**Challenging Thoughts**

**Intervention Planning Guide**

This is an example. Please modify to reflect the needs of your student or students.

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| **SMART Goal****\*reference SMART goal setting guide** | Example: By [date], given explicit instruction in Challenging Thoughts, [student] will independently challenge an unhelpful thought using question prompt(s) and generate a new helpful thought with associated emotions and behaviors.  |
| **Baseline** | Baseline context: | During homeroom 1:1 with [e.g., school counselor] |
| Baseline data type and dates: | [Date]: [X] thought challenging exercises completed daily  |
| **Intervention** | Date intervention plan created: | [Date] |
| Who implements plan: | e.g., counselor, special education teacher  |
| What materials are needed: | Instructional Outline (attached); Thought, Feeling, and Action Visuals (attached); Thought Challenging Prompts Visual (attached); Cognitive Triangle Illustration (attached); Guided Practice Activity Sheet (attached); white board or large paper pad or scratch paper, with pens/markers; examples of thoughts/feelings/actions from favorite media; reinforcement system (e.g., token board, reinforcer, etc.) |
| How the intervention is delivered, including any reinforcement procedures: | **Teaching Trials:** 1. Use Instructional Outline and attached visual supports (i.e., Thought, Feeling, Action Visuals; Cognitive Triangle Illustration; Thought Challenging Prompts Visual) to briefly review relationship between thoughts, feelings, and actions and introduce idea of challenging thoughts.
2. Model (I Do): Use the Instructional Outline and visual supports attached to model/demonstrate identifying unhelpful thoughts, challenging thoughts, and creating or choosing new thoughts using example on Guided Practice Activity Sheet.
3. Guided practice (We Do): With [student], practice identifying and challenging an unhelpful thought and creating or choosing new thoughts using visual supports and Guided Practice Activity Sheet.
4. Independent practice (You Do): Prompt student to identify and challenge an unhelpful thought and create or choose new thoughts using visual supports and Guided Practice Activity Sheet.

**Practice Trials in 1:1 Session:** 1. Have [student] document an experience of an untrue or unhelpful thought with associated feelings and actions using Guided Practice Activity Sheet (or offer example from favorite media).
2. Prompt student[s] to challenge thought(s) and create new thought(s) on Guided Practice Activity Sheet; see Instructional Outline for support in challenging thoughts.
3. Provide reinforcement paired with praise after each practice opportunity.

**Generalization to Classroom:** 1. Once the student(s) can demonstrate the skill in a 1:1 setting, provide natural practice opportunities throughout the course of the day to allow student(s) to practice challenging thoughts with “Is this thought true?”, “Is this thought helpful?” probes. Practice generating new thoughts with the student, or educator can provide options for alternative thoughts that the student can choose from. Practice opportunities could occur at times such as whole class or small group reading, social studies, structured group work, or intervention time. Use visuals to support understanding and provide positive reinforcement.
2. Practice exercises can be done using blank Cognitive Triangle Illustrations, blank copies of Student Example #3 from Guided Practice Activity Sheet, or on scratch paper.
3. Provide student-specific positive reinforcement paired with praise after each practice opportunity.
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| Date and context for initial implementation: | 1:1 with [student] in [setting], [date]  |
| **Ongoing Intervention Data** | Data collector: | e.g., counselor during teaching sessions; special education teacher or paraeducator during classroom practice. |
| Intervention data type: | Frequency count of instances of practice with identifying thoughts, feelings, actions and generating new thoughts |
| Mastery criteria: | Complete 3 out of 4 (75%) thought challenging exercises. |
| Adjustment criteria: | If the student is not engaging in practice exercises during scheduled times, offer student alternative behavioral coping strategies to try (e.g., break, diaphragmatic breathing, asking for help, etc.)  |
| **Plan Review** | Implementation review: | Future meeting to review data schedule for: [Date]: Review implementation and adjust if needed. [Date]: Review initial data and adjust if needed.  |
| Plan fidelityRate 0-5: 0 = not at all 3 = somewhat 5 = completely | Team independence: [insert rating], [date] Team fidelity: [insert rating], [date] |
| Quantity or dosage of implementation | The team works with [student] on Monday of each week to identify four opportunities in the week when untrue/unhelpful thoughts are likely to naturally occur (e.g., typically taxing times for the individual student. [Student] has them on their schedule to raise awareness, but team still needs to prompt student by pointing to Challenging Thoughts on schedule.  |
| Plan executione.g., dates, performance data, decisions and changes:\*Complete at first review meeting | [Date]: implementation reviewede.g., Staff will begin prompting [student] by pointing to Challenging Thoughts on schedule and staff will provide a token for every practice opportunity [student] engages in.  |

**Thought Challenging**

 **Instructional Outline**

**Instructions:** Use this instructional outline as the lesson plan and script for teaching the Thought Challenging strategy. Use the visual supports and activity sheets to support student engagement and understanding.

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| Materials Needed | Thoughts, Feelings, Actions visuals (attached; for teacher and for student), copies of Cognitive Triangle Illustration (attached), Guided Practice Example Cognitive Triangle Illustration (attached), Thought Challenging Prompts handout (attached), examples of thoughts/feelings/actions from favorite media or generic examples, white board or large paper pad or scratch paper, with pens/markers, reinforcement system (e.g., token board, reinforcer, etc.) |
| Lesson goal | Given explicit instruction in Challenging Thoughts and tangible supports, [student] will independently select appropriate ​​thought-challenging question for a given unhelpful thought and generate a new helpful thought.   |
| Introduction | *“We learned how our thoughts* **[point to head and hold up thought bubble visual]***, emotions* **[point to chest and hold up heart visual]***, and behaviors* **[gesture hands/arms out, hold up body visual]** *are all connected. They can change each other.”**“Our brains think thousands of thoughts in a day. Thousands! Some of those thoughts are creative, true, and interesting. They create wonderful, happy feelings, and they motivate us to do kind and heroic things.”**“Sometimes our brains make silly, funny, or ridiculous thoughts. Sometimes we have annoying thoughts. Sometimes we have thoughts that make us feel bothered or upset.”* *“Sometimes, we have totally untrue or very unhelpful thoughts. These untrue or unhelpful thoughts* **[point to head, thought bubble visual]** *can make us feel* **[point to chest, heart visual]** *bothered, upset, frustrated, unmotivated, angry*— *just* *uncomfortable!”* *“Untrue or unhelpful thoughts also can change how we act* **[body visual]**. *They can lead us to do things we should not or stop us from doing things we want to do.”* *“This lesson is all about catching those unhelpful, untrue thoughts and challenging them. What does it mean to ‘challenge’ something?”***[Pause for student response.]***“Challenge means to disagree or to question something. To test it out, confront, or argue with it. We are going to learn to challenge our thoughts by asking ourselves two main questions: (1) Is this thought true? (2) Is this thought helpful?”* **[Show Thoughts Challenging Prompts visual.]** *“By challenging these unhelpful thoughts, we can try to create new, more helpful thoughts so that we can feel better and do better.”* |
| **Teaching Trials** |
| Model (I Do) | *“I’m going to show you what it looks like to catch an unhelpful thought and challenge it. Then, you are going to get a chance to practice.”**“Let’s pretend I just had an argument with my best friend. Afterwards, I had the thought* **[Point to head, thought bubble.]***: ‘Nobody likes me.’”***[Write into *My Thoughts* on Cognitive Triangle Illustration (attached), whiteboard, or scratch paper.]***“With that thought, I might feel* **[point to heart, heart visual]** *sad or lonely.”* **[Write into *My feelings* Cognitive Triangle Illustration, whiteboard, scratch paper.]***“I might be so sad that I stop doing things I like to do* **[body visual]***. I don’t talk to my other friends when they say, ‘Hi,’ later. I might stay quiet all day, which keeps me feeling lonely and thinking nobody likes me”* **[Write into *My actions* on Cognitive Triangle Illustration, whiteboard, scratch paper.]***“Well, I don’t like this at all! I feel sad, and I’m not talking and hanging with my friends like I normally want to. Let’s catch that thought and challenge it.”***[circle ‘Nobody likes me’ thought on Illustration]** *“Here is the thought I want to challenge. I am going to ask myself one or both of my challenging questions.”* **[can reference Thought Challenging Prompts Visual]***“Is this thought true? Is it? No!* **[Hold thumbs down gesture for alternative communication modeling.]** *I have other friends who said, ‘Hi,’ to me! I have [family, pets, teachers, coaches, etc.]. I was thinking that my best friend* *was not liking me during the argument, but I don’t think that nobody likes me!”**“Is this thought helpful? No!* **[Hold thumbs down gesture for alternative communication modeling.]** *It’s changing my feelings and my actions in ways I don’t like. Believing that thought is not helping me. It’s not helping me fix the argument with my friend.”* *“Now that I have challenged the untrue, unhelpful thought. What have I discovered? What are some new thoughts I could made to feel better and do better?”* **[Show EXAMPLE from Guided Practice Activity Sheet.]***“To create a new thought, I might think to myself, ‘My friends still like me, I’m just having a hard day.’”* *“I could also choose thoughts that could make me feel better or do better from the table below. I might circle the following thoughts* **[Demonstrate on Guided Practice Activity Sheet.]**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *No one will ever like me.* | *My best friend was frustrated with me during the argument, but they still like me.* | *I should fix things with them when I see them later.* |
| *I make mistakes sometimes, and people still like me anyway.*  | *There is nothing I can do to fix this.* | *My best friend hates me.* |

*“I’m feeling a bit better, less sad. A little more hopeful.”* **[heart visual]***“I’m not acting so quiet. I want to find my friend to fix our argument.”* **[body visual]** |
| Guided Practice (We Do) | *“Now we are going to practice catching and challenging untrue, unhelpful thoughts together.”* *“Let’s pretend our character, Royce, just got a bad grade on a math test. He thinks, “I am never going to understand math. It is impossible for me.”* **[Refer to Guided Practice Activity Sheet, Student Practice #1.]** *Royce stops studying, he stops practicing math, he stops raising his hand in math class. Royce is frustrated, hopeless, and sad.”* *“Let’s catch that thought and challenge it. Let’s ask Royce one or both of our challenge questions.”* **[can reference Thought Challenging Prompts Visual]***“Is this thought true?”* **[Pause for student responses.]** *“No!”* **[Allow for verbal or alternative thumbs up/thumbs down response.]***“Is this thought helpful?”* **[Pause for student responses.]** *“No!* **[Allow for verbal or alternative thumbs up/thumbs down response.]***Now we have challenged the untrue, unhelpful thought. What new thoughts might help him feel better and do better?”***[Students can create a new thought or choose options for new thoughts on Guided Practice Activity Sheet.]**Instructional Notes:* Be sure to provide visual answer choices or choices on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, as needed, for students who struggle to write answers on Guided Practice Activity Sheet. Students can point to new thoughts on Activity Sheet or identify “a,” “b,” “c,” etc. as new thoughts on Activity Sheet.
* Advanced student option. After creating new thoughts, ask: *“Do you think Royce might feel differently with the new thought? How so? Do you think he might act differently with the new thought? How so?”*
 |
| Independent Practice (You Do) | *“Now you are going to practice catching and challenging untrue, unhelpful thoughts.”* **[Refer to Guided Activity Practice Sheet, Student Practice #2.]** *“Let’s pretend our character, Macy, is sitting near her friend, who is coughing a lot. Macy thinks, ‘I’m going to get sick, too. I will have to go to the hospital. I hate hospitals, that would be the worst thing ever.’”* *“Macy feels scared. Her heart beats fast. Her stomach feels shaky. Macy moves away from her friend. She sits by herself at recess to be away from germs. She refuses to sit near anyone for the rest of the day.”* *“Now, you try to catch and challenge Macy’s untrue, unhelpful thoughts. What new thoughts might help her feel better and do better?”* Instructional Notes:* Be sure to provide visual answer choices or choices on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, as needed, for students who struggle to write answers on Guided Practice Activity Sheet. Students can point to new thoughts on Activity Sheet or identify “a,” “b,” “c,” etc. as new thoughts on Activity Sheet.
* Advanced student option. After creating new thoughts, ask: *“Do you think Macy might feel differently with the new thought? How so? Do you think she might act differently with the new thought? How so?”*
 |
| **Practice Trials in 1:1 Session**  |
|  | *“Now you are going to practice catching and challenging untrue, unhelpful thoughts for yourself.”**“Think of a time you felt uncomfortable. Maybe you were bothered, angry, sad, frustrated, lonely, or any other uncomfortable feeling. Write that feeling here.”* **[Refer to Guided Practice Activity Sheet, blank Student Practice #3. See Instructional Notes.]***“What were your thoughts? What did you do?”* **[Fill in answers to appropriate boxes Student Practice #3, Guided Practice Activity Sheet.]****[Prompt student(s) to challenge truth/helpfulness of thoughts and generate new thought. See Instructional Notes.]**Instructional Notes: * Some students may struggle with generating a personal example. You can use an example from student(s) favorite media. For favorite media examples, choose video clips, book scenes, etc., to depict a character’s thoughts (maybe the character voices thoughts, or student(s) can guess at likely thoughts). Then identify likely feelings and the actions the character took before practicing generating new thoughts.
* Advanced student option. To help with generating new thoughts, consider the following additional probes to ask:
	+ Is this thought true?
		- Why do you believe this?
		- Do you believe this because something has happened?
		- Do you believe this because something did not happen as you expected?
		- Has this happened before?
		- Could there be another explanation?
	+ Is this thought helpful?
		- What would happen if this thought was true?
		- What would happen if you did not believe this thought or if you ignored this thought?
		- Will this thought prepare you for what to do next time this happens?
* Advanced student option. After creating new thoughts, ask: *“Do you think you might feel differently with the new thought? How so? Do you think you might act differently with the new thought? How so?”*
* Make sure [student] is in a calm, well-regulated state before practicing thought challenging exercises for the first time.
* Provide student-specific reinforcement after each practice session.
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| Reflection/Closure | **[Ask questions to assess student understanding and potential usefulness of the strategy.]** **[Modify the types of questions and response options based on the student’s learning profile and communication preferences.]**  Example question: *“On a scale of 1-10, 1 being super easy and 10 being super hard, how hard was this strategy to do?”* *“Would this strategy be useful or not useful to you?”* |
| Generalizationto the Classroom | Once the student(s) can demonstrate the skill in a 1:1 setting, provide natural practice opportunities throughout the course of the day to allow student(s) to practice challenging thoughts with “Is this thought true?” “Is this thought helpful?” probes. Practice generating new thoughts with the student, or the educator can provide options for alternative thoughts that the student can choose from. Practice opportunities could occur at times such as whole class or small group reading, social studies, structured group work, or intervention time. Use visuals to support understanding and provide positive reinforcement.     |

**Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions Visuals**









Images Source: Microsoft 365 stock images

**Thought Challenging Prompts Visual**

 

**Cognitive Triangle Illustration**



**Guided Practice Activity Sheet**

**Directions:** For each item below, read the untrue and/or unhelpful thought. Create or choose brand new thoughts to replace the old thought. *What new thought(s) might make you feel better and do better?*

**EXAMPLE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Text Box**Text Box | **I had an argument with my best friend. I think, “Nobody likes me.”** |
| **Text Box** | **I feel sad and lonely.**  |
|  | **I don’t talk to my friends. I stay quiet the rest of the day.** |



[Circle YES or NO.]

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[Circle YES or NO.]

Create a new thought:

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OR

Circle new thought(s) from the following options:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *a. No one will ever like me.* | *b. My best friend was frustrated with me during the argument, but they still like me.* | *c. I should fix things with them when I see them later.* |
| *d. I make mistakes sometimes, and people still like me anyway.*  | *e. There is nothing I can do to fix this.* | *f. My best friend hates me.* |

**Student Practice #1**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Text Box | **Royce just got a bad grade on a math test. He thinks, “I am never going to understand math. It is impossible for me.”** |
| **Text Box** | **Royce stops studying, he stops practicing math, he stops raising his hand in class.** |
| **Text Box** | **Royce feels frustrated, hopeless, and sad.** |



[Circle YES or NO.]

****

[Circle YES or NO.]

Create a new thought:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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OR

Circle new thought(s) from the following options:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *a. Never is a long time. It is unlikely Royce will never understand math.* | *b. Royce is struggling to understand this topic in math. He needs more help to review his test.* | *c. Royce is a bad student.*  |
| *d. Royce might as well give up.* | *e. Royce did well on his homework. He needs test taking strategies to do just as well on his test.*  | *f. Royce can ask for a break and think about the math test later.* |

**Student Practice #2**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Text Box | **Macy is sitting near her friend, who is coughing a lot. Macy thinks, “I’m going to get sick, too. I will have to go to the hospital. I hate hospitals, that would be the worst thing ever.”**  |
| **Text Box** | **Macy feels scared. Her heart beats fast. Her stomach feels shaky.** |
| **Text Box** | **Macy moves away from her friend. She sits by herself at recess to be away from germs. She refuses to sit near anyone for the rest of the day** |



[Circle YES or NO.]

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[Circle YES or NO.]

Create a new thought:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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OR

Circle new thought(s) from the following options:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *a. Germs can kill Macy.* | *b. Macy has been sick before. She got better after a few days.* | *c. The coughing friend might not be contagious. Macy has been around coughing people plenty of times.* |
| *d. Macy is in danger.*  | *e. Even if Macy had to go to the hospital, the hospital doctors would help her.*  | *f. Macy can get sick from anyone at any time. Macy should stay home.*  |

**Student Practice #3**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Text Box |  |
| **Text Box** |  |
| **Text Box** |  |



[Circle YES or NO.

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[Circle YES or NO.]

Create a new thought:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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