

Putting Anxious Thoughts on Trial: Handout & Worksheet

Understanding Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal human emotion designed to protect us from danger. It activates our body's alarm system so we can respond to threats quickly. While this response is helpful in genuinely dangerous situations, anxiety can sometimes become overprotective. It may overestimate the likelihood of danger, underestimate your ability to cope, or interpret uncertainty as evidence that something bad will happen.

One of the most effective ways to reduce anxiety is not by trying to eliminate anxious thoughts, but by learning to examine them carefully. Rather than automatically believing every anxious prediction, we can become curious investigators. In Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), thoughts are viewed as hypotheses to be tested rather than facts to be accepted.

The goal of this worksheet is not to prove your anxiety wrong. Sometimes our worries are realistic. The goal is to evaluate the evidence fairly, consider alternative explanations, and respond from a place of balance rather than fear. Over time, this process helps reduce catastrophic thinking and builds confidence in your ability to cope with uncertainty.

The Case

Describe the situation that triggered your anxiety.

Situation:

What happened?

What emotions did you notice? Rate each from 0–100%.

What is your anxious prediction?

How strongly do you believe this thought (0–100%)?

The Prosecution

Imagine your anxiety is presenting its case in court.

What evidence appears to support your anxious thought?

What experiences or facts is your anxiety relying on?

The Defence

Now consider the whole picture.

What evidence does NOT support the anxious thought?

Are there facts your anxiety is overlooking?

Have you successfully handled similar situations before?

If someone you cared about had this thought, what might you tell them?

The Jury Deliberates

Consider these questions before reaching a verdict.

What is the most likely outcome?

What is the worst-case outcome?

If the worst happened, how would you realistically cope?

What strengths, skills, or supports could help you?

The Verdict

After reviewing all of the evidence:

What is a more balanced, realistic thought?

How much do you believe your original anxious thought now (0–100%)?

How anxious do you feel now (0–100%)?

What is one small action you can take despite your anxiety?

Reflection:

What did you learn about your anxious thinking through this exercise? How might you use this process again in the future?

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This educational worksheet is intended to support reflection and skill development. It is not a substitute for psychological assessment or treatment. If anxiety is significantly impacting your daily life, consider seeking support from a qualified mental health professional.

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