Session 11: The Thought Record: Putting a Thought on Trial

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Appendix B handouts; whiteboard; the Session 11 handout (Thought Record)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Complete a full Thought Record (Appendix B) on a real, moderate thought
- Use evidence for and against a thought rather than arguing from feeling
- Write a balanced replacement thought they actually believe

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 2 — Healing. The one idea today is that a thought can be put on trial on paper, with evidence for and against. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. Today the trial moves out of our heads and onto paper, where a thought cannot keep changing shape. We build a full Thought Record — evidence for, evidence against, and a balanced thought we actually believe — and we rate everything, because numbers expose movement.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: “What is the harshest sentence your mind regularly pronounces on you — stated as plainly as you hear it?” Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

The Thought Record is CBT's core worksheet, and it works because it moves the trial out of our heads and onto paper where the thought cannot keep changing shape. Columns: situation; automatic thought (rated — how much do I believe it, 0–100); feelings (rated); evidence for the thought; evidence against it; a balanced thought that accounts for all the evidence; then re-rate the original belief and feelings. Two disciplines make it honest: we write the evidence for the thought fairly — sometimes the thought holds a piece of truth, and the balanced thought keeps that piece — and we judge the replacement by believability, not by how inspiring it sounds. A balanced thought believed at 70% changes behavior; a slogan believed at 5% changes nothing.

- **Rate it, don't debate it** Numbers expose movement. A thought that drops from 90 to 55 has not vanished — and the feeling usually follows it down. That is progress worth seeing.
- **Evidence is specific** 'I'm a terrible parent' meets evidence like a kept visit, a child-support payment, a call returned — concrete entries, not vibes, on both sides of the ledger.
- **Keep the true piece** Many painful thoughts guard something real (a harm done, a consequence unfolding). The balanced thought owns the true piece and refuses the false verdict built on top of it.
- **Written for the next storm** Records go in the workbook where a craving or a 3 a.m. spiral can find them. We are writing letters to our future selves.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Cognitive therapy of substance abuse treats thoughts as testable claims and builds the skill of examining evidence for and against them in writing (Beck et al., 1993). Key sources for this session: Beck, Wright, Newman, & Liese (1993); Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (2006), TIP 47. Evidence strength: Strong for CBT-based substance use interventions. Spiritual practice: Evening examen in written form — correlates with CBT self-monitoring (the thought record); evidence: Strong for CBT skills practice (Beck et al., 1993). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version. TIP 47 addresses intensive outpatient treatment, above this education setting; it is background for the CBT skills taught here, not the setting delivered.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Which column was hardest — evidence for, or evidence against? What does that tell you?
2. Did your feeling move when the number moved? By how much?
3. What is the difference between a balanced thought and just 'being positive'?
4. Whose voice does your harshest automatic thought sound like — and does knowing that change its authority?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Guided completion: facilitator picks a common, moderate example ('I blew that meeting, everyone saw I'm not serious') and the whole group builds one record together on the whiteboard. Then each participant completes Appendix B on their own thought from this week's sequences, with facilitator circulating. Volunteers share only their balanced thought aloud.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Complete two more Thought Records this week on real thoughts as they occur. Bring the one that surprised you most to Session 12. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

A thought record is education, not therapy: if a participant's thought is rooted in trauma ('it was my fault,' about an assault or a death), do not process its evidence in group. Validate, help them park it respectfully, and refer to their counselor the same day — some thoughts get a courtroom with a licensed clinician, not a group worksheet.

Closing (2 minutes)

A thought that drops from ninety to fifty-five has not vanished — and the feeling usually follows it down. That is progress you can point to. Two more records this week. Next session: the load-bearing lies underneath the daily thoughts.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐