



SELF-LEARNING ACTIVITY 2 - THE DOWNWARD ARROW

OBJECTIVES

Become aware of when our negative thoughts are activated and analyse the assumptions and beliefs behind them in order to try to modify them in a more adaptive way. This aims to gradually replace negative emotions with more positive or neutral ones.

TIME REQUIRED

Between 30 minutes and 1 hour for each thought, but it may vary.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE

Individual.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

A quiet space, pencil and paper to be able to take notes.

INSTRUCTIONS

A. Being aware: understanding why thoughts are important. When we feel anxious, upset or experience other negative emotions (fear, frustration, anger, helplessness, sadness...), it is necessary to become aware of the situation we are in (e.g., giving a talk or openly presenting our ideas to important people). Therefore, when there is something that is causing us discomfort, we need to look both at the emotions we are experiencing and at the type of situations that are causing them, so that we become more aware of what is triggering our suffering or worries.

B. Knowing whether our thoughts are one-off or the result of a pattern. If we determine that the discomfort that we experience is not one-off (e.g., whenever we expose ourselves to others, we have a bad time), we are most likely generating negative automatic thoughts which, the more discomfort they generate, the more they will affect our sense of self and our perception of the value of our environment.

C. Go deeper into your interfering thoughts through the downward arrow:

- 1) Choose a type of situation where you usually have unpleasant emotions and start asking yourself what you attribute the discomfort to, i.e., what you think about at those times.
- 2) Once you have detected the most superficial automatic thoughts (e.g. "I'm not explaining myself well"), analyse what you think they are about. Go deeper into these thoughts and look for their core meaning by asking yourself the following questions:

- ✓ What does this mean for me?
- ✓ What does this imply for me?
- ✓ Why is it important to me?
- ✓ What does this mean for me?
- ✓ What conclusions do I take from it?

- 3) It may be helpful to do a short recap of the time when this type of evaluation started to appear: time of life, people involved, level of personal and interpersonal involvement, etc. Perhaps you will discover more cross-cutting appraisals about yourself.

D. Once you detect a core thought (deeper and more deeply rooted), question it from the present moment. Does it currently make sense? Is there information that contradicts what you think? Are you neglecting aspects that offer another kind of conclusion? Is the view you are activating really supported by objective facts? (Emotional arguments would not count as objective facts).

E. Finally, if you feel that you are holding beliefs that are poorly reasoned and detrimental to you, you can look for others that suit you (they should fit your way of seeing things), that are truer to the facts and that generate a greater sense of well-being.

SELF-EVALUATION AND REFLECTION GUIDE

Self-evaluation: Each process should be analysed individually and there is no single right way to do it, but a possible example of a downward arrow in a public speaking situation would be the following:

- I will stammer when I speak.
- The others will notice.
- They may laugh at me.
- They won't take me seriously.
- They'll think I'm dumb.
- I'm dumb.



What does this mean for me?

ASSUMPTION: "If I stutter while I'm talking, people will think I'm dumb."

CORE BELIEF: "I'm dumb."

The change in thinking would also be very personal, but an example of how to do it would be the following:

- If the negative assumption is "If I stammer while talking, people will think I am dumb", you can analyse the real importance of such a thought and the influence it can have on us, as well as the possibility of someone drawing a conclusion in such a radical way from a talk.

- From here, a reasonable change would be: "If I stammer while talking, it's because this talk is important to me and I'm nervous... I have other ways of showing that I know what I'm talking about... If someone thinks I'm stupid because I stutter, they don't know me at all, and I don't care about such a biased isolated opinion.... Stammering is not synonymous with personal worth, I can practice improving my performance.