

3 CBT Activities

Creative twists on
classic exercises

grades 2-8

Great for
anxiety
fears
big feelings

**Social Emotional
Workshop** 

BRAVE LADDER

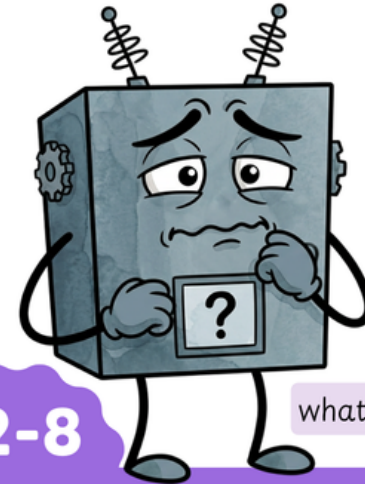
CBT tool
for anxiety

visual exposure



emotional
shop

NAME & TAME challenging feelings



10 characters
CBT based
Create your

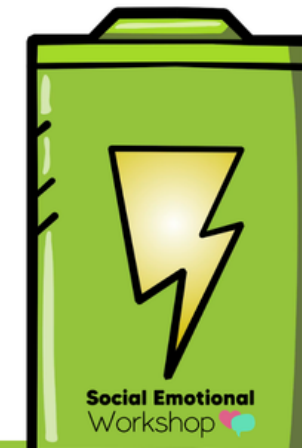
2-8

what if machine

counseling workshope

BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION

counseling activities



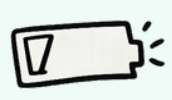
Charge
your
battery

Social Emotional
Workshop

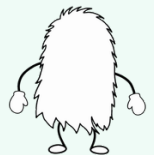
3-8

Bundle of 3 Research Based CBT Tools

Puts a creative spin on

 behavioral activation (low mood)

 gradual exposure (fear)

 externalization (tough feelings + thoughts)

perfect for individual & group counseling

Brave Ladder - Gradual Exposure

Counselor Guide

Brainstorm Worksheet

Helpful Tools

(Thermometer & Ways to Adjust)

Brave Ladder Worksheet

Practice Log

Editable student worksheets

Brave Ladder

Take your brainstormed steps and arrange them order from easiest to hardest.

My Brave Goal

Petting a large dog at the park.

Step	Rating
Petting a small, calm dog on a leash.	9
Being in the same room as a calm dog.	8
Standing 3 feet from a dog on a leash.	7
Watching a dog play through a window.	6
Watching a dog from across the street.	5
Watching a video of dogs barking.	4
Playing with a realistic stuffed dog.	3
Watching a video about dogs.	2
Looking at photos of puppies.	1

Charge Your Battery - Behavioral Activation

Counselor guide

Scaffolded student worksheets

Activity Trackers

grades 3-5

What Charges You Up?

We can put activities that make you feel good and charge you up into four categories. What activities are in each category is different for each person. Read the examples in each box, then add your own ideas.

People

Spending time with friends, family, pets.
Ex: playing with your pet, Facetimeing a friend, eating dinner together, playing a game together, making a card with a friend, going to the park with a friend.

My Ideas

Getting Things Done

Finishing something, practicing a skill, working towards a goal.
Ex: practicing an instrument, finishing a puzzle, building something, working on a collection, completing a project.

My Ideas

Fun

Activities you enjoy just because they feel good.
Ex: watching a show, playing a game, reading, drawing, listening to music, riding your bike, baking something.

My Ideas

Helping

Doing something kind or useful for someone else.
Ex: feeding a pet, helping a sibling, doing a chore without being asked, watering plants, helping your neighbor.

My Ideas

What Drains Your Battery?

Some activities drain your battery. A lot of them are unavoidable: a hard day, a stressful test, an argument with someone. That's normal. Knowing what drains you helps you plan to recharge afterward.

Write a few activities you know tend to drain your battery. Remember, these activities are a normal part of life. The goal is to balance them out with ones that charge you back up.

times of day
ry feels low

grades 6-8

ome warning signs that
ry is getting low?

When your battery feels low, what do
you usually do?

Name & Tame - Externalization

Counselor guide

10 character posters + cards

10 character worksheets

Create your own template

Craft extension directions

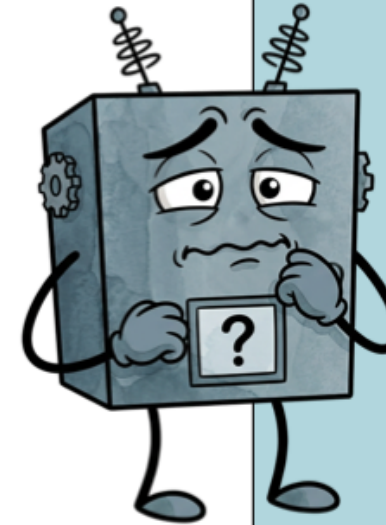
What If Machine

It keeps your thoughts spinning.

The What If Machine gets your brain stuck in a loop.

What if this goes wrong? What if that happens? What if, what if, what if.

It keeps coming up with questions and spinning through things that haven't even happened yet. It thinks it's protecting you. But it's just working overtime on all the what-ifs.



When Does It Show Up

The What If Machine shows up when things are uncertain.

Know Its Warning

It can make your stomach fill with butterflies if it keeps you up at night with scary scenarios.

What It Tells You

It tells you that sometimes you have to be a little braver.

What It Wants You To Do

It wants you to avoid spending all your time worrying about things that might happen instead of living in the present.

Talk Back To It

You can tell the What If Machine it's wrong. Try saying something like, "Worrying about it won't change anything."

Send It Away

You can make the What If Machine slow down or shut off by using these strategies:

- ✓ Ask: Is this a fact or just a what-if?
- ✓ Give it a worry window. 5 minutes and then switch it off.
- ✓ Zoom in on the right now, instead of what might happen.

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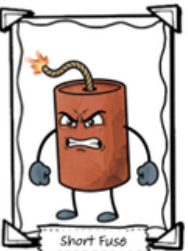
WHO'S RUNNING THINGS?



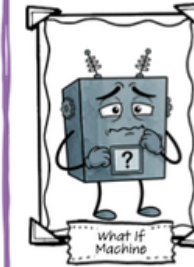
The Dread



Not Enough Whisperer



Short Fuse



What If Machine



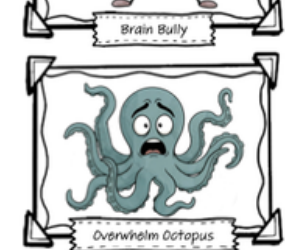
Gloom Cloud



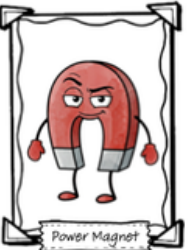
Perfection Police



Blaster



Overwhelm Octopus



Power Magnet

Quick Guides

How to Use This

Externalization Toolkit – Counselor Guide

Externalization is a CBT technique that turns a negative feeling or behavior into a character separate from the student. The student isn't an angry kid. Their anger is erupting. When a child believes that negative feelings or behaviors are part of who they are, it's harder to change. With externalization, you make it something they can name and talk back to.

What It Works With Kids

Creating a character can help make this concept concrete. The feeling becomes a character they can see and interact with, bridging the cognitive gap.

The 5-Step Process

Shown here using the Gloom Cloud, the same framework applies to the 10 included characters and any you create.

Step 1: Introduce & Draw the Character

Start by normalizing that everyone feels sad sometimes, and that sometimes sadness can feel really heavy or hard to shake. Then invite the student to bring it to life:

"Sometimes when we feel really sad, it can feel like something is following us or sitting on top of us. I want you to draw what that sad feeling looks like if it were a character. This one is called a Gloom Cloud, but you can make it look however you want and call it whatever you want. What does its face look like? What color is it? Big or small?"

Step 2: Build the Character's Profile

Once the student has brought their character to life, it's time to learn more about it:

- "What does the Gloom Cloud tell you when it shows up?" (negative self-talk)
- "When does the Gloom Cloud come around?" (triggers)
- "What does the Gloom Cloud want you to do?" (unhelpful behaviors)
- "How big does it get? Does it ever feel as big as the whole sky?" (intensity scale)

Use the intensity scale (Know Its Strengths) to understand the range of this feeling.

Step 3: Separate the Student from the Character

Reinforce the separation between the student and this negative feeling. **Don't rush this step.**

Key language shift:

"So you don't have anyone to play with at recess. And you think, 'No one like me.' That's the Gloom Cloud talking! We need to make that Gloom Cloud go away."

How The Brave Ladder Works

Step 1: Identify a Single, Clear Target

Don't try to address "anxiety" in general. Pick one specific fear, such as: Separation from a caregiver, speaking in class, fear of dogs, or another specific situation, or test at a certain time.

Step 2: Brainstorm 8–10 Steps Collaboratively

Building the ladder is a collaborative process. Students who have buy-in are far more likely to participate. Work together to list situations related to the fear. To adjust difficulty, modify these variables:

- **Proximity:** How close is the student to the feared object or situation?
- **Time:** How long must they stay in it?
- **Support:** Is the counselor right there, nearby, or not present?
- **Medium:** Is it a photo, video, or the real thing?

Step 3: Rate Each Step Using the Brave Thermometer (0–10)

Have students rate each brainstormed step:

- **0-2:** No Problem (slight butterflies)
- **3-4:** Easy (a little nervous)
- **5-6:** Medium (challenging but doable)
- **7-8:** Hard (really scary, challenging)
- **9-10:** Very Hard (scariest possible step, feels impossible)

If a student says every step feels equally scary, prompt them to imagine doing it with support rather than alone, for a short time rather than a long time.

Step 4: Fill in the Brave Ladder

Students put the steps to their brave goal in order from easiest to hardest. You do not need to fill all 10 rings, use as many steps as you need.

Step 5: Practice & Track

Use the Practice log to track when the student tries each step and how it went. Generally, you are looking for students to decrease their rating of a step and to practice it at least 3 times.

1: Introducing the Concept

Goal: Teach the core concept and build a personalized charging activity list

Opening hook: "Think about any device, like a phone or an iPad. When the battery is almost dead, what do you do? You plug it in to charge it back up. Our mood works the same way. When we're feeling low, our brain tells us to do less: stay in, skip things, avoid. But that can drain your battery faster and keep it low. We need to find the things that charge us up and keep our battery full."

Key teaching points:

- When we feel low, avoiding things feels easier in the moment, but it usually makes us feel worse over time.
- Positive activities generate positive mood and energy. Students can start before they feel ready.
- What charges each person up is different. The goal is to find yours.

Walk through the workbook:

- **Page 1:** Read through together and discuss. Check for understanding of the core concept before moving on.
- **Page 2:** Build the activity list together. Say: "Let's fill in the four categories. I'll share some examples, and we will brainstorm some more that make sense for you."
- **Page 3:** Discuss activities, places, people, and times when their battery drains. Explore the warning signs and what they do when their battery is low.

Close with the tracker preview: "Before we meet again, try at least one charging activity and use the Check Your Charge page to rate how you felt before and after. You're collecting data on yourself. I want to see what you find."

2. Reviewing & Planning

Goal: Reinforce the concept through direct experience and build a sustainable plan.

Check-in: "What did you try? What was your charge level before? After? Did anything surprise you?"

Key teaching point: "A lot of times, we expect activities to feel like more effort than they're worth. But when we do them, we often feel better than we expected. The brain tries to protect you from using up any more energy, but it can mislead us about what helps."

Build the Charging Plan (Page 5): Work through it together rather than assigning it independently

Practical Details



Grade Level

2nd to 8th



Made For

individual + group counseling



File Format

PDF

PowerPoint Templates



AND

CBT

Research based

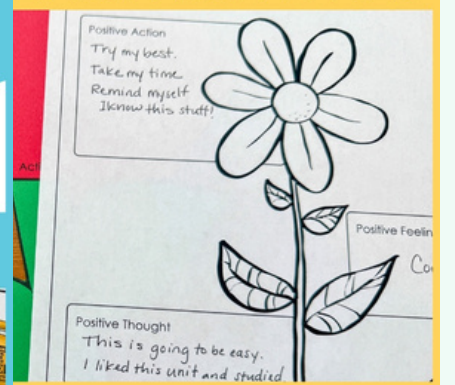
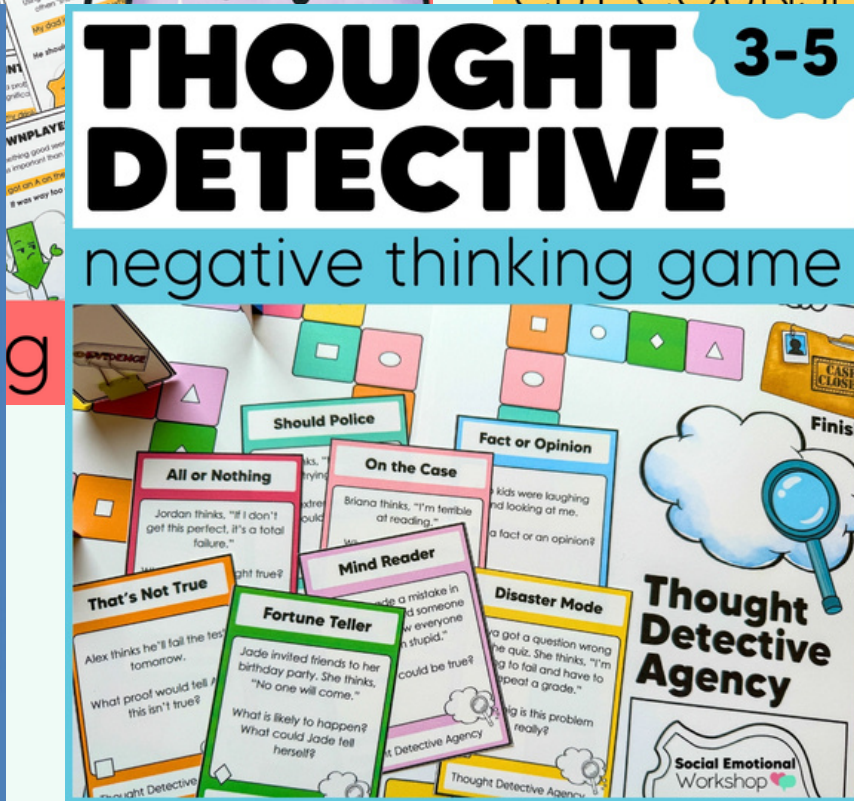
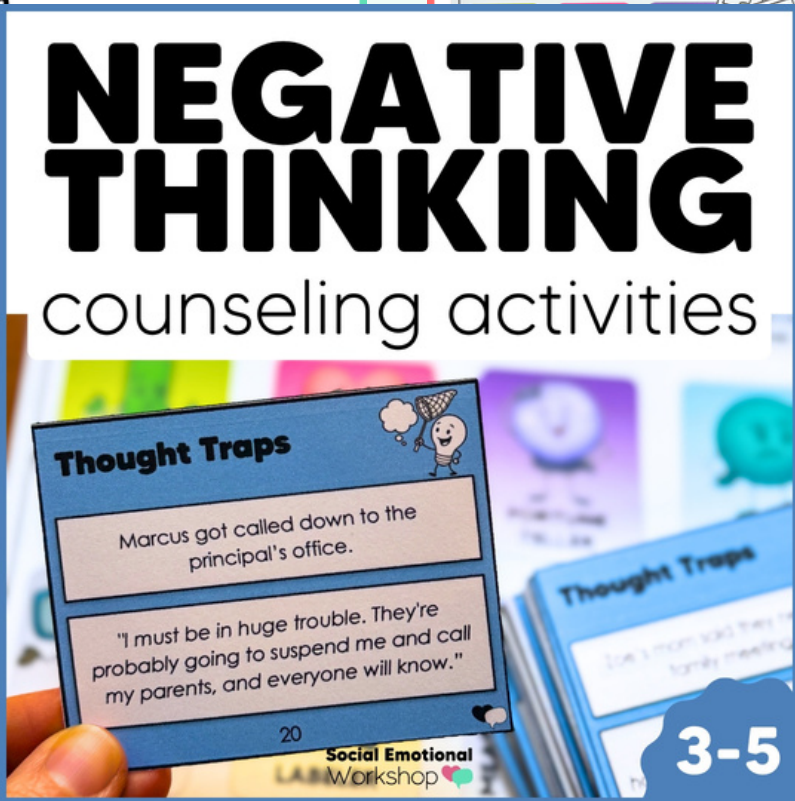
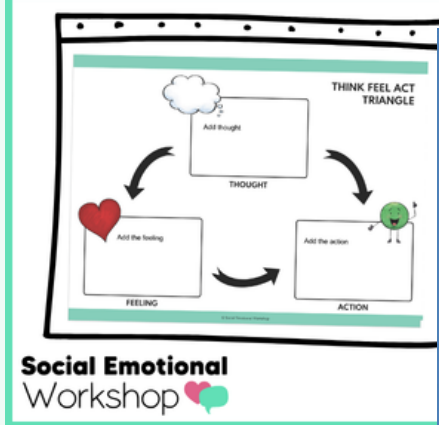
Low prep



Printing

Color + BW

More CBT Activities



Hi! I'm Laura

I create research-driven, uncomplicated tools and resources designed to build students' social and emotional skills in counseling or the classroom.

During ten years as a school psychologist, I wore all the hats - but the one I never took off was supporting my colleagues.

Whether you're a first-year counselor or a seasoned teacher, I want you to have the tools you need to support each student.

Visit [my blog](#) for more ideas and [subscribe](#) for exclusive resources!

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