts.</p>	

From *The Onward Workbook: Daily Activities to Cultivate Your Emotional Resilience and Thrive* by Elena Aguilar.
Copyright © 2018 by Elena Aguilar. Reproduced by permission.

Challenge That Thought

Challenge That Thought - Event 2

<p><i>Prompting Event:</i> What triggered the distress? Include the who, what, where, and when.</p>	
<p><i>Feeling:</i> Name the feelings (see “The Core Emotions” in Chapter 2).</p>	
<p><i>Clarify Your Interpretation:</i> What were your thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions about the situation?</p>	
<p><i>Unhelpful Thought Patterns:</i> Which category of distorted thinking did you fall into?</p>	
<p><i>Challenging Evidence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any other way to look at this? • What advice would I give to someone I love in this situation? • What evidence might someone else point out to show me that my thoughts aren’t completely true? • Am I focusing on weaknesses and not considering my strengths? • What have I learned from past experiences that could help me now? • Might I see this situation differently in a few months, or years, than I do today? • Am I blaming myself, or someone else, for something I, or he or she, can’t control? 	
<p><i>More Balanced Interpretation:</i> Rewrite your thoughts about the triggering event in a more balanced way. Stick to the facts.</p>	

From *The Onward Workbook: Daily Activities to Cultivate Your Emotional Resilience and Thrive* by Elena Aguilar. Copyright © 2018 by Elena Aguilar. Reproduced by permission.

Challenge That Thought

Identify Patterns

At the end of the week, look for patterns. See if you noticed yourself falling more regularly into one or two kinds of distorted thinking. Jot down a few reflections and observations here.

Look for trends in the events that upset you. (Maybe you are triggered most by colleagues or changes in your routine, or you experience more emotional upset on days when you don't eat lunch.) What do you notice about the events that upset you?

WHAT'S NEXT

Keep Learning with Bright Morning



Join our [Coaching Burnout workshop](#).

Learn how to coach through burnout—without burning yourself out.

These skills transform coaching conversations and help create workplaces where people can stay, grow, and find energy in their work again.



Access the [Coaching Emotions Toolkit](#).

Coaching emotions can be intense and intimidating. When teachers are overwhelmed, frustrated, or resistant, it can seem like they'll never make breakthroughs to serve children. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Curious what this could look like for your team?
Schedule your [complimentary consultation](#).

