

# **E-BOOK - Self-Care Practices content from Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy" by David D. Burns**

*Disclaimer:* The techniques below are based on the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and are inspired by Dr. David D. Burns' book, Feeling Good. They are powerful tools for self-care but are not a substitute for professional counseling. If your feelings become overwhelming or you are in crisis, please connect with a professional.

## *Core Principle: Your Thoughts Are Not Facts*

The fundamental idea is that feelings like anxiety, sadness, or anger are a direct result of the way you think about a situation, not the situation itself. The first step is to recognize this link.

## *Identify the Thought-Feeling Connection:*

Every time you feel a strong negative emotion (e.g., sadness, anger, guilt), stop and ask yourself: "What was I just thinking?" Write down the thought that went through your mind right before the feeling started.

## *Instant Self-Care Practices Based on CBT:*

These practices are organized by the level of a person's distress, with a focus on immediate action.

Low-Level Distress (General Stress, Mild Anxiety, or a Bad Mood):

## *The "What's the Distortion?" Technique:*

When a negative thought arises (e.g., "I'm going to fail this exam"), identify which "cognitive distortion" it belongs to.

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Seeing things in black-and-white (e.g., "If I get a B, I'm a total failure").

Mind Reading: Assuming you know what someone else is thinking (e.g., "They think I'm annoying").

Fortune-Telling: Predicting a negative outcome (e.g., "I know I'm going to mess up this presentation").

Personalization: Taking something personally that isn't about you (e.g., "My friend didn't text me back; they must be mad at me").

**Purpose: Simply naming the distortion helps you see that your thought is a common, illogical error, not an objective truth.**

### The "Pleasure-Predicting Sheet" (Simplified):

When you feel unmotivated or down, make a list of 3-5 simple, enjoyable activities (e.g., listen to a favorite song, watch a funny video, take a 10-minute walk).

For each activity, predict how much pleasure you will get (e.g., "5/10").

After doing the activity, rate your actual pleasure (often, it's higher than you predicted).

**Purpose: This practice directly challenges the cognitive distortion of "emotional reasoning" ("I feel like doing nothing, so I should do nothing") and helps you rediscover that even small activities can boost your mood.**

Medium-Level Distress (Feeling Overwhelmed, Persistent Negative Thoughts, or Low Self-Esteem):

### The Three-Column Thought Record:

Create a simple table with three columns.

Column 1: Situation: Briefly describe the event or situation.

Column 2: Negative Thought: Write down the automatic negative thought that crossed your mind.

Column 3: Rational Response: Challenge the thought. Ask yourself: "What is the evidence for this thought? What is the evidence against it? What would a friend say? What's a more realistic way to look at this?"

Example:

Situation: My friend left my text on read.

Negative Thought: "They hate me. I'm so unlikable."

Rational Response: "My friend is probably just busy. I have no evidence they hate me. They were just talking to me yesterday. I'm taking this personally. A more realistic thought is that they'll get back to me when they can."

**Purpose: This is a core CBT tool that forces you to actively challenge your negative thoughts, which weakens their power over your emotions.**

Conquering Procrastination with "The Pump Principle":

If you're avoiding a task, don't wait to "feel motivated" to start. Burns argues that action comes first, and motivation follows.

Break the task down into a "stupidly simple" first step. For example, if you need to write a paper, your first step is "Open a blank document." The next is "Write the title."

Commit to just doing that one small step. You'll often find that the momentum from that first action will carry you forward.

**Purpose: This directly counters the feeling of being overwhelmed and the thought, "I can't do this." It shows you that you can, and that progress is made in tiny, manageable steps.**

Extreme Distress (Feeling Hopeless, Severe Guilt, or Self-Criticism):

Challenging "Musts," "Shoulds," and "Oughts":

When you're feeling extreme pressure or guilt, identify any "should" statements you're telling yourself (e.g., "I should be able to handle this. I must be a failure if I can't").

Rephrase them as preferences. For example, "I would prefer to handle this well, but it's okay that I'm struggling right now. It's a difficult situation."

This rephrasing softens the internal pressure and reduces feelings of shame.

**Purpose: These rigid rules are a source of great self-criticism. Rephrasing them helps you be more compassionate with yourself.**

The "Self-Labeling Challenge":

When you are tempted to call yourself a negative name (e.g., "I'm a loser," "I'm worthless"), challenge that label.

Ask yourself: "Is this label a complete and accurate description of a complex human being?"

Instead of using a label, describe your specific behavior in the moment. "I made a mistake on that assignment" is accurate. "I am a failure" is not.

**Purpose: This helps you separate your identity from your actions. It teaches you that a single mistake or moment of weakness does not define you as a person.**