

Therapeutic Exercises for Children: Guided Self-Discovery Using Cognitive-Behavioral Techniques

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Introduction

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKBOOK

Therapeutic Exercises for Children: Guided Self-Discovery Using Cognitive-Behavioral Techniques is a set of well-constructed cognitive-behavioral coping skills for children ages 8 to 11 years old who are experiencing depressed and anxious mood states. The material is based on cognitive-behavioral theory and therapy. Moreover, many of the exercises were initially developed at the Preventing Anxiety and Depression in Youth (PANDY) Program at the Wright State University School of Professional Psychology in Dayton, Ohio. A mouse cartoon is a central figure in the exercises. The mouse is called PANDY and each exercise includes PANDY's "Tips for Children." Each skill set includes a section providing "Guidelines for Therapists," "Tips for Children," and the exercise itself. The workbook contains many exercises and it is not expected that every child will complete every worksheet. The therapist will need to tailor the treatment to particular children. The *Therapeutic Exercises for Children: Professional Guide* will be especially helpful in helping therapists flexibly apply the workbook exercises to different children's treatment needs. In this introduction to the workbook, we will briefly describe the theoretical foundation of the workbook, explain its contents and layout, and explicate its usefulness.

THEORETICAL MODEL

Therapeutic Exercises for Children is based on cognitive theory and psychotherapy as espoused by Aaron T. Beck, MD (A. T. Beck, 1976, 1985; A. T. Beck et al., 1979). Moreover, the workbook is also based on the seminal work done in applying cognitive-behavioral therapy to children completed by Kendall and his colleagues (Kendall et al., 1992), Seligman and his colleagues (Seligman et al., 1995), as well as Silverman and Kurtines (1996). Basically, a cognitive-behavioral model posits that four symptom clusters emerge in psychologically meaningful environments. These four symptom clusters include physiological changes, behavioral changes, emotional changes, and cognitive changes. The four symptom clusters are causally interrelated such that by making a change in one symptom cluster, change in the remaining three is realized (A. T. Beck, 1985). Typically, a distressing event in a child's context triggers these symptoms (e.g., divorce, going to school, peer rejection, etc.).

Cognitive-behavioral therapy identifies behavioral and cognitive symptoms as initial treatment targets. Accordingly, cognitive therapy aims interventions directly toward cognitive-behavioral symptoms as a way to change physiological and affective distress. Not surprisingly then, the workbook exercises emphasize action and thinking patterns. The focus is on guiding children to identify their stressors and experiment with new ways of thinking and doing. Cognitive therapy helps youngsters acquire and apply coping skills. The coping skills are presented in a lively, experiential, and here-and-now manner. In this way, the skills become more real for the youngsters. The *Therapeutic Exercises for Children: Professional Guide* offers numerous recommendations for augmenting the experiential nature of the cognitive skills. Finally, homework is an

essential component of a cognitive-behavioral approach to treatment. It is expected that therapists will collaboratively assign portions of the workbook exercises to children for homework. The Memory Jogger exercise provides a chart to keep track of the child's homework (or mousework) assignments.

Purchasers of this book may photocopy and/or adapt these exercises solely for use with their clients in therapeutic settings. Further information about copyright exceptions may be found on page ii of this workbook. Although page numbers are printed on the bottom of each page to simplify searches for particular exercises, some purchasers may wish to delete these numbers on copies of exercises reproduced for use with their clients.

Therapeutic Exercises for Children is divided into four sections: self-monitoring exercises, priming exercises, self-instructional/self-control exercises, and rational analysis exercises. Generally, therapists will begin with a self-monitoring task, proceed to priming exercises, and then progress to self-instructional and rational analysis techniques. The "Guidelines for Therapists" section, which precedes each exercise, is designed to guide the therapist's decision-making. Additionally, the *Therapeutic Exercises for Children: Professional Guide* will promote therapists' mindful selection of appropriate techniques.

The self-monitoring section includes **Diamond Connections**, **PANDY Coloring Sheet**, **PANDY Fun Diary**, **Memory Jogger**, **My Mouse Traps** and **PANDY Fix-It**, **Bubble Up Your Fear**, and **Catching Feelings and Thoughts**. All of these exercises teach children ways to identify their distressing thoughts, feelings, bodily reactions, behavioral patterns, and situational circumstances. **My Mouse Traps** and **PANDY Fix-It** includes a problem-solving component and the **PANDY Fun Diary** offers a way to increase their daily pleasant events. All the activities refer to the **PANDY** mouse cartoon and include "Tips for Children" which explain the various tasks to youngsters.

Once children apply their self-monitoring skills to their problems, they are ready for priming tasks. Priming tasks are designed to prepare the children for the self-instructional and rational analysis techniques. The theoretical and clinical background of priming procedures is briefly discussed in the "Guidelines for Therapists" sections and further explicated in the *Therapeutic Exercises for Children: Professional Guide*. The workbook includes three priming tasks: **Permanent or Temporary**, **Sticks and Stones**, and **Many Meanings**. **Permanent or Temporary** works to shift children's viewpoint from believing most events are unchangeable to the perspective that most circumstances are temporary. **Sticks and Stones** is designed for attenuating the effects of pernicious self-criticisms. **Many Meanings** primes children to think from alternative perspectives.

The self-instructional skills follow the priming techniques. There are four self-instructional tools: **Me/Not Me**, **Changing Your Tune**, **Tease Whiz**, and **Surf the Angry Sea**. **Changing Your Tune** is the most general technique and can be applied to a variety of situations. **Changing Your Tune** is a modification of a classic self-instructional tool (Meichenbaum, 1985). **Me/Not Me** is a self-instructional drill which should be used with children who assume excessive responsibility for circumstances which are beyond their control. **Tease Whiz** offers several skills to youngsters who are the objects of teasing. Finally, **Surf the Angry Sea** coaches children to apply self-instructional tools to angry feelings.

The final section of the workbook includes techniques emphasizing rational analysis. There are four rational analysis exercises including **Clue Snooping**, **Real or False Alarms**, **Breaking the Crystal Ball**, and **Thought Digger**. The rational analysis techniques require more depthful processing and more sophisticated reasoning abilities. **Real or False Alarms** is the most specific exercise and is designed to help children discern which of their worries are realistic and which worries are merely inaccurate catastrophic predictions. **Breaking the Crystal Ball** is also a technique designed to attenuate children's inaccurate predictions. **Clue Snooping** and **Thought Digger** are more general cognitive therapy exercises which are applicable to a wide range of emotional distress. **Clue Snooping** is a modification of a traditional test of evidence and **Thought Digger** teaches children questions to ask themselves to evaluate the accuracy of their thinking.

HOW THIS WORKBOOK CAN BE USEFUL

Therapeutic Exercises for Children is a handy aid for mental health professionals entrusted with the care of children ages 8 to 11 years old who are experiencing depressed and anxious mood states. The workbook consists of well-crafted exercises that guide therapists' work with children. The exercises focus on skill development. The activities readily fit into experienced cognitive-behavioral therapists' repertoires. Additionally, the workbook helps the novice cognitive therapist scaffold Socratic dialogues and behavioral experiments, which propel guided discovery. Finally, the *Therapeutic Exercises for Children: Professional Guide* provides further clinical direction, and promotes depthful management of various clinical vicissitudes associated with childhood depression and anxiety.

Self-Monitoring Exercises

| | | |
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Diamond Connections

GUIDELINES FOR THERAPISTS

A critical first step in cognitive-behavioral therapy is educating clients about the treatment model (A. T. Beck et al., 1979; Padesky & Greenberger, 1995). Socialization to the treatment model demystifies therapy and gives children a map for understanding treatment. Many explanations of therapy for youngsters are dull, boring, and frequently go over children's heads.

Diamond Connections is a simple and entertaining tool used for socializing children to the cognitive model. A baseball diamond is offered as a metaphor and includes the central parts of the cognitive model as bases. Feelings, actions, bodily reactions, and thoughts are represented on the diamond. Their connections are self-evident because all four bases are necessary parts of a baseball diamond.

Reviewing the "Tips for Children" is a good first step. The programmed steps in the "Tips" text facilitates interactive teaching. Therapists and children should read the passages aloud, pausing to process salient points. The "Tips" provide a conceptual template for categorizing and distinguishing between thoughts, feelings, bodily reactions, and behavioral actions. When coupled with the sample worksheet, which is completed in a child's handwriting, the child should gain a robust introduction to therapy.

The worksheet begins at first base (feelings). The child is invited to share all the different words she/he uses to express scared or sad feelings. Certainly, children are allowed to use the sample words supplied by the examples on the worksheet and sample worksheet. However, a better option is including more words that the children personally use to tell others they are sad or scared. In this way, the feeling words become more contextually valid.

The worksheet continues around the bases (actions, thoughts, and bodily reactions). At each base, children are asked to supply personal examples. When children have worked their way around the diamond, the therapists can explain the **Diamond Connections**.

Therapists can enliven this exercise in several ways. For instance, children could stand on bases while they express their feelings, thoughts, actions, and behaviors. In our school-based group work, the children were invited to pass bases among each other and tell their particular symptoms to each other. The group leaders can pretend to be a public address announcer exclaiming, "On second base is Tommy, and Tommy is going to tell us what things he does when he is sad."

Diamond Connections ties together the basic tenets of cognitive-behavioral therapy into a playful metaphor familiar to children. The baseball diamond illustrates the interrelationship between thoughts, feelings, actions, and bodily sensations. Further, just like in a baseball diamond, **Diamond Connections** shows that one base of the tenets cannot exist without the others. Finally, this basic exercise teaches the children the beginning steps in identifying thoughts, feelings, actions, and bodily sensations.

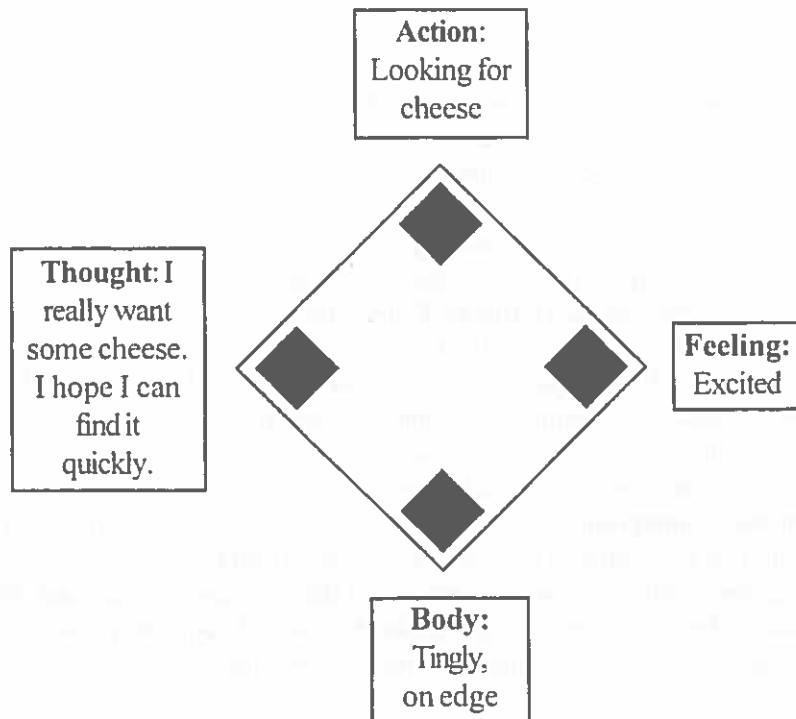
Diamond Connections



Tips for Children

PANDY SAYS

Hi, boys and girls. I am going to show you how your thoughts, actions, feelings, and bodily changes are connected. I was in a maze looking for some cheese. I was kind of excited and my body felt tingly and on edge. I said to myself, "I really want some cheese. I hope I can find it quickly." Take a look at where I am on my diamond.



I started into the maze and turned corner upon corner. After a few twists and turns, I was lost. I began to feel worried and started to sweat. My mouth felt dry and my throat felt like there was a lump in it. My stomach started to hurt. The following thoughts went through my mind: "Oh no, I've made a terrible, stupid mistake. I'm lost and I'll never find my way to the cheese. Every step I take is a mistake. I'm

trapped.” I could not think straight and make choices. I was stuck and I stopped trying to find my way.

See if you can figure out what goes on at each base now.

Action Changes:

Thought Changes:

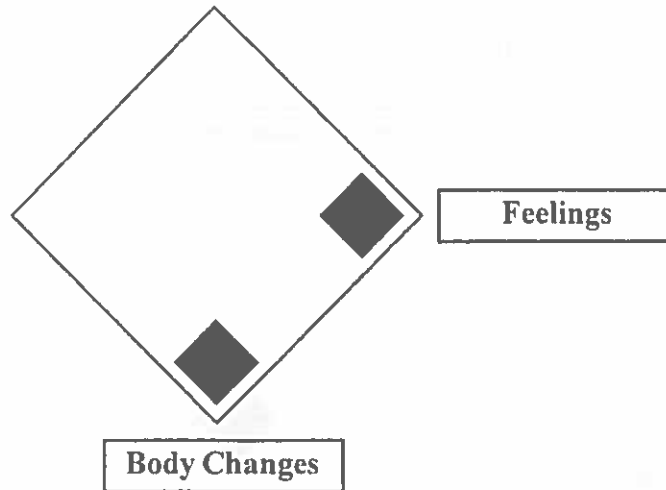
Feeling Changes:

Body Changes:

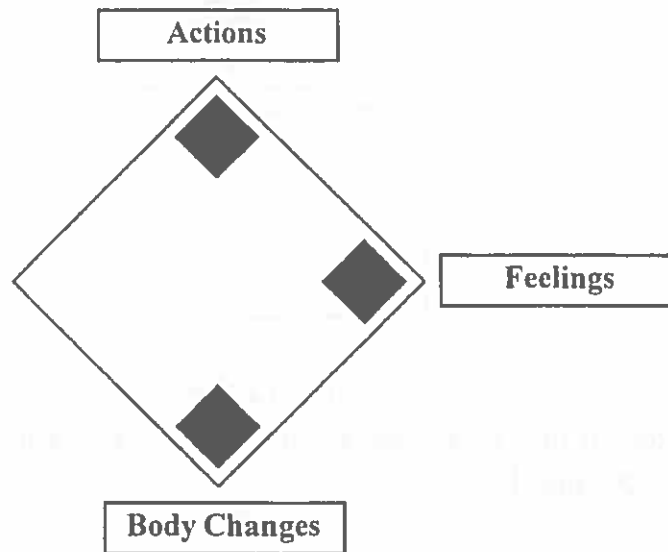
So, there I was, stuck in a corner of the maze trying to find some cheese. My stomach started to turn over and around and over again. My head started to pound “Thump, thump,” and hurt.

Body Changes

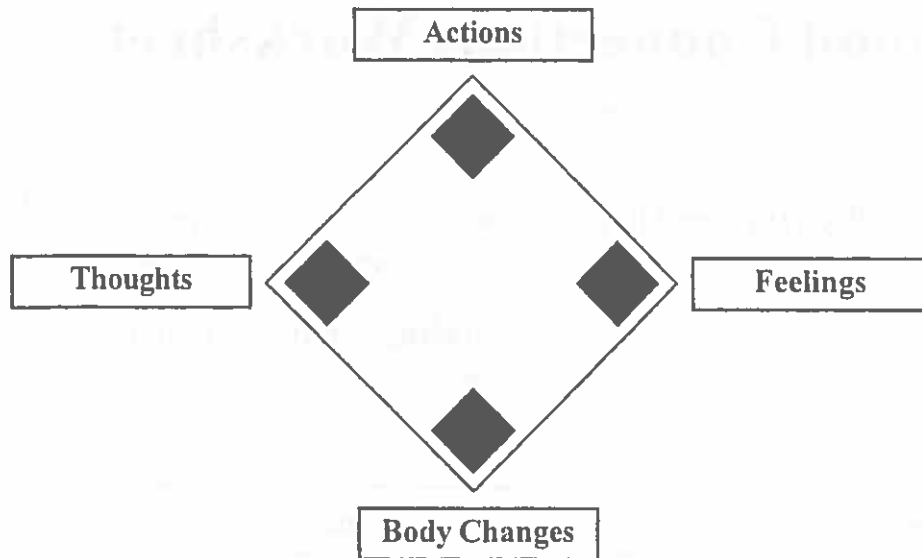
I began to feel sad and worried.



I didn't know what to do. I gave up trying to find a way out of the maze. I sat down in the corner and started to cry.



I thought, "What's the use. I'm stupid. I'll never figure things out. The cheese is not really important to me anyway. People will be very disappointed in me."



My body, thoughts, actions, and feelings were all connected. They were all tied together. One part could not move without the other one.

Then, I stopped crying and looked around. I began exploring some of the paths in the maze. Sure, some were blocked, but others led to more paths. What part of my **Diamond Connections** changed (circle one)?

Action Thinking Feeling Body

As I started exploring and trying out new paths, I started to feel differently. My sad and worried feelings started to change. My stomach was not as “jumpy” as before and my head didn’t hurt as much. And you know what? Thoughts like, “I’m stupid and nothing will work out for me,” stopped going through my mind. As I walked and explored more, I found my way out of the maze and reached the cheese. And you know what? The cheese sure was tasty!

I hope my example gave you some ideas about using my **Diamond Connections Worksheet**. Take a look at my sample worksheet.

Diamond Connections Worksheet

(Sample)



Hi. It's me, **PANDY**, the Mouse-in-the-House. I want to tell you about the way your thoughts, feelings, actions, and body work together.

Whenever you are scared or sad, your **feelings change**. You might feel worried, terrified, anxious, down, blue, or depressed. See if you can list some **feeling words** you use.

| Scared Words | Sad Words |
|--------------|-----------|
| Scared | down |
| Worried | sad |
| frightened | blue |
| jittery | gloomy |

You may have some changes in your **body** when you are scared and sad. Your stomach might get upset, you have headaches, you sweat a lot even when it is not hot, you get dizzy, or you have trouble sleeping. List some changes you notice in your body.

| How my body is when I am scared | How my body is when I am sad |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| My body feels tight. | I feel tired. |
| My throat is dry. | I get a headache. |
| My hands sweat. | I get a stomachache. |
| | |

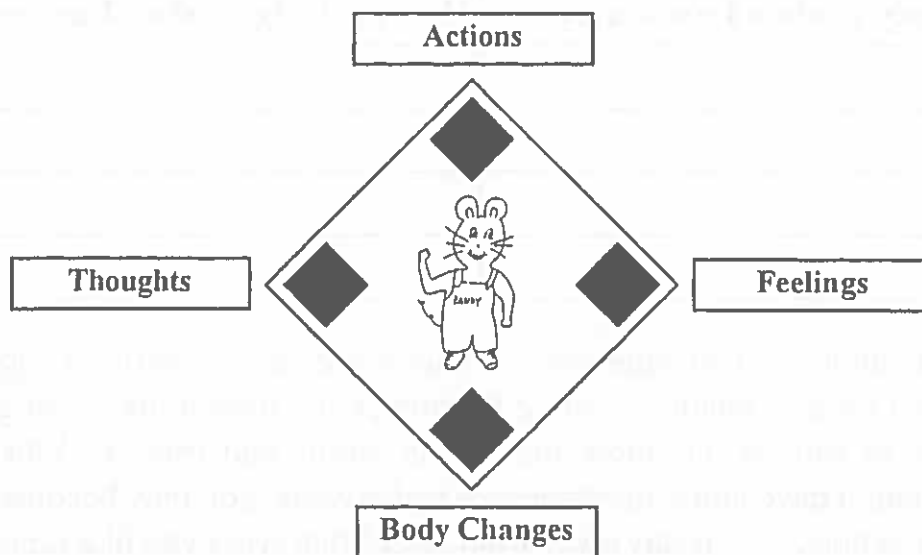
There are things you do when you are scared and sad. Sometimes when you are sad, you don't have as much fun doing the things you used to like, you give up on things faster, or you get into more fights with family and friends. When you are scared, you might have more nightmares or bad dreams, you may become more shy around other people, or you stay away from things that scare you like school or dogs or elevators. See if you can list some of the things you do when you are **scared** and **sad**.

| | |
|--|---------------------------|
| Things I do when I am scared | Things I do when I am sad |
| I let other kids tell me what to do. | I cry. |
| I get very quiet. | I stay by myself. |
| I have trouble falling asleep. | I give up on things. |
| I have trouble getting ready for school. | I act grumpy. |

There are things you say to yourself when you are scared or sad. These things are called your **thoughts**. Your **thoughts** might be things like, "I'm ugly. I'm no good. I'll never feel like I fit in. All the kids will think I'm weird. Being in school is scary. I'm going to embarrass myself." List some **thoughts** you have.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Thoughts I have when I am scared | Thoughts I have when I am sad |
| Something bad is going to happen. | I'm stupid. |
| I can't handle this. | I'm ugly. |
| Being scared + nervous is awful. | Nobody likes me. |
| Other kids will think I'm weird. | I will never fit in. |

These **thoughts**, **feelings**, **actions**, and **body changes** all happen together. They are connected in kind of a diamond shape. Here's how it looks.



We are going to work on all the diamonds to help you feel better.

Diamond Connections Worksheet



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| Scared Words | Sad Words |
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You may have some changes in your **body** when you are scared and sad. Your stomach might get upset, you have headaches, you sweat a lot even when it is not hot, you get dizzy, or you have trouble sleeping. List some changes you notice in your **body**.

| How my body is when I am scared | How my body is when I am sad |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
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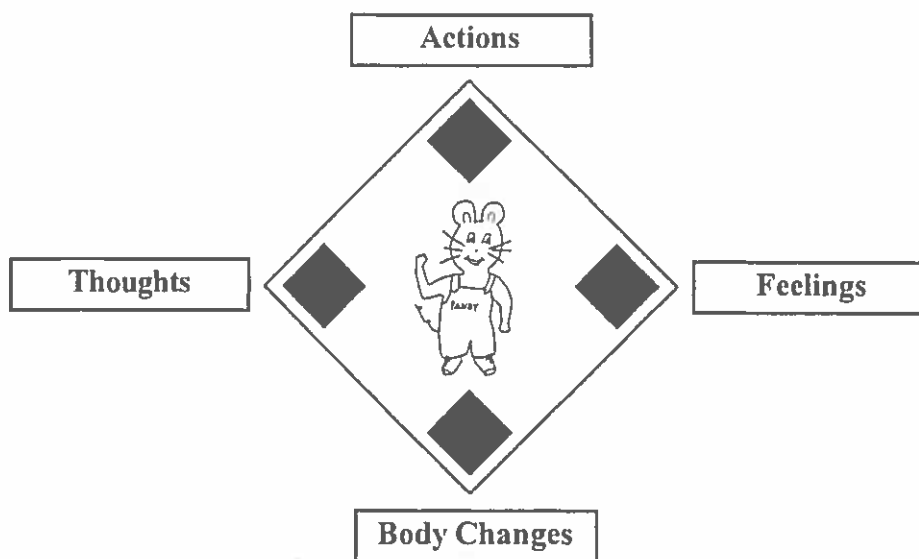
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| Things I do when I am scared | Things I do when I am sad |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
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There are things you say to yourself when you are scared or sad. These things are called your **thoughts**. Your **thoughts** might be things like, “I’m ugly. I’m no good. I’ll never feel like I fit in. All the kids will think I’m weird. Being in school is scary. I’m going to embarrass myself.” List some **thoughts** you have.

| Thoughts I have when I am scared | Thoughts I have when I am sad |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
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These **thoughts, feelings, actions, and body changes** all happen together. They are connected in kind of a diamond shape. Here’s how it looks.



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