

**Thinking Matters!
Exploring My Thinking**



If I want to change my behavior:

Thinking Matters!



Thinking Matters! Exploring My Thinking

This is a sample of the Thinking Matters worksheets and instructions from the original Thinking Matters Facilitator Manual.

If you would like to access a full copy of the Thinking Matters Facilitator Manual 2nd edition you can purchase it at this link. [Thinking Matters Facilitator Manual 2nd edition](#) or you can contact Thinking Matters, LLC here: [Contact Thinking Matters, LLC](#)

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Foreword

Thinking Matters is designed to be a very basic educational cognitive behavioral approach. This approach will fill a gap that exists among available cognitive behavioral approaches. Most programs are intended to produce lasting behavior change in participants. Because of this, they are complex and time consuming. These programs often have duration from six months to 2 years, when delivered as designed. Most programs attempt to teach several different approaches, such as cognitive restructuring and social skills. These approaches assume that participants possess a basic understanding of underlying concepts and ideas. They also assume the participants enter the program with the skills necessary to perform the program activities.

For example, program manuals often indicate facilitators should instruct participants to select a situation where they got into trouble and write a brief objective description. The facilitator is left to determine if the group understands the terms being used. If a participant thinks “brief” consists of two paragraphs. The instructor must provide guidelines for the definition of brief. This must be done within the time allotted for program activities. Unfortunately, many program designers do not consider that teaching the basic cognitive skills will lengthen the program duration and/or increased the session length.

Participants are regularly asked to provide a situation description that contains “no excuses and no blame”. Regrettably, the criminal’s thinking does not separate the “excuses” from the “situation”. These diverse ideas appear to the offenders as a “situation package”. The thinking that leads an offender to trouble is the kind of thinking that goes something like this: “I hit my neighbor in the nose because he is rude.” To the offender the neighbor is in *fact* rude. Offenders believe their perceptions based upon an antisocial mindset. To them it is not an excuse—it contains no blame. Most program approaches do not specifically require participants to find excuses and/or blame. Nor, do they teach participants to remove excuses and blame from their situation description as part of the curriculum.

Facilitators often feel compelled to complete the program by a certain deadline. Sometimes this pressure coerces them to skip essential information or gloss over important activities. For example, role rehearsal is a critical activity in some programs. Due to competing the interests above, when role rehearsals are not performed, as required, participants do not gain the full benefit from the activities. This is just one negative result of spending significant time bringing the participants “up to speed”. In addition, when offenders *are* able to perform the basic skills, facilitators are “out of time”. These competing pressures often undermine the goals and outcomes anticipated by program authors and service agencies.

Thinking Matters teaches these skills in a very basic manner. Because these are a sub-set of the skills necessary to produce long-term change, they can be taught in a short period. Most approaches teach thinking reports as a singular item—in aggregate. Thinking Matters teaches each element of thinking reports individually. Before a participant is asked to create a thinking report, they are taught how to write a satisfactory situation description. They are not assigned thinking reports until they have demonstrated the skill of writing a situation description. They are not required to look for risk thinking until they have demonstrated the requirements of a thinking report. This makes learning the skills easier and more manageable for participants.

Two basic advantages to Thinking Matters:

- Participants are better prepared to be successful in more intensive program approaches.
- Facilitators using intensive approaches can adhere to program scripts and methods with fewer deviations and “clean-up”.

Teaching the skills individually teaches the building blocks for subsequent cognitive behavioral approaches. Thinking Matters teaches these skills in a relatively short period. This makes it very useful for situations where time is limited by factors such as sentence length or insufficient staffing. Residential facilities and jails are examples where time limitations might be present. Thinking Matters can be used with participants who do not have basic skills required to perform more intensive programs. It can also be expanded for use as a more intensive approach by adding skills or requiring participants to practice the skills for an extended period.

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Worksheet Instructions

Worksheets 1-5 should be considered the minimum skill set for most participants.

Worksheet 1 **Being Objective**

Worksheet #1 teaches participants the skill of viewing situations objectively. This includes accepting responsibility for their behavior. This is almost exactly the opposite of what comes natural to them. Situations that do not comply with the following guidelines are not acceptable. They must be returned to the participant to be done correctly. Worksheet #1 should be filled out as described below:

- Objective-no excuses, no blame, no storytelling, no “fluff”
- 1-2 sentences
- I (first person)
- Past tense
- Try to keep the situation recent to help them remember the situation and thoughts they had at the time
- Must lead to trouble (or immediate potential trouble)
- Participant must be able to remember details
- Accidental situations are not acceptable
- The situation must have risk of trouble— trouble means:
 - Illegal, rule violation. harm to self or others, get fired, lead to divorce, violent & etc

Facilitators will handout worksheet #1 to participants and the above guidelines will be explained. Participants should be given time to ask questions. Facilitators should ask the group/individual for examples and guide the participants toward refining the situation statements.

Most participants will try to excuse their behavior by describing the situation subjectively. Some situations will be described that include irrelevant material or blame others. It is imperative the situation be stripped of these items before being accepted as completed. Worksheet #1 has instructions and examples of acceptable responses near the top.

Worksheet 2 **Thoughts, Feelings, Beliefs and Attitudes**

Participants will select a situation from worksheet #1 and have it approved by the facilitators. This situation will be written at the top of this worksheet.

Worksheet #2 teaches participants to sort their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and attitudes. To perform this activity participants must look back at a situation described in worksheet #1. Participants often view their behavior as an extension of the situation. They usually do not see that their thinking and feelings helped to drive their behavior. This worksheet requires them to break the situation into its component parts as it happened. It is essential that the thoughts and feelings be in the context that they actually occurred at the time. Eventually, participants will be asked to find new thinking. The new thinking will happen in the “present” as well. Worksheet #2 should be filled out as described below:

- I— first person
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- Present tense— as if it were happening “right now”
- **Thoughts** they had **BEFORE** the behavior
- **Feelings** are generally, one word
 - There can be more than one feeling for each thought
 - There can be the same feeling for several thoughts

Note: Physical reactions can be used as “clues” to help identify emotions.
(I.e. Shaky hands might indicate nervousness, anger or embarrassment.)

- **Beliefs:**
 - Broad and general that can be applied in many areas of life.
 - I believe smokers
 - I believe politicians
- **Attitudes:**
 - Usually observable (not always)
 - Can be one word
 - Cocky/arrogant
 - Hostile/defiant
 - Can be the way one moves
 - walk, body position, gestures

Some participants might have trouble finding all of the components on their first try. Facilitators should separate this worksheet into two activities (homework assignments) if they believe it to be necessary. If this is done, it is usually productive to work with thoughts and feelings in one lesson. Beliefs and attitudes can be addressed as a separate lesson.

Participants will often want to look at their thoughts in retrospect. When this happens the facilitator will see words in the past tense (was, did, could have etc.). Participants sometimes decide that they will report what they “should” have thought. This amounts to feeding the facilitator information— showing that they have already changed and do not need to do further work. When this happens participants will need to do the work again. Facilitators will not accept work that does not have all of the elements in the bulleted list above.

Worksheet 3 Looking for Meaning

Participants will select a situation from worksheet #1 and have it approved by the facilitators. This situation will be written at the top of this worksheet. This should be the same situation used on the previous worksheet.

Worksheet #3 teaches participants to look for meaning in their thinking and feelings. The rationale is that any situation that has no significance would not deserve action. Therefore, if action was taken that led to trouble, *something* must have had meaning. Participants will practice finding how thinking and feelings connect. They will be required to determine how a specific thought and feeling related to each other. In addition, participants will determine what they believed they deserved or wanted. They must also decide what they thought others deserved. This worksheet helps participants explore their expectations and what thinking & feelings support these perceptions.

Facilitators should ensure that completed work accomplishes the following:

- Connects thinking to feelings
- Identifies thinking that helps one feel better

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- Identifies thinking that helps one feel worse
- Identifies thinking that leads toward a decision
- Identifies expectations for:
 - Self
 - Others
 - Outcome(s)

Facilitators should review worksheet #2 while checking worksheet #3. This will help them determine if the thinking has relevant context. It would be inconsistent if the participant has demeaning thoughts for someone but expresses an expectation of good will. Participants will tend to minimize intentions of harm and overstate altruism. It will be necessary for facilitators to look closely for statements that indicate a lack of effort. Short answers and blank spaces should alert them to these potential problems. Taking the “easy way out” is often symptomatic of anti-social thinking. The exercise should indicate significant effort on the part of participants to give complete and coherent answers on the Worksheet(s).

Worksheet 4 Looking for Thinking Patterns

Participants will select a situation from worksheet #1 and have it approved by the facilitators. This situation will be written at the top of this worksheet. This should be the same situation used on the previous worksheet.

Worksheet #4 teaches participants that situations have a cause and effect characteristic. Further it helps them see that their thinking and feelings have a direct relationship to their decision making. This skill connects various parts of the participant experience and shows how thinking leads to a behavior.

- Placing my thinking and feelings in sequence
 - What happened first?..... Next? How does this fit together?
- How my thinking is connected to my feelings and behavior
- How does this thinking produce a specific behavior?
- Making connections between my
 - Thinking
 - Feelings
 - Behavior
 - Attitudes

Participants will use previous worksheets to fill in the “flow chart” of the situation previously selected for the other worksheets. The first box will be the starting point. This will be at some point before the behavior that caused trouble. The last box will usually be at some time after the behavior.

Facilitators should be careful to explain to participants that the consequence does not go in the first box. Participants will tend to view the situation as beginning with the consequences or at the point where they were “caught”. This will not be acceptable. The starting point must be with thinking that *leads toward* the behavior. The skill is to look for thinking that helped the participant decide to take action that leads to trouble (as defined above). In addition, participants should learn to identify the

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thinking and feelings that support these decisions. This exercise will assist the participant to gain an understanding of their motivation for some of their personal choices.

Worksheet 5 Finding Risk & Replacing Thoughts

Participants will select a situation from worksheet #1 and have it approved by the facilitators. This situation will be written at the top of this worksheet. This should be the same situation used on the previous worksheets.

Worksheet #5 teaches participants to evaluate thinking. This requires that they assess the thinking for risk of leading to trouble and identify any associated emotions. It also requires participants find creative and sensible alternatives to their thinking habits.

Facilitators should be alert for “risk thinking” that does not lead to a problem behavior. Offenders will sometimes try to show how much they have changed since then and substitute risk thinking with “what they think you want to hear”. If this happens, have them go back to previous worksheets and find thinking that leads toward trouble. Participants might use unrealistic “new thinking”. Facilitators should question the participant to ensure that the new thinking is realistic and achievable. It will be prudent to ask, “Do you believe you could really think this? Would you really feel that way?”

Identify thoughts & feelings that lead toward trouble

- Identify any risk of:
 - Harming others
 - Harming self
 - Breaking laws or rules

- Identify new thoughts that:
 - Keep me out of trouble
 - Are realistic & achievable

When worksheet #5 is presented to the group, it should be performed as a role rehearsal. The participant should describe the situation so that the group can visualize the setting. Another participant or a facilitator can assist by acting the role of the other person involved (if any). The participant playing the role of the main actor should point to his/her head when reporting thoughts. This will make a clear distinction between thinking and speaking.

Worksheet 6 Thinking Errors

Worksheets #6-7 are additional skills that can be included in a minimum skill set if participants are assessed as in need and available resources exist.

Participants will select a situation from worksheet #1 and have it approved by the facilitators. This situation will be written at the top of this worksheet. This should be the same situation used on the previous worksheet.

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Worksheet #6 (and 6a) teaches participants to look for risk thinking during real life situations. Being alert to risk thinking as it happens can help reduce the risk of destructive behavior. Much of the thinking that leads people toward trouble happens frequently but goes unnoticed. Participants will be required to write down situations where risk thinking was present. *This behavior need not have actually become a problem.* Worksheet #6 has some common types of thinking that lead people to problem behaviors. Worksheet #6a is blank so that participants can look for anti social thinking and write it down in their own words. Thinking like this is commonly called a Thinking Error. This activity should encourage participants to look for thinking errors in their everyday life.

Facilitators can use Thinking Errors Characteristic of a Criminal as a starting point. It could be useful to distribute a thinking error list as a supplement to the worksheets. Participants will then have a quick reference guide to use. When completing the worksheets facilitators should encourage participants to use their own words and not simply copy the reference sheet language.

(Note--Additional information regarding Thinking Errors can be found in, The Criminal Personality Vol. I, 1976, Aaronson Press, Samuel Yochelson & Stanton E. Samenow)

Worksheet 7 Decision Tree

Worksheet #7 teaches the basis for planning to avoid risk behavior. It is a summary of the previous worksheets. Participants can refer to worksheet #1 for situations that could recur. Participants should place a situation at the top of the worksheet and look for thinking and feelings before the behavior. They should use the skills learned from other worksheets. This will help participants anticipate whether certain kinds of thinking will lead toward trouble.

Facilitators should be alert for offenders trying to use this worksheet to “impress” others. They will often try to claim to have already changed. It is not the facilitator’s job to decide if change has occurred. Facilitators should focus upon achievement of the skill. The worksheet should show continuity. Thinking should show similar characteristics to previous worksheets and activities. The thinking and feelings should correspond with the behavior chosen. It will be important for participants who will enter more intensive programming to learn skills relevant for relapse planning. This worksheet begins to prepare them for these new skills.

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Appendix

Thinking Matters Worksheets

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Introduction

It is important to look for what I was thinking and feeling when I did something that did/does/could get me into trouble. The reason this is important is because my thoughts and feelings are what help me make decisions. These decisions help me choose how to act in any situation. I can learn some skills that will help me be more aware of my thinking. The first skill I need to get good at is, describing situations that might have gotten me into trouble. (Worksheet 1)

It is not easy to find my thoughts so I need to practice looking for them. Once I get good at looking for my thoughts I can do it without trying so hard. As I get better at this I will be able to do it faster. The second skill I need to get good at is recording my thoughts and feelings. The thoughts and feelings I'm looking for happened **before** I did something to get into trouble. (Worksheet 2)

The reason my thoughts and feelings help me make decisions is because they come from what I believe is true. This helps me figure out what things mean. For example, if I think someone hates me, when they run toward me I might think I am in danger. If I think someone likes me, when they run toward me I might think they are glad to see me. I might believe it is right to attack someone when I think they are a danger.

I already know what to do when I think I'm in danger. I don't have to figure it out. I don't usually spend a lot of time trying to sort out the thoughts that tell me what to do. This kind of thinking is a set of habits I learned over my whole life. I call these Thinking Patterns.

I can understand the different ways I think and feel in different situations. To do this I need to look at my thinking as if I were watching a movie. I can learn to watch for certain kinds of thinking and feelings that cause me problems. The third skill I need to get good at is finding thinking and feelings that lead toward trouble. (Worksheet 3)

I need to figure out what some of my thinking means. I need to see how these different parts of my thinking and feelings fit together---- sort of like a puzzle.

When I put a puzzle together the first thing I do is open the box and look inside. Then I empty all the pieces out and turn them over so I can see the right side of all the pieces. After that I start looking for colors and shapes that seem to fit together. Then I start to fit pieces into the correct places until the puzzle starts to look like the picture on the box. The fourth skill is finding patterns in my thinking. (Worksheet 4)

I can use these worksheets to help me look for my thinking and feelings in a situation where I did something to get into trouble. They can also help me look for how my thinking is connected to my feelings and behavior.

I usually try to put things in the order that they happened. Sometimes I don't remember all of the thoughts and feelings right away. At those times I fill in what is easy to remember and then go back and fill in the rest.

I can change my way of making decisions. I can change the way I act. I can take control of things that have caused me problems. To do this I need to decide which thoughts and feelings lead me toward trouble. Then I need to find some new thoughts that will lead me away from trouble. I need to make sure that the new thoughts lead me toward feeling better too. (Worksheet 5)

I can keep practicing these skills by looking for more thinking that leads toward trouble. I can look for situations where I used the same thinking over and over or I can look for new kinds of thinking (Worksheet 6). I can keep track of when I have certain kinds of thoughts and do Thinking Reports for those situations later. Other times I need to slow down and look at my thinking more clearly to decide where my thinking will lead (Worksheet 7). I can write down a situation and decide if my thinking has risk. I can try to guess if it leads to a behavior that will get me into trouble.

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Worksheet 1

I use this worksheet to practice describing situations where I did something that got me into trouble (or could have). Usually these are situations where I broke the law or hurt someone. I try to keep the situation description as short and simple as I can. Here are some examples.

EXAMPLES:

- 1.) I drove home drunk from a party.
- 2.) I punched my neighbor in the face during an argument.
- 3.) I spent all of my rent money at the bar.
- 4.) I tore up my ex-girlfriend's yard with my car.

1.)

SITUATION: _____

2.)

SITUATION: _____

3.)

SITUATION: _____

4.)

SITUATION: _____

5.)

SITUATION: _____

6.)

SITUATION: _____

7.)

SITUATION: _____

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Worksheet 2

I pick a situation from worksheet #1 and have it approved by my facilitator. Then I write down all the thoughts I had before I did the behavior that causes problems. I need to remember my feelings and write them down too. After I do this, I need to write down my beliefs and attitude(s) that helped me think and feel this way.

Thinking Report

SITUATION: _____

THOUGHTS

- 1.) _____
- 2.) _____
- 3.) _____
- 4.) _____
- 5.) _____
- 6.) _____
- 7.) _____
- 8.) _____
- 9.) _____
- 10.) _____
- 11.) _____
- 12.) _____

FEELINGS:

BELIEF(S):

- 1.) _____
- 2.) _____
- 3.) _____

ATTITUDE(S):

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Worksheet 3

First I fill out a Thinking Report. Then I use it to help me fill out this form.

Situation: _____

These thoughts helped me feel good in some way: (list the thoughts)

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

- 5 _____

- 6 _____

At the time, I believed that I deserved:

At the time, I thought others should:

_____ thoughts helped me feel bad in some way: (list the thoughts)

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____


- 5 _____

- 6 _____


- 7 _____

Words I used to describe how I felt at the time:

When I felt BAD:



When I felt GOOD:



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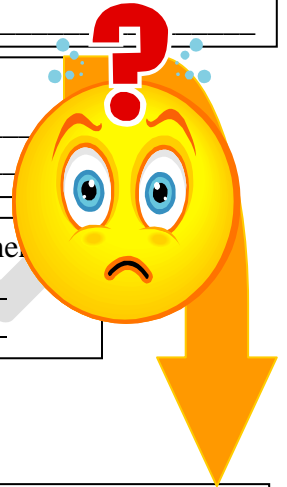
Worksheet 4

worksheets 2 & 3. Then I put the thinking and feelings where I think they belong. This will help me see how my Thinking Pattern works. I must start (box 1) at a time **before** I did the behavior that gets me into trouble. The starting point must be with thinking that leads toward the behavior. I do not want to start at a time when I was caught. Then follow the arrows through the situation.

Situation: _____

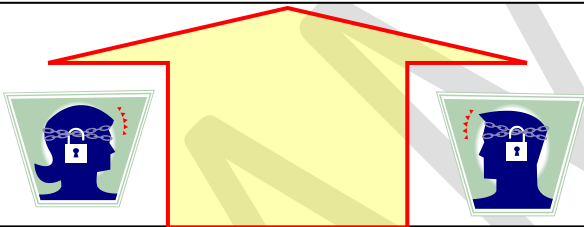


(1) Start here: Everything was going OK until:



(6) End here: Things went wrong again when:

(5) I thought everything was going OK again when:



(2) When that happened I started to feel:

I started to think:



(4) I felt a little better when I:



(3) Then I wanted to do things like:

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Worksheet 5

Look at worksheets 2, 3 & 4. I need to look for thoughts and feelings that made it likely to get into trouble. I need to decide which thoughts and feelings were the most powerful or important at the time. I will write them down as risk thoughts and feelings. In the next column, I will write down a new thought I could use instead to lead me away from trouble.

Situation: _____

Risk Thoughts & Feelings	New Thoughts & Feelings
1.)	
2.)	
3.)	
4.)	
5.)	
6.)	
7.)	
8.)	
9.)	
10.)	
11.)	
12.)	

Worksheet 6

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This kind of thinking can lead me toward trouble if I am not careful. I can watch for some of this thinking to practice looking for trouble. If I see myself thinking any of these things I will write down the date, place and situation. Then I can do a Thinking Report later to see if I can find out if this thinking leads me toward trouble.

Situation Log

That's Stupid This kind of thinking helps me believe I'm smarter or more important than others. It helps me not listen to what others say.

Date	Place	Situation

That's Unfair This kind of thinking helps me think someone is trying to get over on me. It helps me think I need to do something to get even or get back at someone.

Date	Place	Situation

I can't stand it This kind of thinking helps me to take action quickly. It helps me to believe that I have thought about things enough and it is time for action.

Date	Place	Situation

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Worksheet 6-A

Some types of thinking can be used as “Warning Flags”. This kind of thinking can lead me toward trouble if I am not careful. I can watch for some of this thinking to practice looking for trouble. If I see myself thinking any of these things, I will write down the date, place and situation. Then I can do a Thinking Report later to see if I can find out if this thinking leads me toward trouble.

You might want to watch for other types of thinking too. If you find some, you can write them down and do thinking reports on the situations. You can use the back of this sheet to make a list or get a copy if you run out of room.

Situation Log

Thinking

Definition

Date	Place	Situation

Thinking

Definition

Date	Place	Situation

Thinking

Definition


Date	Place	Situation

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Worksheet 7

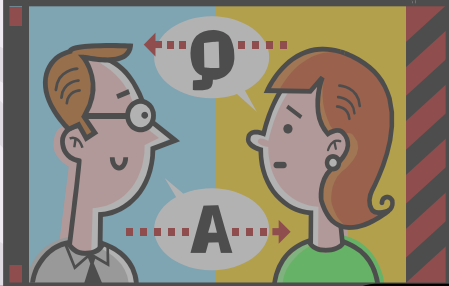
I use this worksheet to help me decide where my thinking will lead me. I put the situation in the top box. Then I put the thinking and feelings in the middle box. Then I try to guess if the thinking leads me toward trouble or away from trouble.

Situation: _____



Thinking: _____

Feelings _____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____



Action: _____

Toward Trouble

Action: _____

Away From Trouble

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