

**Strengths**

Intervention



15 min/day



Client



No

## Daily Exceptions Journal

Positive CBT combines traditional CBT with positive psychology to shift the focus of therapy from what is wrong to what is right with clients and from what is not working to what is (Bannink, 2012). Positive CBT aims to improve the well-being of clients and their therapist by emphasizing and exploring exceptions to the problem as opposed to the problem itself in treatment.

Self-monitoring of one's problematic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in and between therapy sessions is a classic CBT technique. This technique allows the client and therapist to gain a more accurate understanding of the problem and the context in which it occurs, as opposed to relying on the client's recall. However, from the perspective of positive psychology, self-monitoring in this way only encourages the client to develop a narrow focus on "the problem." Subsequently, he or she misses the opportunity to observe and learn anything else. Thus, in Positive CBT, self-monitoring is not about clients' problems or symptoms, but about clients' strengths and exceptions to the problem. This approach enables clients to learn more about themselves as well as about what works and what is going well for them, which they can then use and apply to change their situation for the better (Bannink, 2012).

This tool is based on the concept of positive self-monitoring. Clients are invited to keep an 'exceptions journal' to begin to document and thus focus on when the problem does not occur and why.



### Author

This tool was adapted from Frederik Bannink's 'Exceptions Journal' exercise (seen in her 2012 book entitled *Practicing Positive CBT: From Reducing Distress to Building Success*) by Lucinda Poole and Hugo Alberts (Ph.D.).



### Goal

The goal of this exercise is to help clients become aware of what they are doing right to manage a particular problem and to highlight their strengths and move away from problem-focused thinking.



## Advice

- Although this exercise asks clients to document exceptions to the problem, be sure to allow clients to discuss the problem itself if they wish to do so. The idea with positive CBT is to develop a balanced therapeutic approach instead of focusing on eradicating the problem and focusing exclusively on exceptions to it. Dismissing the problem altogether would likely leave the client feeling unheard and invalidated.
- It is important to devote enough time to review the contents of the client's completed journal in session to spot the client's strengths and to praise and encourage progress and achievements.



## References

- Bannink, F. (2012). *Practicing positive CBT: From reducing distress to building success*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bannink, F.P. (2013). Positive CBT. From reducing distress to building success. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 42, 2.



# Daily Exceptions Journal

## Instructions

### Daily exceptions journal

Keeping track of when a problematic behavior *does not* occur in our day helps us to learn about what we are doing right to manage it. Therefore, every day this week, spend some time at the end of each day answering the following 10 questions.

1. What has improved today, even if just a little bit?

2. What else has improved?

3. What did I do differently to improve things?



4. What did I think or believe about myself that was helpful to make these improvements? What was different?

5. When didn't I experience the problem today?

6. What happens when the problem begins to resolve itself? What am I doing to bring this resolution about?

7. When was the problem less of a problem today?



8. What could I do to continue to make improvements?

9. What would my life look like if things continued to improve?

10. What can I congratulate myself for today?