CBT Thought Restructuring Guide

A 5-step practice to catch, challenge and reframe difficult thoughts as they happen.

Step 1: Catch the thought

Pause when your mood shifts. Ask: 'What just went through my mind?' Write the exact thought, e.g. 'I'm going to mess this up and everyone will see.'

Step 2: Name the feeling

Name the emotion and rate it 0-100. Naming a feeling reduces its grip and gives you a baseline to compare against later.

Step 3: Check the evidence

Write what supports the thought and what does not. Look for thinking traps: catastrophising, mind-reading, all-or-nothing thinking, 'should' statements.

Step 4: Build a balanced thought

Combine the evidence into a fair statement, e.g. 'I feel nervous, and I've prepared. Even if it isn't perfect, I can handle it.' It should feel believable, not forced.

Step 5: Re-rate and act

Rate the emotion again. Then choose one small, kind action: a short walk, a message to a friend, or the first step of the task.

Your practice space

Situation:

Automatic thought:

Emotion and rating (0-100):

Evidence for / against:

Balanced thought:

Emotion re-rated (0-100) and next small action:

Tip: practise on small everyday worries first. The skill grows with repetition. If distress feels overwhelming or persistent, please reach out to a qualified mental health professional.