

Cognitive Distortions

Using Mindfulness

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PURPOSE OF GROUP: to learn how to apply mindfulness techniques
to decrease irrational thoughts
to increase coping skills

MATERIALS NEEDED: pens/pencils for each group member
paper; have enough for each group member
print p. 4 of guide; have enough copies for each group member

1.

-Facilitator opens group by introducing quick **activity** in which group members will **write in a stream of consciousness**.

*Give each group member pens/pencils & a piece of paper, and give them a few minutes to write down every thought that pops into their head as it comes

*You can tell them that they won't be asked to share what they write, so they shouldn't hold back!

-As group members will probably see from the above activity, **we have a constant dialogue running in our head**.

-We can't really stop it... our thoughts are automatic

-They take us away from the present moment and guide our focus towards the past or the future

-Our mind is always judging, evaluating, & creating stories

*You can ask group members, "What was your mind doing during the activity?"

-Our thoughts are often distorted & irrational, and they impact our emotions & behaviors.

-Example: Thought= “No one likes me”

Emotion= Sadness, hopelessness

Behavior= Isolation (i.e. avoiding social events)

*You can ask group members to give more examples

-Our thoughts affect us greatly because **we attach to them.**

-This means that we give them our attention & become immersed in them

-We don't just let them come & go... we overanalyze them, judge them, create a story out of them, etc.

-We take them as the truth (but our thoughts aren't always true!)

-We identify with the voice in our head

a. Therefore, our thoughts become “personal”

2.

-We can't stop our thoughts, but we can **use mindfulness to observe them.**

-When we observe our thoughts, we do not attach to them or judge them

a. We look at the thought as just energy passing through us, and we simply note that it is there

-We **stay in the present moment** as opposed to being swept away by the thought

*Here are two great quotes you can share:

a. Author Michael A. Singer: “You don't fight the mind. In fact, you don't even try to change it. You just make a game out of relaxing in the face of its melodrama. You simply learn how to release the tendency for getting drawn into the energy”

b. Author Eckhart Tolle: “Whenever you are able to observe your mind, you are no longer trapped in it”

-Group members may be thinking, “What the heck does all of this even mean?!” Well, here's an example to show **the difference between attaching to a thought & observing a thought:**

-Thought: “Caitlyn's dress is prettier than mine. She looks so much better than me”

Attaching: “I'm ugly. I'll never be like her. I should just go home. No one notices me”

Observing: “I notice I'm having thoughts about Caitlyn looking better than me”

-Notice the difference in the intensity...

a. **When you attach to a thought, it becomes personal...** when you observe a thought, it becomes impersonal

3. Tell group members that they will now complete a **handout** in which they will **practice observing their thoughts**.

-Print out the handout, **“Observing Our Thoughts”** (on p. 4 of this guide), and give one to each group member to fill out

*Read the example on the handout before they begin writing

3a. Allow group members to share their answers to the handout when they’re done.

*Ask them to point out the differences between attaching to their thought & observing their thought

4.

-Facilitator can conclude group by encouraging group members to practice mindfulness in other areas of their life. Here are some examples:

-Practice mindful listening

a. Listen without judgment & don’t interrupt

b. Don’t think about what your response will be... just listen!

-Practice mindful eating

a. Don’t just gobble up your food! Chew slowly, take small bites, and savor the taste. Be aware of the food’s texture

-Take a mindful walk

a. Go outside & observe your senses... what do you see? Hear? Feel? Smell?

b. Walk at a slower pace than you normally would

*You can ask group members for more examples of areas in their life in which they can practice mindfulness

Observing Our Thoughts

We all have irrational, anxious, ugly thoughts. Write down 3 of your own & how you could **observe** the thought (instead of attaching to it). Follow the example.

Example:

Thought- “My boss yelled at me this morning. He’s angry today”

How I attached to this thought- “What if he fires me? How am I going to pay for my daughter’s college tuition? Should I start looking for other jobs?”

How I could observe this thought- “I notice I’m thinking about my boss’ mood & how he yelled this morning”

1.

Thought-

How I attached to this thought-

How I could observe this thought-

2.

Thought-

How I attached to this thought-

How I could observe this thought-

3.

Thought-

How I attached to this thought-

How I could observe this thought-