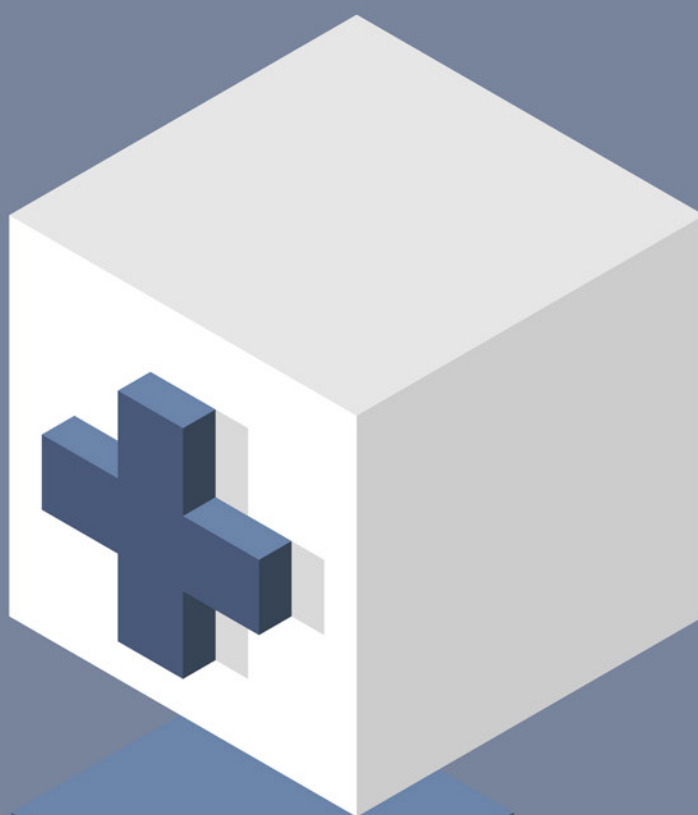




17 Positive CBT & Cognitive Therapy Exercises



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Traditional Cognitive Behavioral Therapy [CBT; 1] is a technique proven to reduce and alleviate depressive symptoms and other disorders related to stress and anxiety. CBT is based on a traditional problem-solving paradigm, focusing on behavioral or cognitive patterns that cause suffering and reduce well-being.

In contrast to the problem-oriented focus of traditional CBT, Positive CBT adopts a solution-focused approach. More precisely, Bannink stated that “...in Positive CBT we set out to design something, there is an output, there is something to achieve. It is not just a matter of removing a problem; there is a designed something that was not there before. In this design, the focus shifts from problem analysis to outcome analysis or goal analysis” [2 p. 9].

Positive CBT broadens the focus of CBT to include themes such as optimism, strengths, positive emotions, meaning, and life goals [3]. In Positive CBT, the attention shifts from analysis, explanations, and problems towards thoughts, future actions, and solutions. This shift in focus helps improve the client’s self-efficacy and self-esteem by highlighting the competencies and resources that encourage sustained and lasting changes [3].

Several beliefs characterize positive CBT. These beliefs assume 1) clients are competent experts who have existing abilities and resources within themselves, 2) there are always exceptions to problems, 3) small changes and improvements are often enough, and 4) success is defined as reaching the preferred outcome, which may be different from solving the problem [4].

By incorporating solution-focused elements, positive CBT offers pathways to reduce pain and suffering, resolve concerns and conflicts, and more effectively cope with life stressors [2]. Further, positive CBT structurally and persistently reinforces attention to positive features, which result in greater improvements in positive affect and other indices of positive mental health, such as positive emotions and subjective happiness [3].

Increasing positive emotions rather than decreasing negative ones has been shown to be more important for well-being and recovery from depression [3]. Indeed, research on neural networks and habit formation suggests that constant reinforcement of orientation to positive features stimulates the development of alternative, positive information processing habits more optimally [4].

The cultivation of positive emotions through positive CBT has various psychological and physiological benefits, such as increased dopamine, which improves cognitive flexibility and the ability to switch perspectives; increased oxytocin, which boosts trust and reduces fear in response to stress; reduced stress hormone cortisol; reduced blood pressure; and decreased risks of high blood pressure and stroke [5].

■ ADVICE FOR PRACTITIONERS

The following advice will help you navigate and get the most out of this curated selection of positive CBT exercises.

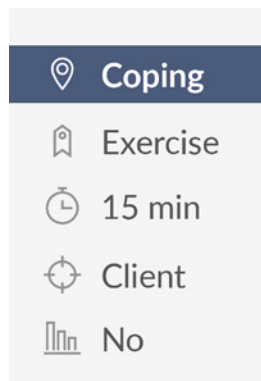
- In Positive CBT, the practitioner's attitude should encourage clients to be the co-experts in their own experiences and allow themselves to be informed by the client. Practitioners (and clients) will benefit from using positive, solution-focused language and an upbeat tone rather than simply mirroring clients' tones. Two simple ways to achieve this are to:
 - Change "if" statements to positive "when" statements.
 - Use the future tense when discussing what clients want to change in their lives.
- To encourage client discourse on solutions, change, and resources, practitioners can:
 - Ask eliciting questions: "What would you like instead of the problem?"
 - Ask questions to encourage more detailed discussion: "What exactly did you do differently?"
 - Ask competence questions that acknowledge achievements: "How did you manage to do that?"
- Positive CBT starts with building a good rapport with clients and creating a positive and strong alliance. Practitioners may find it helpful to ask questions about the daily life of the client and their progress; this will help set a positive tone and uncover information about strengths and resources already present in the client's life.

■ THIS PRODUCT

This product includes a diverse range of science-based positive CBT techniques that can be used to help clients shift their attention away from their problems towards solutions and activities that already work. With a solution-focused emphasis, the exercises included here can help clients adopt a future-oriented approach to the challenges they face and bring about sustained change in the future by drawing on their strengths, capabilities, and existing resources. In doing so, clients will feel empowered as experts in their own lives, find exceptions to their problems, improve self-efficacy and self-esteem, and experience the beneficial effects of increased positive emotions.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE ICONS

Each exercise is structured in the same way, consisting of a background section, a goal description, advice for using the exercise and suggested readings. On the first page of every exercise, a legend is shown, consisting of several icons:



- The first icon displays the topic of the exercise.
- The second icon shows the type of exercise. The following options are available:
 - » Exercise (an exercise that describes an activity that is done once, during a session)
 - » Assessment (an exercise that aims to assess a trait or characteristic of a person)
 - » Overview (an exercise that provides an overview or list of something; research findings, facts, etc.)
 - » Advice (an exercise that is directed at the helping professional providing advice on how to carry out a certain activity)
 - » Meditation (an exercise that describes a form of meditation)
 - » Intervention (an exercise that describes an activity that needs to be done more than once during a certain period)
- The third icon provides an estimation of the duration of the exercise. In other words, how long it takes to complete the exercise. This is always an estimation of the total time it takes. Note that for some exercise types, like overview, advice, protocol and intervention it is difficult if not impossible to provide an estimation of the duration. In these cases n/a (not available) is written.
- The fourth icon describes the intended audience for this exercise; available options include client, coach or group.

- The last icon indicates whether this specific intervention has been tested at least once in a scientific study and has been published in a peer reviewed journal (yes or no). Note that if there is a strong theoretical and scientifically tested basis underlying the tool, but the tool itself in its current form has not been directly addressed in research, the icon will still indicate “no”.

► USING THE EXERCISES

Please note that the exercises in this product are not a substitute for a coaching certification program, which we recommend you take before you call yourself an official coach and before you see clients or patients.

Note that you are advised to use these exercises within the boundaries of your professional expertise. For instance, if you are a certified clinician, you are advised to use the exercises within your field of expertise (e.g. clinical psychology). Likewise, a school teacher may use the exercises in the classroom, but is not advised to use the exercises for clinical populations. Positive Psychology Program B.V. is not responsible for unauthorized usage of these exercises.

■ REFERENCES

1. Beck, A. T. (1979). *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders*. Penguin.
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3. Geschwind, N., Arntz, A., Bannink, F., & Peeters, F. (2019). Positive cognitive behavior therapy in the treatment of depression: A randomized order within-subject comparison with traditional cognitive behavior therapy. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 116, 119–130.
4. Berkman, E. T. (2018). The neuroscience of goals and behavior change. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 70, 28–44.
5. Fredrickson, B.L. (2009) *Positivity*. New York: Crown.