

Cognitive Therapy Worksheet Example: *Difficulty Finishing Dissertation*

Event or Situation: *Not making progress towards finishing dissertation. Not a great relationship with advisor. Committee members want me to do stuff I don't want to do. Not sure if the project is worthwhile. May lose funding after next year and have big loans already. Never have enough time in life.*

Unhealthy Negative Feelings: *Depression, Anxiety, Anger towards advisor, Jaded about field, Trapped and overwhelmed, Guilty about lack of progress*

Unhealthy Behaviors: *Avoiding meeting with my advisor. Spending too much time on teaching duties as TA. Procrastinating or working on other projects to avoid dissertation. Staying in a lot. Stopped exercising. Getting really drunk at parties on the weekends.*

Pessimistic, Irrational, or Distorted Beliefs

*I can't do a mediocre job on this. I've got too much invested. If I don't have a great dissertation, I will have no future in academics.*  
[absolute demands, all or nothing thinking]

*Why am I continuing in this field if I don't even like working on my own project? Maybe I should quit now and cut my losses.*  
[over-generalizing, denial/avoidance]

*I can't stand being in my lab another day. It's the most miserable place in the world.*  
[awfulizing, can't-stand-it's]

*It's so unfair for my committee members to give me mixed messages and try to control my project. And my advisor doesn't even stand up for me. Whose side is he on?*  
[blaming, fallacy of fairness, personalization]

Disputation or Challenge

*Most dissertations are indeed mediocre, even those of successful academicians. The goal is to learn from the process, not produce the most important work of my life.*

*It's very common to be sick of your dissertation after it's done. Does my dissertation represent all my future work? Contemplating quitting is a cop-out and de-motivates me.*

*I will not die or explode if I stay in my lab another day. Telling myself it's miserable guarantees that I will feel worse.*

*Nothing in life has to be fair. There are actually a lot of politics involved that have nothing to do with me. My advisor is protecting himself. Who says my advisor has to put my needs above his?*

Optimistic, Rational, or Realistic Beliefs

*The most important thing is to get over this hurdle. It's ok if it's not perfect; it's part of my learning process. I'll have several other future projects to obsess about.*

*It's better to make big life decisions after I finish my dissertation and have less stress. If I commit myself to finish, I will be more accepting of all of the hard work I have to do.*

*It's a dismal environment, but it's really not awful in the literal sense. I can deal with this on a temporary basis. I've made it this far.*

*I can't control others, especially those in power above me. I have to choose my battles wisely. It's in my best interest to be strategic and tactful at this point. I'm a savvy person and can play this game.*

Healthy Negative Feelings: *Tired from hard work, Disappointment and frustration when not getting my way, Acceptance of difficult time period*

New Constructive Behaviors: *Meet with advisor more often, Set smaller intermediate goals for dissertation, Take action on committee members advice (even that I disagree with), Set limits with other work that is non-dissertation related (TA activities), Find pleasure in other areas of my life, Regular exercise*

