

## Session 9: Cognitive Coping 2

Now that Veterans have been asked to monitor their negative thoughts and have increased their awareness of such thoughts' power and prevalence, Session 9 highlights how to make adaptations to unhealthy, inaccurate thoughts. As this session focuses on ways to challenge ANTs, it may be helpful at session initiation to remind Veterans that since they can *choose* the way that they think about and react to experiences, they are empowered to help determine the course of each day.

### Session 9 Agenda

✓	Administer SUDS.
✓	Establish agenda.
✓	Review Session 8.
✓	Present Session 9 content: Challenging negative thoughts.
✓	Discuss home practice.

### Session 9 Materials

- Catching ANTs Worksheet
- Coping Statements Checklist

### Challenging Negative Thoughts

Briefly discuss Session 8 with Veterans and inquire about the process of identifying and evaluating ANTs. Ask about the types of thoughts they noticed and if they were surprised at the frequency. In addition, discuss any impact that their negative thoughts had on pain experiences or moods, as well as any barriers encountered in the process. If they did not arrive at session with the home practice completed, inquire about why. Since it is important for Veterans to have some experience in recognizing ANTs and considering their impact, complete two retrospective examples in session together. This important session focuses on the task of challenging ANTs and trying to help Veterans minimize their occurrence and impact in the future.

Using the same Catching ANTs thought record introduced in Session 8, explore how these negative thoughts can be challenged. The idea is not to generate happy, unrealistic thoughts but to create a more balanced, accurate way of looking at experiences. After identifying an ANT, Veterans are encouraged to weigh the evidence that supports and does not support the cognition. This promotes a more realistic and healthy way to interpret the world.

## TALKING TIPS: *Challenging Negative Thoughts*

Once you notice an ANT, pause to consider the cognition. Challenge the negative thought by trying to collect the facts. Ask questions such as:

- Is this 100% true?
- Is there a different way to look at this issue?
- What would I tell a close friend if they had this thought?
- Is this thought helpful to me?
- Is there evidence that I am not taking into account?

When you answer these questions, you have a more balanced and realistic view of the situation. Replacing unhealthy thoughts with more accurate ones will help you cope better and allow you to practice more effective pain management.

During the session, use at least two examples provided by the Veteran to complete the *Challenge It* column on the worksheet. Review the full thought record and determine if participants understand the process and rationale. It may be helpful to remind them that while it is understandable to have pain-related ANTs, they often lead to increased pain and reinforce the maladaptive cycle CBT-CP is helping Veterans change.

The following is an example of an exchange between Juan and his therapist regarding recognizing and replacing maladaptive thoughts:

- Therapist: To understand the concept of replacing thoughts that are not helpful with ones that are more helpful, it's useful to use an example from your life. I recall us having a conversation that could be used to do this. Let's break down the *situation* you discussed previously, in which you were changing a tire with your father and experienced extreme pain. What were the *thoughts* that went through your head?
- Juan: I remember thinking, "My back is broken. I can't cope with this."
- Therapist: And what *emotions* did you experience?
- Juan: I initially felt scared when I thought I broke my back. When I realized I hadn't, I got down thinking that I am too young to have pain like this and I can't cope. I felt depressed.
- Therapist: So then it sounds like you would say these thoughts were *harmful* or not helpful and made your mood worse?
- Juan: Definitely. I felt down the whole day and stayed in my room. Not doing anything probably made my pain worse too.
- Therapist: Can you think of a more *balanced thought or coping statement* to replace the ANT of "I can't cope with this?"
- Juan: I guess a more accurate one would be, "I've been through pain increases like this before, I just need to focus on something else until it passes."
- Therapist: That is a very good way to re-frame your thought into something more accurate and positive. From the example you provided, we can see how replacing an unhelpful thought could have helped avoid some of the increased pain and depressed mood that you experienced.

## Coping Statements

Completing the process of identifying and challenging ANTs is beneficial in understanding the cognitive processes that influence mood and pain. Another technique that can also be helpful in managing pain flare-ups or negative mood is to use positive coping statements. Evidence suggests that those who use positive coping statements tolerate pain more effectively than those who use catastrophizing statements (Roditi, Robinson, & Litwins, 2009). The ideal coping statement helps patients remain calm during stressful situations. Coping statements provide "go-to" phrases that can replace unhealthy thoughts or help Veterans cope with specific difficult situations, especially ones that may be unanticipated. A key element to the success of coping

statements involves finding phrases that strongly resonate with the individual Veteran. The Coping Statements Checklist helps Veterans choose statements that may be effective for them. Patients may have their own phrases or statements that they have used in the past and have served them well. Encourage them to add such statements to the list provided.

One advantage of formulating effective coping statements is that they can be portable and kept handy for use at any time. They can be written on a small piece of paper such as a 3x5 card that has been cut in half and can be kept in a wallet. For those who use a smart phone, a coping statement note can be created that contains helpful phrases. A similar document could be kept in a journal or on a computer/tablet for use at home as well, but having statements ready at all times is ideal.

Consider the following discussion about replacing negative thoughts with Coping Statements:

Sheila: I've been in therapy a long time for my depression and PTSD. I've learned about CBT and replacing negative thoughts. But, my thoughts about pain are harder for me. They're true. I AM in pain. The pain IS awful.

Therapist: Those thoughts may be true. But, does thinking about how much pain you're in or focusing on how awful your pain is help you cope with the pain?

Sheila: No.

Therapist: The goal is to recognize thoughts that are not helpful and replace them with ones that are helpful. Here is a list of example coping statements. Read this list and tell me which ones stand out to you.

Sheila: I like "I just have to make it through this moment." Some days I wake up and feel overwhelmed thinking about how I'm going to make it through the day, which makes it hard to even get out of bed. If I focus on making it through each moment rather than getting through the whole day, I think that would be easier.

Therapist: Great. What are your thoughts about using coping statements as one way to help you get through bad pain days?

Sheila: I think that when I am lying in bed in pain, it's hard to think about anything else.

Therapist: And that's why we have this list for reference and as a reminder. Some people find it helpful to keep a list of coping statements on the refrigerator or in their phone. Where do you think would be a good place for you to keep them so that you would use them?

Sheila: I sleep with my phone by my bed. I can set an alert for the mornings so that when I wake up I get a reminder that "I just have to make it through this moment."

## Practice

Veterans should continue to add personal examples to the Catching ANTs Worksheet, including positive/balanced statements to challenge ANTs. In addition, using the Coping Statements Checklist ask that they identify several statements that they find calming and reassuring which can be used before the next session.