

# The Psychotherapy File

An Aid to Understanding  
Ourselves Better

Published April 2000  
V:04.00

**ACAT** *Administration*  
Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapy

**Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapy**  
3rd Floor, South Wing, Division of Academic Psychiatry  
St Thomas' Hospital, Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7EH  
enquiries@acat.org.uk www.acat.org.uk 0207 928 9292 ext 3769

# The Psychotherapy File

## Introduction

Each of our lives is different. The experiences that we have had so far in our lives shape the way we see ourselves and others. Many people feel that the way they see things is the “right” way and is familiar. However, sometimes these ways of seeing things and what we do as a result can be the source of our problems.

In order to make things better it can help to recognise how you see yourself and others. It is also helpful to recognise your patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. This is the first step in learning to have more control and happiness in your life.

**The following questions are designed to help you start thinking about your way of seeing the world and your particular patterns.**

## Keeping A Diary Of Moods And Behaviour

Symptoms, bad moods, unwanted thoughts or behaviours that come and go can be better understood and controlled if you learn to notice when they happen and what starts them off.

If you have a particular symptom or problem of this sort, start keeping a diary. The diary should be focussed on a particular mood, symptom or behaviour, and should be kept every day if possible. Try to record this sequence:

1. How you were feeling about yourself and others and the world before the problem came on.
2. Any external event, or any thought or image in your mind that was going on when the trouble started, or what seemed to start it off.
3. Once the trouble started, what were the thoughts, images or feelings you experienced.

By noticing and writing down in this way what you do and think at these times, you will learn to recognise and eventually have more control over how you act and think at the time. It is often the case that bad feelings like resentment, depression or physical symptoms are the result of ways of thinking and acting that are unhelpful. Diary keeping in this way gives you the chance to learn better ways of dealing with things.

It is helpful to keep a daily record for 1-2 weeks, then to discuss what you have recorded with your therapist or counsellor.

## Starting To Change

You may get quite depressed when you begin to realise how often you stop your life being happier and more fulfilled. It is important to remember that it's not being stupid or bad, but rather that:

- a) We do these things because this is the way we learned to manage best when we were younger,
- b) We don't have to keep on doing them now we are learning to recognise them,
- c) By changing our behaviour, we can learn to control not only our own behaviour, but we also change the way other people behave to us,
- d) Although it may seem that others resist the changes we want for ourselves (for example, our parents or our partners), we often under-estimate them; if we are firm about our right to change, those who care for us will usually accept the change.

## Working With The Psychotherapy File

Look through the descriptions on the following pages and mark how far you think they apply to the way you feel. Some will be familiar, others will not. If a description feels familiar but is not quite right cross out the words that do not apply and write in how things are for you in your life. Remember there is no way of doing this badly or of getting it wrong. Discuss what you have discovered with your therapist. You and he/she can work together to work out what your unhelpful patterns are, get the descriptions as accurate as possible as the first step towards making helpful changes.

# TRAPS, DILEMMAS and SNAGS

Patterns that do not work but are hard to break.

Sometimes, there are certain ways that we think and act that do not achieve what we want. These can be hard to change.

Please read through the following patterns and decide how much this applies to you. Then circle the best response on the right.

## A. TRAPS

Traps = ways we think and act that make our problem worse rather than better, like a vicious circle.

<p><b>1. FEAR OF HURTING OTHERS</b></p>	<p>Circle best response</p> <p><b>Often Applies</b></p> <p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p> <p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>
---	--

<p><b>2. DEPRESSED THINKING</b></p>	<p>Circle best response</p> <p><b>Often Applies</b></p> <p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p> <p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>
-------------------------------------	--

TRAPS CONTINUED

<p><b>3. TRYING TO PLEASE (2 examples)</b> (a)</p> <p>When I feel uncertain about myself I worry about upsetting others</p> <p>I do what I think others want and I try hard to please them</p> <p>Others take advantage of me and then I feel angry, depressed or guilty</p> <p>This confirms my feelings of uncertainty about myself and I worry even more.</p>	<p>Circle best response</p> <p><b>Often Applies</b></p> <p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p> <p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>
<p>(b)</p> <p>When I feel uncertain about myself, I feel overwhelmed and anxious about upsetting others.</p> <p>I hide away, put things off and let others down.</p> <p>Others become angry with me.</p> <p>This confirms my uncertainty about myself even more</p>	<p><b>Often Applies</b></p> <p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p> <p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>
<p><b>4. AVOIDANCE</b></p> <p>I feel anxious and not very confident about certain situations e.g. crowds, parties, open spaces.</p> <p>When I go into these situations I feel more anxious.</p> <p>Avoiding these situations makes me feel better so I stop trying to face them</p> <p>My life becomes more limited and I feel more anxious and less confident.</p>	<p>Circle best response</p> <p><b>Often Applies</b></p> <p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p> <p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>

TRAPS CONTINUED

<p><b>5. SOCIAL ISOLATION</b></p>	<p>Circle best response</p>
	<p><b>Often Applies</b></p>
	<p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p>
	<p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>

<p><b>3. LOW SELF ESTEEM (2 examples)</b></p> <p>(a)</p>	<p>Circle best response</p>
	<p><b>Often Applies</b></p>
	<p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p>
	<p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>
<p>(b)</p>	<p>Circle best response</p>
	<p><b>Often Applies</b></p>
	<p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p>
	<p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>

## B. DILEMMAS

Often we act in a way that is unhelpful and we are unhappy because the only other way we can imagine seems as bad or even worse. We often do not realise that we see things like this and that these are false choices. They are false because sometimes we assume that “if I do x, then y will follow” and this may not necessarily be the case. They are also false when we assume these are our only possible choices. These false choices can be described as **either/or** or **if/then** dilemmas.

Do you act as if any of the following false choices rule your life? Recognising them is the first step to changing.

Please read through the following dilemmas and rate how much they apply to you by circling the best response.

Choices about myself; I act as if.....or

<p>1.</p> <p>either I keep feelings bottled up                      OR I risk being rejected, hurting others, or making a mess</p>	<p><b>Often Applies</b></p> <p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p> <p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>
<p>2.</p> <p>either I spoil myself and am greedy                      OR I deny myself things, punish myself and feel miserable</p>	<p><b>Often Applies</b></p> <p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p> <p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>
<p>3a.</p> <p>If I try to be perfect                      then I feel depressed and angry</p>	<p><b>Often Applies</b></p> <p><b>Sometimes Applies</b></p> <p><b>Does Not Apply</b></p>

DILEMMAS CONTINUED

<p>3b.</p> <p>If I don't try to be perfect</p> <p style="text-align: right;">then I feel guilty, angry and dissatisfied.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>4.</p> <p>If I must</p> <p style="text-align: right;">then I won't.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">When faced with a task, I must either submit unhappily or resist it passively. Other people's wishes or even my own can feel too demanding, so I put things off and avoid them.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>5.</p> <p>If I must not</p> <p style="text-align: right;">then I will.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sometimes, the only proof of my existence is my resistance. Rules feel too restricting, so I break rules and do things that are harmful to me.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>6.</p> <p>If others are not expecting me to do things for them or look after them,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">then I feel anxious, lonely and out of control.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>

**DILEMMAS CONTINUED**

7.	either I get what I want and feel childish and guilty	OR I don't get what I want and feel frustrated, angry and depressed.	Often Applies  Sometimes Applies  Does Not Apply
----	---	--	--

8.	either I keep things (feelings, plans) in perfect order	OR I fear things will turn into a terrible mess.	Often Applies  Sometimes Applies  Does Not Apply
----	---	--	--

Choices about how we relate to others; I behave with others as if...

1.	either I am involved with someone and likely to get hurt	OR I don't get involved and stay in charge but remain lonely.	Often Applies  Sometimes Applies  Does Not Apply
----	--	---	--

2.	either I stick up for myself and nobody likes me	OR I give in and get put on by others and feel cross and hurt.	Often Applies  Sometimes Applies  Does Not Apply
----	--	--	--



DILEMMAS CONTINUED

<p>3.</p> <p>either I am a brute OR a martyr (secretly blaming the other person).</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>4(a). With Others...</p> <p>either I am safely wrapped up in bliss OR I am fighting.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>4(b). When fighting,</p> <p>either I am a bully OR a victim.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>5.</p> <p>either I look down on people OR I feel they look down on me.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>

DILEMMAS CONTINUED

<p>6(a).</p> <p>either I am made happy by the admiration of those I admire</p> <p>OR I feel vulnerable.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>6(b). If I feel vulnerable</p> <p>either I put others down</p> <p>OR I put myself down.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>either I am involved with others and feel taken over or smothered</p> <p>OR I stay safe and uninvolved but feel lonely and isolated.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>8. When I am involved with someone I care about,</p> <p>either I have to give in</p> <p>OR they have to give in.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>

## DILEMMAS CONTINUED

9. When I am involved with someone I depend on,  either I have to give in                                  OR they have to give in.	<b>Often Applies</b>  <b>Sometimes Applies</b>  <b>Does Not Apply</b>
---	---

10(a). As a woman,  either I have to do what others want    OR I stand up for my rights and get rejected.	<b>Often Applies</b>  <b>Sometimes Applies</b>  <b>Does Not Apply</b>
---	---

10(b). As a man,  either I can't have any feelings                  OR I am an emotional mess.	<b>Often Applies</b>  <b>Sometimes Applies</b>  <b>Does Not Apply</b>
--	---

11.  either I look down on people                      OR I feel they look down on me.	<b>Often Applies</b>  <b>Sometimes Applies</b>  <b>Does Not Apply</b>
--	---

## C. SNAGS

A Snag is a pattern that stops us from getting on with our lives. A Snag is what is happening when we say, “I want a better life **but...**” or “I want to change **but...**”

Often getting on with our lives and changing brings new consequences. Sometimes, the worry about these consequences can “snag us”. For example, it may feel strange to behave differently from how you, and others who know you, expect you to behave. A snag may come from others not wanting us to change or not coping with us changing. Sometimes snags come from us feeling guilty if things go well for us or from feeling we do not deserve to be happy. As a result, we feel that we have to spoil our pleasure or success.

### Remember

- ◆ We have these patterns because this is the way we learned to manage when we were younger.
- ◆ By changing these patterns, we can also change the way other people behave towards us.

Please read each snag and then circle the response that best describes how well this applies to you.

<p>1.</p> <p>For fear of the response of others I must sabotage success as;</p> <p>a) it deprives others, b) others may envy me, or c) there are not enough good things to go around.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>2. I must sabotage good things as if I do not deserve them.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>

## D. DIFFICULT AND UNSTABLE STATES OF MIND

Some people find that their state of mind can feel very different and difficult at times. These changes in our state of mind can make it difficult to keep control over our behaviour and experience. Please indicate if any of the following apply to you.

<p>1.</p> <p>How I feel about myself and others can change dramatically. I can switch from one state of mind to a completely different one.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>2.</p> <p>Some states are accompanied by intense, extreme and uncontrollable feelings.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>Other states are accompanied by an emotional blankness, feeling unreal, or feeling muddled.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>4.</p> <p>Some states are accompanied by feeling intensely guilty or angry with myself, wanting to hurt myself.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>

## DIFFICULT AND UNSTABLE STATES OF MIND CONTINUED

<p>5.</p> <p>Some states are accompanied by feeling that others can't be trusted, are going to let me down, or hurt me.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>6.</p> <p>Some states are accompanied by being feeling unreasonably angry or hurtful to others.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>Sometimes, the only way to cope with some confusing feelings is to blank them off and feel emotionally distant from others.</p>	<p>Often Applies</p> <p>Sometimes Applies</p> <p>Does Not Apply</p>

## E. DIFFERENT STATES

Everybody experiences changes in how they feel about themselves and the world. For some people, these changes are extreme, sometimes sudden and confusing. In such cases, there are often a number of states that re-occur. Learning to recognise them and shifts between them can be helpful.

Below are descriptions of such states. Please tick those that you experience. You can delete or add words to the descriptions. At the end of the list, you can add any descriptions that are not listed but apply to you.

	Tick.
1. Zombie. Cut off from my feelings and from others.	
2. Feeling bad but soldiering on, coping.	
3. Out of control rage.	
4. Extra special. Looking down on others.	
5. In control of myself, of life, of other people.	
6. Cheated by life, by others. Untrusting.	
7. Provoking, teasing, seducing, winding others up.	
8. Clinging, fearing abandonment.	
9. Frantically active. Too busy to think or feel.	
10. Agitated, confused, anxious.	
11. Feeling perfectly cared for, blissfully close to another.	
12. Misunderstood, rejected, abandoned.	
13. Scornful and hating of myself.	
14. Vulnerable, needy, helpless, waiting for rescue.	
15. Envious, wanting to harm others and put them down.	
16. Protective, respecting of myself and of others.	
17. Hurting myself, hurting others.	
18. Angrily giving in to the demands of others.	
19. Hurt and humiliated by others.	
20. Secure in myself. Able to be close to others.	
21. Intensely critical of myself and of others.	
22. Frightened of others.	
23.	
24.	
25.	