

Completing the Responsibility Pie Chart to Reduce Self-Blame

Objective

To reduce feelings of guilt, shame, or fear if you blame yourself for a situation or event.

What to Know

In Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), responsibility pie charts serve as valuable tools to help dissect and understand perceived responsibilities, especially when you believe you are responsible for something negative or adverse that occurred. Perhaps you shoulder an undue burden of blame or guilt for an event or situation that may not entirely be within your control or your fault. The “Responsibility Pie” is one way of challenging distorted thinking that involves self-blame, fear, guilt, and shame. This chart helps you challenge unrealistic or distorted thinking about feared events or responsibility for situations that have already happened.

Here is how the CBT responsibility pie chart might be used.

- 1. Identify the Specific Responsibility.** The first step is to define and pinpoint the event or situation you feel responsible for. It could involve personal relationships (e.g., a breakup, a misunderstanding with a friend), a work-related issue (e.g., a project failure, a missed deadline), or even broader life events (e.g., a family problem, a health issue).
- 2. Break Down the Responsibility.** The chart focuses on this specific event/situation and allocates a segment to represent your perceived responsibility or guilt. This section might be disproportionately large compared to other areas on the chart, indicating an inflated sense of responsibility.
- 3. Identify External Factors.** CBT encourages the exploration of external factors or other individuals involved in the situation. Allocate other segments of the pie chart to represent the responsibilities or contributions of other people, circumstances, or factors that might have influenced or caused the event.
- 4. Analyze Cognitive Distortions.** Recognize any cognitive distortions associated with your sense of responsibility (your counselor or therapist can help you with this step). These might include tendencies like personalizing, overgeneralizing, or catastrophizing, where you assume disproportionate responsibility or exaggerate the impact of your actions on the outcome.
- 5. Balance the Pie Chart.** Through discussion and guided reflection, readjust the size of the responsibility segment within the pie chart. This may involve reducing your perceived responsibility and appropriately reallocating responsibilities to other contributing factors or individuals involved.

6. Develop Coping Strategies. Identify coping strategies to manage feelings of guilt, shame, fear, or excessive responsibility. This can involve challenging negative thought patterns, practicing self-compassion, learning to differentiate between what's within your control and what is not, and fostering a healthier perspective on accountability.

What to Do

Identify the event or situation you feel responsible for:

List people and circumstances that contributed to this event or situation (i.e., members of your family, physical abuse, substance use, friends, romantic partner, children, loss of loved one, job status, and so on).

On the next page, divide the pie into slices. Label these slices with the names of the people or circumstances which you think have greater responsibility for the event or situation. The size of each segment corresponds to the perceived or actual amount of responsibility or time dedicated to that specific area.

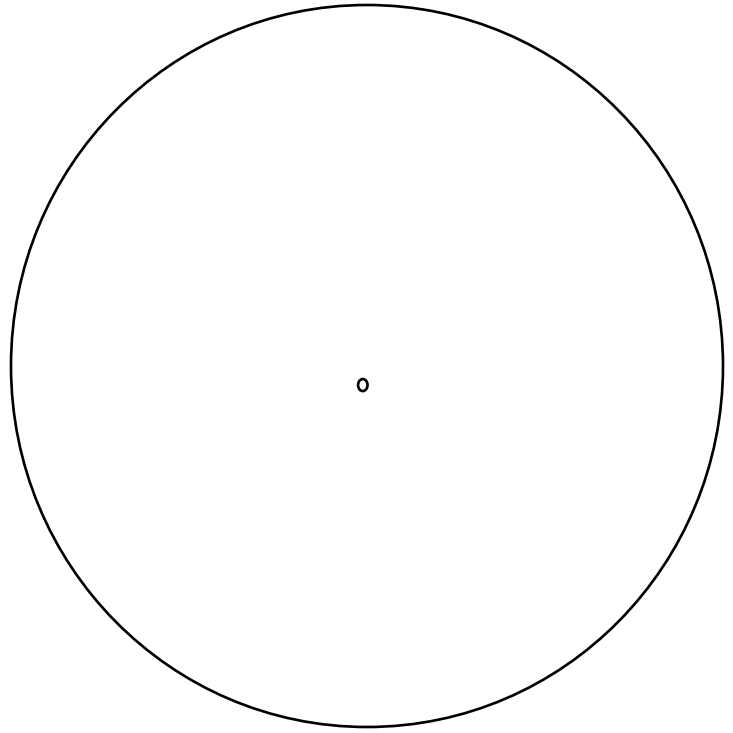
When you are finished, notice how much responsibility is yours alone and how much you share with others.

Write down how responsible you feel, using a percentage scale with 0% being not at all responsible, and 100% being totally responsible.

Next, think about and write down all the other factors that may have contributed to this event.

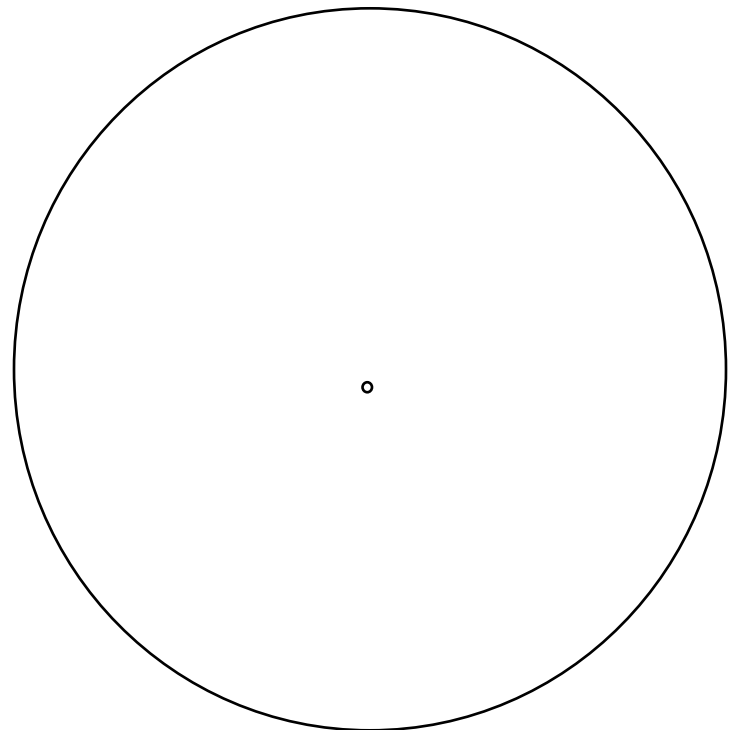
Time to readjust. In the second circle, draw lines out to the circle from the center and mark off sections for each factor, according to how responsible that factor is. The part you are left with (if any) is how responsible you *really* might be.

Original belief about responsibility _____%



List additional factors involved:

Revised belief about responsibility _____%



Identify coping strategies to manage feelings of guilt, shame, fear, or excessive responsibility.
You might challenge negative thought patterns, practice self-compassion, differentiate between what is within your control and what is not, and foster a healthier perspective on accountability. Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe the cognitive distortions you identified while completing this activity.

What was challenging about this exercise? Be specific.

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

What did you learn from this exercise?
