

Journaling & recording your thoughts

Intrusive thoughts are not unusual. Often our most automatic thoughts are negative, and, left unchecked, these can develop into ingrained negative ways of thinking.

Negative thinking patterns can have a huge impact on our lives - you might find yourself avoiding certain situations that set off your negative thoughts. This can mean you miss opportunities to do the things you enjoy.

However, similarly, it is possible to 'rewire' our minds to think in more helpful ways. Whether you write them on a piece of paper or in a daily planner, thought records can help you to view your thoughts in a more balanced way.

There are several key steps to follow when writing a thought record, and these are listed below. Try to complete them all to get the most accurate picture of your anxiety, and how your mental health has improved through the process.

You should first consider what was happening when the thought first came on. Where were you? What were you doing? Was your day going well beforehand? Was something on your mind? (e.g. 'I was at home, feeling anxious about going out.')

Write down the thoughts that bothered you. (e.g. 'I thought if I went out, I might have a bad panic attack and die.')

Underneath, create two columns. On one side, write down the 'evidence' that made you believe the thought was real. (e.g. 'The tight feeling in my chest is painful when I have panic attacks.')

On the other side, write all the 'evidence' that the thought is not real. (e.g. 'I'm very healthy', 'Panic attacks can't cause you to die like that', etc)

Investigate the thought. Ask yourself questions about the thought. Why was the thought so anxiety-inducing? What would happen if it came true? What could you do to manage that situation? (e.g. 'I'm more scared of how I feel during the attack', 'If a panic attack happens, I can use mindfulness to calm my breathing.')

Write some alternative, balanced responses to the thought. (e.g. 'I've had panic attacks before, and I've always dealt well with them. I will come through this!')

Record your feelings at the end of the exercise - has your anxiety improved?