Free Download

Teen DBT Cards:

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

www.SocialWorkersToolbox.com

32 cards

SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE **FREE** RESOURCES

WWW.SOCIALWORKERSTOOLBOX.COM

ALL OR NOTHING THINKING

You see situations as completely good or completely bad.

Scenario: You argue with your partner once and decide the whole relationship is a disaster.

Prompt: What is one middle option between the two extremes?

OVERGENERALISING

You take one event and assume it will always happen.

Scenario: One friend forgets to text back, so you decide everyone will ignore you from now on.

Prompt: What evidence shows this may not happen every time?

MIND READING

You believe you know what others think without checking.

Scenario: Someone looks away when you talk and you assume they find you boring.

Prompt: What is another possible explanation for their behaviour?

FORTUNE TELLING

You predict a negative outcome before anything has happened.

Scenario: Before meeting your partner's family, you tell yourself they will dislike you.

Prompt: What other outcome could happen instead?

CATASTROPHISING

You jump quickly to the worst outcome.

Scenario: Your group chat goes quiet for an hour and you panic that everyone is turning against you.

Prompt: What outcome is most likely when you look at the facts?

EMOTIONAL REASONING

You believe something is true because the feeling is strong.

Scenario: You feel unattractive one morning and decide everyone else sees you that way as well.

Prompt: What facts support or challenge the feeling?

SHOULD STATEMENTS

You pressure yourself with strict rules.

Scenario: You tell yourself you should always cope well and never show stress at home.

Prompt: Can you change the should to a preference or a choice?

LABELLING

You attach a harsh label to yourself or someone else.

Scenario: You forget your brother's birthday and call yourself a useless person.

Prompt: What behaviour was the issue rather than the whole person?

PERSONALISATION

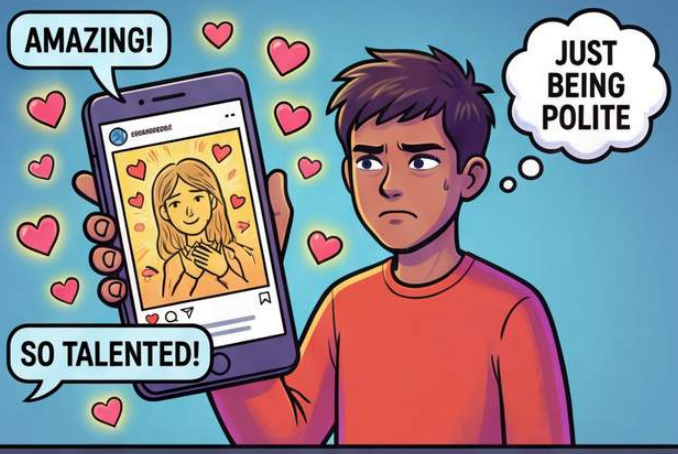
You take blame for things that are not fully your responsibility.

Scenario: Your friends fall out with each other and you decide it must be because of something you said.

Prompt: What part belongs to you and what part belongs to others?

DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVE

You ignore your achievements or good moments.

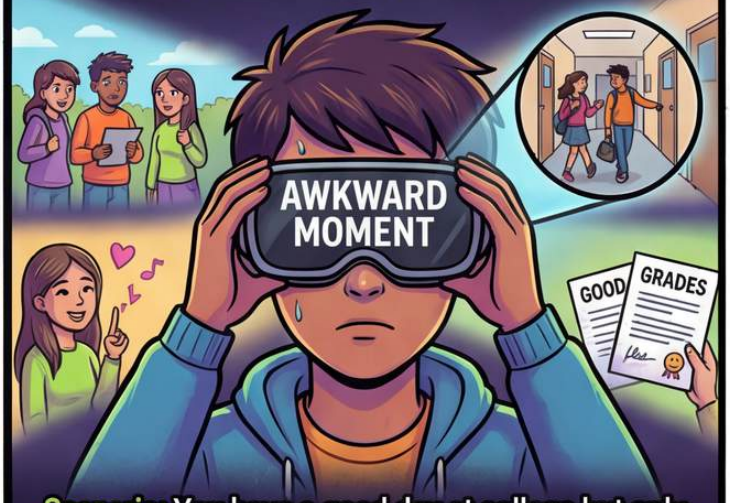


Scenario: You get kind comments on a drawing you post online but tell yourself people are only being polite.

Prompt: What is one positive detail you can accept without brushing it away?

TUNNEL VISION

You focus only on the negative part of an experience.



Scenario: You have a good day at college but only think about one awkward moment in the corridor.

Prompt: What neutral or positive detail have you missed?

COMPARING YOURSELF UNFAIRLY

You compare yourself to others without considering differences.

Scenario: You compare your fitness level to athletes on social media and decide you are failing.

Prompt: What personal strength can you recognise right now?

BLAMING OTHERS

You hold others responsible for your feelings or actions.

Scenario: You spend all weekend gaming and then blame your friends for distracting you from homework.

Prompt: What part of the situation can you take responsibility for?

BLACK AND WHITE RULES

You expect strict rules to work in every situation.

Scenario: You believe good friends must always agree with you, so you feel betrayed when one has a different opinion.

Prompt: Is this rule realistic for everyone?

FILTERING

You see only one piece of information and ignore the rest.

Scenario: On social media, you notice only negative comments and ignore the supportive ones.

Prompt: What information are you leaving out?

MAGNIFYING THE NEGATIVE

You make a small problem feel much bigger.

Scenario: You burn one meal while cooking and decide you are hopeless in the kitchen.

Prompt: What number does this problem honestly deserve on a scale of one to ten?

MINIMISING THE POSITIVE

You downplay good outcomes.

Scenario: You finish a long run but say it does not count because you slowed down near the end.

Prompt: Why does the positive moment matter, even a little?

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

You expect perfect performance from yourself.

Scenario: You learn a new instrument and get frustrated because you cannot play a full song straight away.

Prompt: What would you expect of a friend in the same situation?

EMOTIONAL AMPLIFIER

Your feeling grows until it colours the whole situation.

Scenario: You feel anxious before a party and convince yourself that nothing about the evening will be enjoyable.

Prompt: What part of the situation has nothing to do with the feeling?

PERFECTION OR FAILURE

You see anything less than perfect as failure.

Scenario: You record a video for a college application and delete it if even one sentence sounds slightly off.

Prompt: What would a seventy percent success look like instead?

BLURRED BOUNDARIES

You take on emotions or responsibilities that belong to others.

Scenario: A friend is upset with their parents, and you feel responsible for fixing the whole problem.

Prompt: What belongs to you and what belongs to them?

CONFIRMATION BIAS

You notice only the things that match your belief and ignore anything else.

Scenario: You believe your coach dislikes you, so you notice only their corrections and ignore their praise.

Prompt: What evidence points in the opposite direction?

REGRET THINKING

You replay past mistakes again and again.

Scenario: You keep reliving something embarrassing you said at a party months ago.

Prompt: What can you change going forward and what is outside your control now?

FAIRNESS THINKING

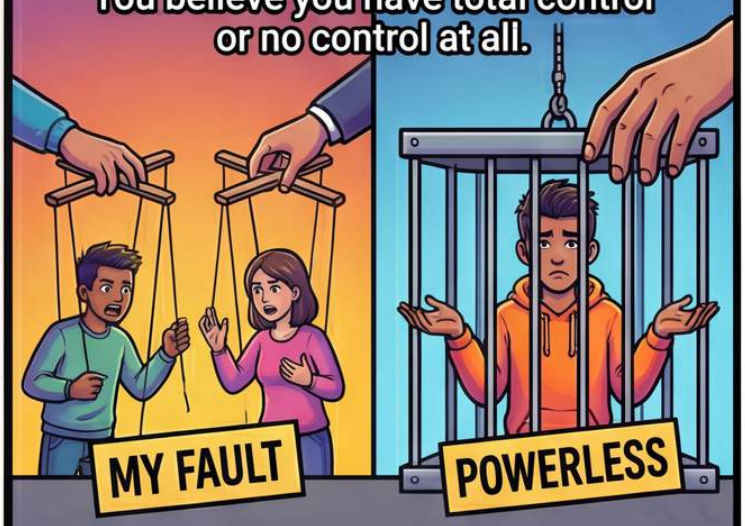
You believe life should always feel fair.

Scenario: You work hard for an audition and feel crushed when someone else gets the part.

Prompt: What can you do next even though the outcome felt unfair?

CONTROL FALLACY

You believe you have total control or no control at all.



Scenario: You blame yourself entirely when your parents argue or decide you cannot influence anything at all.

Prompt: What part of the situation can you influence today?

EXTERNAL VALIDATION TRAP

You judge your worth based on what others think.

Scenario: You post a photo online and feel worthless if it gets fewer likes than usual.

Prompt: What opinion do you want to hold about yourself instead?

HELPLESSNESS THINKING

You assume you cannot improve anything, so you stop trying.

Scenario: You struggle with science and decide there is no point revising because you will fail anyway.

Prompt: What small step can you take today?

FEAR DRIVEN DECISIONS

You let fear decide your actions.

Scenario: You avoid applying for a part time job because you fear being judged in the interview.

Prompt: What would you choose if fear was not in charge?

PAST EQUALS FUTURE THINKING

You believe past events will repeat no matter what.

Scenario: You had one unhealthy friendship and now assume every new friend will treat you the same way.

Prompt: What has changed that could lead to a different outcome?

OVER RESPONSIBILITY

You feel you must fix everything and everyone.

Scenario: You manage everyone's problems in your group chat and feel guilty when someone is still upset.

Prompt: What would happen if you stepped back for a moment?

PEOPLE PLEASING THINKING

You ignore your own needs to keep others happy.

Scenario: You always say yes to extra plans even when you need rest.

Prompt: What need of your own do you want to protect?

APPEARANCE DISTORTION

You judge your whole worth based on one feature you dislike.

Scenario: You notice a skin breakout and decide you look awful, so you avoid going out.

Prompt: What is one thing you can appreciate about your appearance today?

About this Resource

This free set of Teen DBT Cards: Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts is a printable PDF designed to help teenagers recognise and challenge unhelpful thinking patterns. The 32 cards each explain a different thinking trap and give a simple scenario and prompt to help young people think in a healthier, more balanced way. The cards use clear language and engaging illustrations that make the concepts easy to understand.

These cards cover a wide range of unhelpful thinking styles, including all or nothing thinking, catastrophising, mind reading, emotional reasoning, perfectionism, people pleasing, external validation, regret thinking and more. Each card helps teenagers notice when their thoughts are becoming extreme, negative or inaccurate, and encourages them to question the thought and consider another perspective. This supports emotional regulation, resilience, problem solving and confidence.

This resource is suitable for parents, carers, teachers, social workers, counsellors, therapists, youth workers and mental health practitioners. It can be used during direct work, DBT based sessions, CBT style work, emotional wellbeing lessons, early help, therapy, pastoral support or youth group activities. The cards help teenagers understand their thinking patterns, manage strong feelings and practise healthier ways of coping.

This downloadable PDF is ideal for anyone searching for DBT worksheets for teens, unhelpful thinking cards, CBT resources, thought challenging tools, mental health activities, therapy printables or conversation starters that support emotional wellbeing.

Cards included:

- All or Nothing Thinking
- Overgeneralising
- Mind Reading
- Fortune Telling
- Catastrophising
- Emotional Reasoning
- Should Statements
- Labelling
- Personalisation
- Discounting the Positive
- Tunnel Vision
- Comparing Yourself Unfairly
- Blaming Others
- Black and White Rules
- Filtering
- Magnifying the Negative
- Minimising the Positive
- Unrealistic Expectations
- Emotional Amplifier
- Perfection or Failure
- Blurred Boundaries
- Confirmation Bias
- Regret Thinking
- Fairness Thinking
- Control Fallacy
- External Validation Trap
- Helplessness Thinking
- Fear Driven Decisions
- Past Equals Future Thinking
- Over Responsibility
- People Pleasing Thinking
- Appearance Distortion