

Do You Feel Hopeless?

Objective

To explore and understand your feelings of hopelessness while using strategies to increase hope.

What to Know

Hopelessness is the belief that things are not going to get better or that you cannot succeed. Hopelessness may make you pull back from your life and avoid doing things you usually enjoy or being with people you love. When you feel hopeless, you may have a sense that things will never improve, you will never be happy, or you are stuck in life. Feeling hopeless can also feel like helplessness, sadness, apathy, or despair. You could feel empty but not understand why.

You might tell yourself that things are awful, horrible, and dreadful. You may be convinced you will not succeed, or there is no chance things are going to get better. Your thoughts may be distorted, inaccurate, or wrong. It is easy to get caught up in a negative cycle that makes it hard to see that things can get better.

Fortunately, there are some things you can do when you feel hopeless—no matter how bad things seem.

1. Argue the Opposite. When you feel hopeless, you likely think about all the reasons why things will never get better. So, argue the opposite. Is there evidence that things might work out better than you expect? How might things get better? Focusing on the potential positives can open up possibilities. While there is always a chance that things might not turn out as you hope, there is also a chance they may turn out better than you anticipate.

2. Consider What You Gain When You Feel Hopeless. You might think, “I don’t gain anything. I don’t want to feel this way!” But, upon reflection, you might discover that feeling hopeless protects you from disappointment. If you never expect anything good to happen, you do not have to worry about being disappointed. Feeling hopeless might also help you avoid taking action. You might find hopelessness somehow protects you from creating change or doing things differently.

3. Consider What You Gain from Developing Hope. How might your life change? What would you be doing differently if you felt hopeful? Sometimes, you must change your behavior for hopeful feelings to grow.

4. Engage in Problem-Solving. Focus on potential solutions and brainstorm ideas when you have a problem. See if you can come up with as many strategies as you can to address a problem. If a problem seems unsolvable, consider how to change how you feel about the problem.

5. Talk to a Trusted Friend or Family Member. When you struggle to identify possible solutions or you are having a hard time getting unstuck, reach out to a trusted loved one and explain what you are experiencing. They may be able to help you see things from a different perspective or

share strategies to help you feel better. Sharing how you feel might be the key to helping you gain a little more hope about your situation.

6. Develop a Plan. After you have come up with solutions or brainstormed ideas—alone or with others—create a plan and decide what step you are going to take first. If plan A fails to work, identify a plan B. Think of your plans as experiments—run as many experiments as you can until you discover what works.

7. Take Action. After you have identified your plan, take action—one step at a time.

What to Do

This worksheet is designed to help you explore and understand your feelings of hopelessness. Take some time to honestly answer the following questions.

Current Feelings of Hopelessness. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being, "not at all," and 10 being "extremely," rate how intensely you feel hopelessness right now: _____

Reflect on recent events, situations, or thoughts that may have triggered your feelings of hopelessness. Write them down, even if they seem insignificant.

Consider if feelings of hopelessness are a recurring pattern in your life. Have you felt this way before? If so, when and in what situations?

Describe any symptoms you experience when feeling hopeless. This could include fatigue, sadness, isolation, loss of interest, etc.

Write down some of the specific thoughts or self-talk that accompany your feelings of hopelessness. For example, "I can't do anything right," or "Nothing ever works out for me."

How do your feelings of hopelessness affect your daily life? Consider relationships, work or school, self-care, and overall well-being.

Reflect on the strategies you currently use to cope with hopelessness. Are these strategies helpful or unhelpful in managing your feelings? Why?

List the people in your life who you can turn to for support when you feel hopeless. How comfortable are you reaching out to them?

Describe any self-care practices or activities that you find comforting or helpful when you feel hopeless. This could include exercise, relaxation techniques, hobbies, or spending time with loved ones.

Consider what a hopeful future might look like for you. What changes or improvements would you like to see in your life? Are there any goals you want to set for yourself?

Reflect on your personal strengths and positive qualities. What are some things you appreciate about yourself, even when you feel hopeless?

Next, follow the seven steps outlined above.

1. Argue the Opposite. Is there evidence that things might work out better than you expect? How might things get better? Focus on the potential positives to open up possibilities.

2. Consider What You Gain When You Feel Hopeless. Be honest and specific.

3. Consider What You Gain from Developing Hope. How might your life change? What would you be doing differently if you felt hopeful?

4. Engage in Problem-Solving. Focus on potential solutions and brainstorm ideas. See if you can come up with as many strategies as you can. If a problem seems unsolvable, consider how to change how you feel about the problem.

5. Talk to a Trusted Friend or Family Member. Who will you talk to? When?

6. Develop a Plan. After you have come up with solutions or brainstormed ideas—alone or with others—create a plan and decide what to do. If plan A fails to work, identify a plan B.

Plan A

Plan B

7. Take Action. After you have identified your plan, take action—one step at a time. What will you do? By what date?

Reflections on This Exercise

What was challenging about this exercise? Be specific.

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

Did you feel more hopeful after completing this exercise? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
