

Automatic Thoughts: Catch the Thought

Automatic thoughts are quick words, images, meanings, or predictions that appear in response to a situation. This sheet helps you slow them down enough to see what your mind added.

Catch it -> Name it -> Separate fact from interpretation

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Trigger / situation

What was happening just before the emotion shifted?

I texted a close friend about weekend plans. They read it at lunch and had not replied by evening.

First thought, image, or meaning

Write the first thing that flashed through your mind - even if it seems irrational, embarrassing, or incomplete.

They are avoiding me. I must have done something wrong.

Emotion + intensity

What did you feel? Rate each emotion 0-100.

Anxiety 70/100; sadness 45/100.

Body sensations

What did you notice physically?

Tight stomach, hot face, urge to keep checking my phone.

The hot thought

Which thought best explains why the emotion became strong? Rewrite it as one clear sentence.

They are pulling away from me because I upset them.

Camera test: what is observable?

What could a camera, audio recording, or neutral witness confirm?

The message was read. There was no reply for several hours. I saw them active online once.

What did my mind add?

Predictions, interpretations, assumptions, labels, or mind reading.

Their motive, that I caused it, and that the friendship is changing.

What deserves attention next?

Do I need to reframe the thought, solve a real problem, get information, tolerate uncertainty, or simply let the thought pass?

No action is needed tonight. If the distance continues, I can ask directly instead of guessing.