

Coping with Stuck Points

Objective

To identify ways to overcome your “stuck points” and reduce unhelpful cognitive patterns.

What to Do

A "stuck point" is a term used in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to describe thoughts or beliefs that limit growth, progress, and recovery. These thoughts act as barriers, blocking the journey toward mental and emotional wellbeing. These thoughts often originate from negative or distorted thinking patterns and can significantly impact your feelings, choices, behaviors, and overall wellbeing. Identifying and addressing your stuck points is an essential step in moving toward a healthier mental and emotional state.

Common Types of Stuck Points

Stuck points manifest in several forms, and they fall into common categories:

- **All-or-Nothing Thinking.** Seeing situations as entirely good or bad, with no middle ground.
- **Catastrophizing.** Expecting the worst-case scenario to occur, even when it is unlikely.
- **Mind Reading.** Believing you know what others are thinking about you, usually assuming the worst.
- **Labeling.** Assigning negative labels to yourself or others based on specific behaviors or events.
- **Personalization.** Taking responsibility for events or situations that are beyond your control.
- **Should Statements.** Holding rigid expectations about how things "should" be, leading to frustration and disappointment.
- **Discounting the Positive.** Minimizing or ignoring positive aspects of yourself or situations.

Here are some additional points about stuck points. Stuck points might be:

- thoughts about why something happened.
- thoughts about yourself, others, and the world that have changed because of a situation or event.
- “if-then” statements, such as, “If I let others get close, then I will get hurt.”
- extreme or absolute words, such as “never,” “always,” or “everyone.”

Once you identify your stuck points, you can challenge and reframe them. Here is a simple process to help you.

1. Evaluate the Evidence. Examine the evidence that supports or contradicts your stuck point. Are there facts that challenge the validity of this thought? Your thoughts may not be 100% accurate.

2. Consider Alternatives. Identify alternative, more balanced thoughts that can replace the stuck point. How can you reframe the situation in a more constructive way?

3. Shift Your Perspective. Try to view the situation from a different perspective, considering a broader context or a more compassionate outlook.

4. Practice Self-Compassion. Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer to a friend facing a similar situation.

5. Set Realistic Expectations. Acknowledge that perfection is unattainable, and it is okay to make mistakes, fail, and experience setbacks.

Use this worksheet to become more aware of your stuck points and practice challenging them. Over time, this process can help you break free from negative thought patterns, enhance your emotional wellbeing, and facilitate your journey toward recovery and personal growth.

What to Do

Refer to the examples of stuck points below, then write three of your own.

- I should have known he would hurt me.
- It is my fault the accident happened.
- Expressing emotions means I will lose control.
- If I let myself think about what happened, I'll never get it out of my mind.
- I can never be a good person because of the things that I have done.
- I have no control over my future.
- I am unlovable because of [*the trauma*].

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Think about recent challenges or difficult situations you encountered in your life. These could be related to your mental health, relationships, work, school, or any other aspect of your life. Write them down.

Consider the thoughts or beliefs that arose during these challenging moments. What negative thoughts or self-talk did you notice? Examples might include self-criticism, self-doubt, catastrophic thinking, or irrational beliefs. Write them down.

Reflect on the emotions that accompanied these negative thoughts. Did you feel anxious, sad, angry, or overwhelmed? Write down any emotions you recall experiencing.

Think about how your thoughts influenced your behavior. Did they lead to avoidance, isolation, procrastination, or other unhelpful behaviors? Recognizing these patterns can provide valuable insights. Write them down.

The following exercise combines elements of a thought record and Socratic questioning, which are both common techniques used in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). It can help you systematically analyze your negative thoughts or stuck points and explore more balanced perspectives. This exercise can be effective in promoting self-awareness and challenging cognitive distortions.

Here is Susan's example:

Step 1 - Identify the Thought: "I made a mistake in my relationship, and now my spouse is going to leave me."

Step 2 - Automatic Belief: "I'm a terrible partner, and I've destroyed our relationship!"

Step 3 - Evidence For and Against:

For: I had an argument with my partner.

Against: We've had arguments before and resolved them. My partner has also made mistakes in the past.

Step 4 - Cognitive Distortions: All-or-nothing thinking, catastrophizing.

Step 5 - Alternative Thoughts: "We had a disagreement, which is normal in any relationship. It doesn't mean the entire relationship is ruined."

Step 6 - Rate Emotional Intensity: Initial rating: 8/10.

Step 7 - Reevaluate Belief: The automatic belief seems exaggerated given the evidence and the presence of cognitive distortions.

Step 8 - Rate Emotional Intensity Again: After challenging the thought, emotional rating: 4/10.

Step 9 - Action Plan: Plan to communicate with my partner and work through the disagreement constructively.

Step 1 - Identify the Thought. Write down the specific negative thought or stuck point you want to work on. Be as detailed as possible in describing the thought.

Step 2 - Automatic Belief. Note the automatic belief associated with the thought. What do you automatically believe to be true when you have this thought?

Step 3 - Evidence For and Against. Use the following chart to list the evidence that supports the automatic belief from Step 2. In the other column, list the evidence that contradicts or challenges that belief. This process will help you consider both sides of the issue.

Evidence that supports the automatic belief	Evidence that contradicts or challenges that belief

Step 4 - Cognitive Distortions. Review the automatic belief and the evidence for and against it. Identify any cognitive distortions present in your thinking. Common cognitive distortions include all-or-nothing thinking, catastrophizing, mind reading, and personalization. Write down which distortions might be influencing your thinking.

Step 5 - Alternative Thoughts. Generate alternative, more balanced thoughts or interpretations of the situation. Consider what a more objective, compassionate, or realistic perspective might be. Write down these alternative thoughts.

Step 6 - Rate Emotional Intensity. On a scale from 0 to 10, rate the emotional intensity or distress associated with your initial negative thought, where 0 = no distress, to 10 = the highest level of distress: _____

Step 7 - Reevaluate Belief. Revisit the automatic belief you identified in Step 2. Given the evidence, cognitive distortions, and alternative thoughts, reassess the strength and validity of this belief. Is it as intense or distressing as it initially seemed? Why or why not?

Step 8 - Rate Emotional Intensity Again. Re-rate the emotional intensity or distress associated with the thought after completing this exercise, from 0-10: _____

Step 9 - Action Plan. Determine if there are any action steps you can take based on the alternative thoughts or perspectives you identified above. These actions can help you address the situation or challenge in a more constructive manner.

Repeat this exercise whenever you encounter stuck points or negative thoughts to gain clarity, challenge unhelpful beliefs, and ultimately foster more balanced thinking patterns.

Reflections on This Exercise

What was challenging about this exercise? Be specific.

Did anything surprise you about this activity? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
