

**Mindset**

Exercise



10 min/day



Client



No

## Diary of Better Moments

Our use of positive and negative information to make sense of our surroundings is imbalanced. Specifically, humans are hardwired to pay attention to, learn from, and use negative information far more than positive information [1]. This negativity bias can have significant and detrimental implications for our relationships and interactions with others, our psychological well-being, and our decisions. However, we can cultivate positive resources that will help us recognize and appreciate when things go better than expected, even in the most challenging situations.

Positive CBT shifts the focus of therapy from what is wrong to what is right and from what is not working for clients to what is [2]. In short, it is not concerned with monitoring problems and weaknesses but with noticing exceptions to these problems and building on existing resources. It is like choosing to nurture the flowers in a garden instead of just removing the weeds. Psychological well-being is, after all, not just the absence of psychopathology but also the presence of positive resources [3]. It is important to note that this is not about toxic positivity or ignoring life's problems. Rather, it is about learning to notice when things have gone better, or less bad, than expected and choosing to do more of what works [4].

The use of mindful self-monitoring techniques, like diary-keeping, improves feelings of competency and allows the individual to view a given situation from a more balanced perspective [2]. Indeed, research suggests that mindful self-monitoring supports the accurate classification of positive and negative stimuli, increases optimism and positive judgments, and reduces negativity bias [5]. In short, keeping a diary of our 'better moments' reminds us of the exceptions to the problems we face. This exercise will help clients develop a more balanced perspective by paying attention to and recording the everyday things that turn out better than or not as bad as expected.



### Author

This tool was created by Elaine Houston.



### Goal

This exercise aims to help clients cultivate a more balanced perspective on life by noticing and recording the everyday moments when things go better than, or not as bad as, expected.



## Advice

- Positive CBT starts with building rapport. It may be helpful to begin sessions with some questions about clients' daily lives, including what kind of work they do and what they enjoy, what they are good at, what hobbies they have, or other inquisitive icebreakers. Beginning in this way sets a positive tone and may also uncover useful information about strengths already present in the client's life.
- While traditional CBT seeks to fix perceived limitations and deficiencies, positive CBT seeks out what is right and focuses more on the exceptions to our problems than on fixing the problem itself. Be mindful that this exercise is not concerned with monitoring problems and weaknesses but with expanding the client's existing resources.
- Better moments do not have to be life-changing or extraordinary. This exercise helps clients identify the little moments that make them think, "That wasn't so bad" or "That went better than expected." Clients should not spend excessive time recording diary entries; rather, writing for just five or ten minutes each day will suffice.



## References

1. Vaish, A., Grossmann, T., & Woodward, A. (2008). Not all emotions are created equal: The negativity bias in social-emotional development. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134, 383-403.
2. Bannink, F.P. (2017). *Positive psychology interventions in practice*. John Wiley & Sons.
3. Slade, M. (2010). Mental illness and well-being: The central importance of positive psychology and recovery approaches. *BMC Health Services Research*, 10, 1-14.
4. Bannink, F.P. (2014). Positive CBT: From reducing distress to building success. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 44, 1-8.
5. Kiken, L.G., & Shook, N.J. (2011). Looking up: Mindfulness increases positive judgments and reduces negativity bias. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2, 425-431.



## Diary of Better Moments

Our nature is to pay more attention to the negative rather than to the positive things in life. Consider the following example. You apply for several jobs and, after a few weeks, just one potential employer invites you to attend an interview. You know you should be happy about that one successful application, but you cannot help feeling deflated and disappointed about the others. The rejections completely overshadow any joy you feel.

If this sounds like a familiar tale, you are not alone. We all have this tendency, whether we admit it or not. However, focusing too much on the negatives can affect our relationships, mental well-being, and even our physical health. What can we do about this universal attraction to the negative parts of life?

When we get too caught up in life's problems, it is easy to forget about the better moments; those ordinary, everyday occasions when things go better than you imagined they would. There are always exceptions to the difficulties we face, but we must look for them and give them the attention they deserve. This exercise will help you form a more balanced perspective on your day-to-day life by helping you notice and reflect on the moments when things work out better than, or not as bad as, you anticipated.

### Step 1: Instructions

Keeping a diary of life's better moments is an effective way to develop a more balanced outlook and help you understand your experiences more clearly. This exercise will help you record and reflect on the situations, conversations, and outcomes that go better than expected. With practice, you will begin to notice these moments more often and with greater ease.

Each day, you will pay attention to the things that go better – or less bad than anticipated. These moments can be related to absolutely any part of your life, including work, hobbies, health, family, and relationships, for example.

You should write about at least one better moment each day and spend five to ten minutes recording these in your diary using the template provided (Appendix A).

It is important to remember that your better moments do not have to be life-changing or fill you with joy. This diary is about looking for the everyday moments that make you think, "Oh, that wasn't so bad" or "Wow, that went better than expected."

### Step 2: Recording your better moments

You can now begin recording the better moments you experience each day. It may not be possible to record these diary entries as they happen. On these occasions, you can quickly note the details and complete the entry when you have time to do so.



What were today's better moments? Using the following questions to guide you, record each experience in the diary template provided. If required, an example of a completed diary template can be found in Appendix B.

1. What happened today that was better (or less bad) than expected? When and where did this happen? Remember, do not dismiss anything as being too small or insignificant.
2. Why was this moment better (or less bad) than expected?
3. What part did you play in making this happen?
4. How did this moment make you feel?
5. What can you do to have more moments like this in the future?

### Step 3: Reflection

- How did it feel to notice your better moments?
- Can you see a common thread in these better moments?
- Looking over your entries from the past week, what was your best 'better moment'?
- What made this moment so much better than you expected?
- When things went better than expected, and what other positive consequences did you notice?
- In what ways has this exercise changed how you think about your problems?
- In what ways have you been responsible for your better moments?



## Appendix A: Blank Diary Template

### My Better Moments

Date:

1. What happened today that was better (or less bad) than expected?	
2. Why was this moment(s) better than expected?	
3. What part did you play in making this happen?	
4. How did this moment make you feel?	
5. What can you do to have more moments like this in the future?	

**Appendix B: Completed Example of Diary Entry**

My Better Moments	
<b>Date:</b> 10/09/2021	
1. What happened today that was better (or less bad) than expected?	<i>I gave a presentation at work. I hate speaking in public, and I was dreading it. I thought I would mess it up, but it turned out much better than I imagined it would.</i>
2. Why was this moment(s) better than expected?	<i>I was nervous and stumbled a few times, but people were engaged and interested in what I said and asked some really good questions afterward. My colleagues said I did a great job.</i>
3. What part did you play in making this happen?	<i>I put a lot of work into the presentation and created some eye-catching slides to go along with it. I was confident that I knew what I was talking about, and that really helped.</i>
4. How did this moment make you feel?	<i>I felt really proud of myself. I know these things come easily to some people, but I find them very challenging. I worked hard, got through it, and I feel really good about my abilities.</i>
5. What can you do to have more moments like this in the future?	<i>I can volunteer to give presentations like this again. When the time comes, I know that I will be more confident about speaking if I put time and effort into the preparation.</i>