**CBT Rationale:**

How we think, feel, and act are directly tied to one another. When you feel sad, you are more likely to have negative thoughts, which then lead to unhelpful behaviors and more sad feelings. Also, when you feel sad, you are more likely withdraw and act in other ways that feed negative thoughts about yourself and others and grow the sad feelings. In cognitive behavior therapy, we target negative feelings like sadness by giving you skills to identify and change negative thoughts and behaviors.

**Negative Automatic Thoughts: What are they?**

1. An automatic thought is a thought that seems to pop into our heads. Everyone has them. We are usually not trying to think about them; that’s why we call them automatic. Most of the time, these thoughts are very quick and we are more aware of the emotion these thoughts make us feel. Lots of times the thoughts are distorted in some way, but we react as if they are true. What we will do is teach you to identify your automatic thoughts and then to evaluate them to see just how accurate they are.
2. When you notice your mood changing or getting worse, stop and ask yourself, “What is going through my mind right now?” Perhaps you could write down a few of these thoughts on a piece of paper or on your phone. Sometimes you may not be able to tell what you were thinking. Replay the scene as vividly as you can in your imagination, as if it is happening again, and concentrate on how you’re feeling. Then ask yourself, “What’s going through my mind?”
3. You will learn that the negative thoughts that flood your mind are the actual cause of your self-defeating emotions. These thoughts are what keep you lethargic and make you feel inadequate. Your negative thoughts, or cognitions, are the most frequently overlooked symptoms of your depression. These cognitions contain the key to relief and are therefore your most important symptoms.
4. Sometimes automatic thoughts are true, sometimes they are not true, and sometimes they have a grain of truth. We will look at your thoughts and see how accurate it is. What evidence was there that the thought was true? What evidence was there that the thought was not true?
5. T: When a response becomes very well learned, we often become unaware of the cognitive processes associated with that response. That doesn’t mean that we can’t get access to those cognitions. For example, do you know how to drive a car with a manual transmission? If so, do you remember when you first learned how to drive a stick shift? You were probably aware of telling yourself each step as you were doing it. Something like, “first, I need to depress the clutch with my left foot, then I need to put the car in gear, then I ease off the brake with my right foot…” After enough experience it probably became automatic so that you weren’t aware of telling yourself those things and could even have a conversation with someone else and drive at the same time. Does that mean that your mind wasn’t still issuing those commands to your limbs? No, and if you wanted to teach someone else how to drive a stick shift you could make the process very conscious again. So, what you need to do is simply start paying more attention to what is going through your mind when you are feeling anxious. When you first notice an increase in anxiety or tension, the first thing I want you to ask yourself is “what am I thinking about?” Just like any other skill, identifying your automatic thoughts is something that will improve over time. In the meantime, when you get stuck ad draw a blank, let your imagination run free. Try to imagine what negative event you might have been predicting, and try to examine and challenge whatever predictions pop into your mind.

**Negative Automatic Thoughts: Thought records**

1. We will evaluate your thoughts by using a worksheet called a Thought Record. This worksheet is an organized way to respond to thoughts that are distressing to you. In the first section, write down the thought that was distress you. In the next section, write down the situation. When you had the thought, what was happening? In the third section, write down your emotions. In the fourth section, write down your automatic thoughts.
2. Through writing down your thoughts, we can begin to see if there are any patterns or mistakes in your thoughts. There are many common mistakes people make in their thinking. It may be helpful to try to figure out what thought mistake you might be making because it will help you respond to the thought better. One common mistake is called “all or nothing thinking,” where you see things in very black and white terms, instead of shades of grey. We would ask you to look back at your thoughts from the last week to see if any of them fall under this mistake.
3. It is crucial to write down your automatic thoughts and rational responses; do not try to do the exercise in your head. Writing them down forces you to develop much more objectivity than you could achieve by letting responses swirl through your mind. It also helps you locate the mental errors that distress you.

**Behavioral Experiments: What are they?**

1. We will do an experiment to test your automatic thought to see if it is true or not. We will find a situation, such as with your friends, with your partner, with your family, at your work or school, to test out your automatic thought. You will act out your automatic thought (ex., You think you cannot strike up a conversation with a stranger) and see what happens. For example, if you are able to talk to a stranger, it shows that you can. If you are unable, we can prepare you to respond to that thought so you will not get demoralized.

**Behavioral Experiments: Importance of hypotheses and testing**

1. One important way to make changes in your life is to challenge unhelpful behaviors and thoughts by testing out alternative ways of responding. The best way to do this is to develop an experiment to test whether the new pattern of thinking or behavior is more helpful than your current responses, and find a way to collect data as you run that experiment. For example, if you know that lying in bed is unhelpful for your depression, you and your therapist may have the hypothesis that getting out of bed and taking a shower as soon as you wake in the morning will be helpful to your mood. You could then identify which days you’d test out this hypothesis and collect data by monitoring your mood on days you did wake and take a shower compared to the days you laid in bed all day. Once you’ve collected the data, you and your therapist could evaluate the benefits of the new behavior.
2. We will do an experiment to test your automatic thought to see if it is true or not. We will find a situation, such as with your friends, with your partner, with your family, at your work or school, to test out your automatic thought. You will act out your automatic thought (ex., You think you cannot strike up a conversation with a stranger) and see what happens. For example, if you are able to talk to a stranger, it shows that you can. If you are unable, we can prepare you to respond to that thought so you will not get demoralized.
3. To help better understand how intensely you are feeling different emotions, I would like you to practice using a rating scale called the subjective units of distress scale (SUDS). Using the SUDS, your emotions will range in intensity from 0 or not noticeable to 100 or at the highest extreme. The SUDS will help you communicate what you are feeling more accurately and in a way I can understand. I will work with you to explain what each rating means, and we will use examples from your life to help anchor each rating. As you become more skilled at using the SUDS, you will feel clearer about your feelings and more able to make decisions about what you would like to try to do in therapy.