

Exercise: Keep a stress log to increase awareness in the moment

WORRY OFF-RAMP · CHAPTER 5

Name _____

Date _____

Now that you have written about intrusive thoughts and common worries, the next step is to identify them as they arise. Those of us in the behavior-change business know that behavior change is hard. However, just as physical exercise builds strength and endurance, cognitive behavioral exercise does the same. As you now know, you can't change thinking, emotions, or behavior that you don't monitor. Therefore, the first step is to begin monitoring your cognitive behavior. In this exercise, notice when your stress increases, when you have an anxiety-provoking urge or anxiety trigger. For the next week, carry a pocket-sized notebook or write in your mobile device the following information (we call this a stress log):

- ① When you notice an increase in your feelings of stress or anxiety, estimate your stress level and enter a number on a scale from one to ten in the **SUD Level** column, where one represents very little stress, and ten represents as much stress as you could possibly stand.
- ② When you notice an increase in your stress or anxiety, write a brief description of the stressor under **Trigger**. You may experience a sudden increase in tension or anxiety but may not readily identify the trigger. In that case, describe what was happening at the time.
- ③ Now, describe your emotional feeling and write this down in the **Emotional Feeling** column. I emphasize feeling because anxiety isn't just a cognitive experience; we feel it in our bodies. Your triggers may evoke feelings of nervousness, anxiety, disgust, hurt, anger, or dread; give the feeling a name. It will help you in your work to bring down your discomfort. Record them all—they don't have to be logical.
- ④ In the next column, record the specific **Thoughts** that came to you as a result of the trigger. If you were not aware of any specific thoughts, write a description of what you now think, believe, or imagine when you reflect on the trigger. Don't clean up your internal language; write what you thought without editing.

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