

Encouraging Words cue cards
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NOTE: This activity is intended to be a supplementary tool for use by therapists trained in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Rationale:

Cognitive restructuring is a core component of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in which the client, with the help of the therapist, 1) identifies irrational or self-defeating automatic thoughts and 2) formulates alternative thoughts that are more accurate, useful and solution-based. Typically, this restructuring begins during therapy sessions and is continued through the use of homework assignments in which the client is expected to use this more adaptive “self-talk” in real-life situations. It can be, of course, quite challenging for clients to actually apply this new information at the “point of performance” --the times and places in their lives where they typically engage in self-defeating thoughts. Any difficulty in performing the assignments should be reported back to the therapist at the next session for further therapeutic work.

In assigning therapeutic homework to child clients, it is important to remember that children may need varying degrees of “scaffolding” at the point of performance in order to successfully carry out such assignments. Enlisting the help of the child’s caregivers is often the most vital type of scaffolding. However, additional scaffolding can be put in place through the use of “mediators” --tools that serve to remind the child of the knowledge gained in the therapy session.

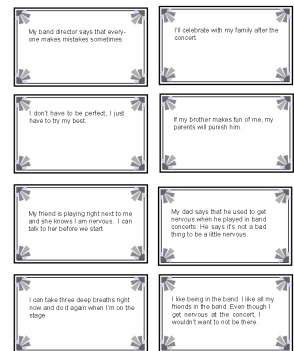
Goal: In this activity, the therapist helps the child to create “cue cards” representing the alternative thoughts that the child has formulated in the therapy session. The child then takes the cue cards home to provide additional scaffolding at a designated “point of performance.”

Age Range: 8 and up

Application: This activity can be used as part of individual and/or family therapy.

Materials needed: "Encouraging Words" cue cards.

Instructions: Before creating the cards, the therapist should help the child and family decide on a specific situation for which the cards will be used. The therapist should take care to help them choose a context in which the child is most likely to experience success.



The example on page 2 shows cue cards created by a child who feels anxious about her performance in an upcoming school band concert. The family has reported that her anxious thoughts often begin during the car ride on the way to an event. The cue cards are designed for the child to use while driving in the car, with her family, on the way to the concert. By using the cards during that particular context, the child has a tool to combat dysfunctional thoughts as soon as they begin. The child will have additional support from her parents, if needed, but the cue cards give her a means to reassure herself during the car ride, rather depending on her parents for reassurance as she has in the past.

The child and/or parent can also make notes on the back of the cards to indicate which thoughts were most helpful and/or to note other automatic, troubling thoughts that had not previously been discussed with the therapist. When, at a later session, the therapist reviews the assignment with the child, success at cognitive restructuring should be measured by how well she calmed herself during the car ride, regardless of how anxious she feels at the concert itself. Any information about success or difficulty during the assignment can help in the planning of future therapy sessions. As the child experiences success with initial homework assignments, the therapist can gradually give assignments for more challenging contexts.

Remember: The more specific the therapist makes the assignment, the greater the likelihood that the child will experience success.

Page 2: Example of cue cards for an anxious child.

Page 3: Example of cue cards created by a child feeling overwhelmed and frustrated with school homework.

Page 4: Ready-made (generic) cue cards

Page 5: Blank cue cards (make your own)

Example of cue cards for an anxious child. In this example, the cards are designed to be used, as needed, during a car ride with her family on the way to a band concert. See explanation on Page 1.

My band director says that everyone makes mistakes sometimes

I'll celebrate with my family after the concert.

I don't have to be perfect, I just have to try my best.

If my brother makes fun of me, my parents will punish him.

My friend is playing right next to me and she knows I am nervous. I can talk to her before we start.

My dad says that he used to get nervous when he played in band concerts. He says it's not a bad thing to be a little nervous.

I can take three deep breaths right now and do it again when I'm on the stage.

I like being in the band. I like all my friends in the band. Even though I get nervous at the concert, I wouldn't want to not be there.

Example of cue cards for a child who felt overwhelmed and frustrated when doing school assignments at home.

- The cards were created in a therapy session. Each thought on the cue card was formulated to counter a specific negative, unproductive thought the child often had during homework time.
- The child then took the cards home. The cards were placed on the kitchen table where he did his homework, as a reminder of the more adaptive “self-talk” he had formulated in the therapy session
- Additional scaffolding was initially provided by the parent, who shifted her role from helping the child do the homework, to helping the child use the cards effectively.
- The therapist suggested a structured plan for the parent to gradually scale back the amount of support she provided.

- from *Executive Function and Child Development* by Marcie Yeager & Daniel Yeager



Example of generic cards that could be used to help a child stay on track while doing a chore such as cleaning his or her bedroom.


- from *Simon Says Pay Attention* by Daniel Yeager & Marcie Yeager



I have a good attitude and that is important.



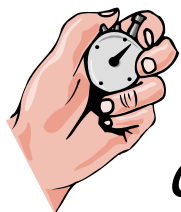
GOAL
If I keep going I'll reach my goal soon!



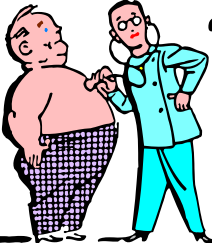
If I stay on track I can do it!




I'm working hard!



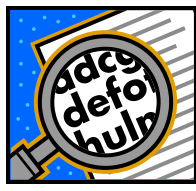
I'm right on track!



Take some deep breaths



Get back on target!



Remember:
Focus on one thing at a time!

Make your own cue cards:

