

Understanding and Coping with Procrastination

Workshop Handout



KSU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

1105 Sunset Avenue
k-state.edu/counseling
counsel@k-state.edu

(785) 532-6927

k-state.edu/counseling

Procrastination Definition

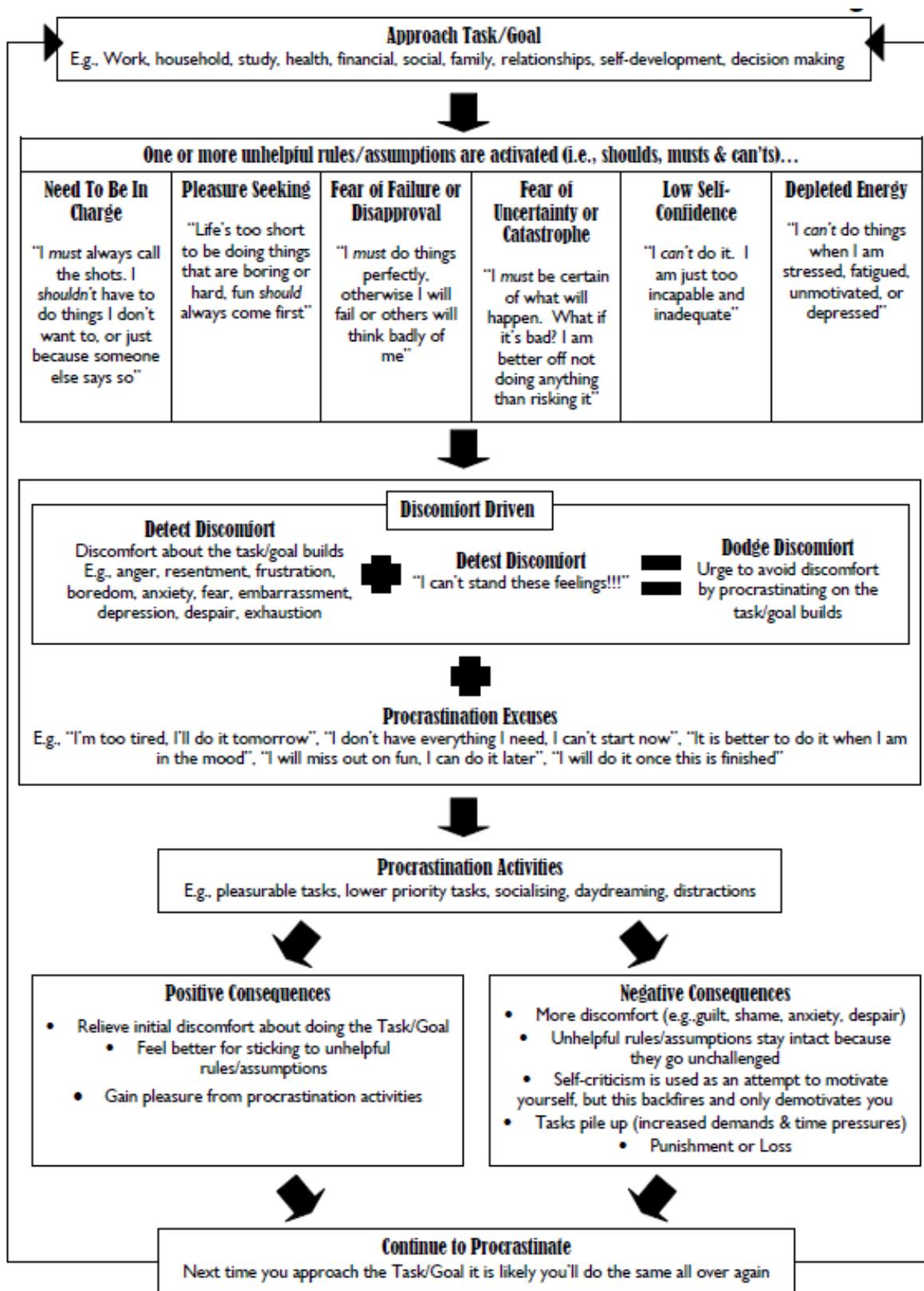
Making a decision for no valid reason to delay or not complete a task or goal you've committed to doing and instead doing something of lesser importance despite there being negative consequences for not following through on the task or goal.

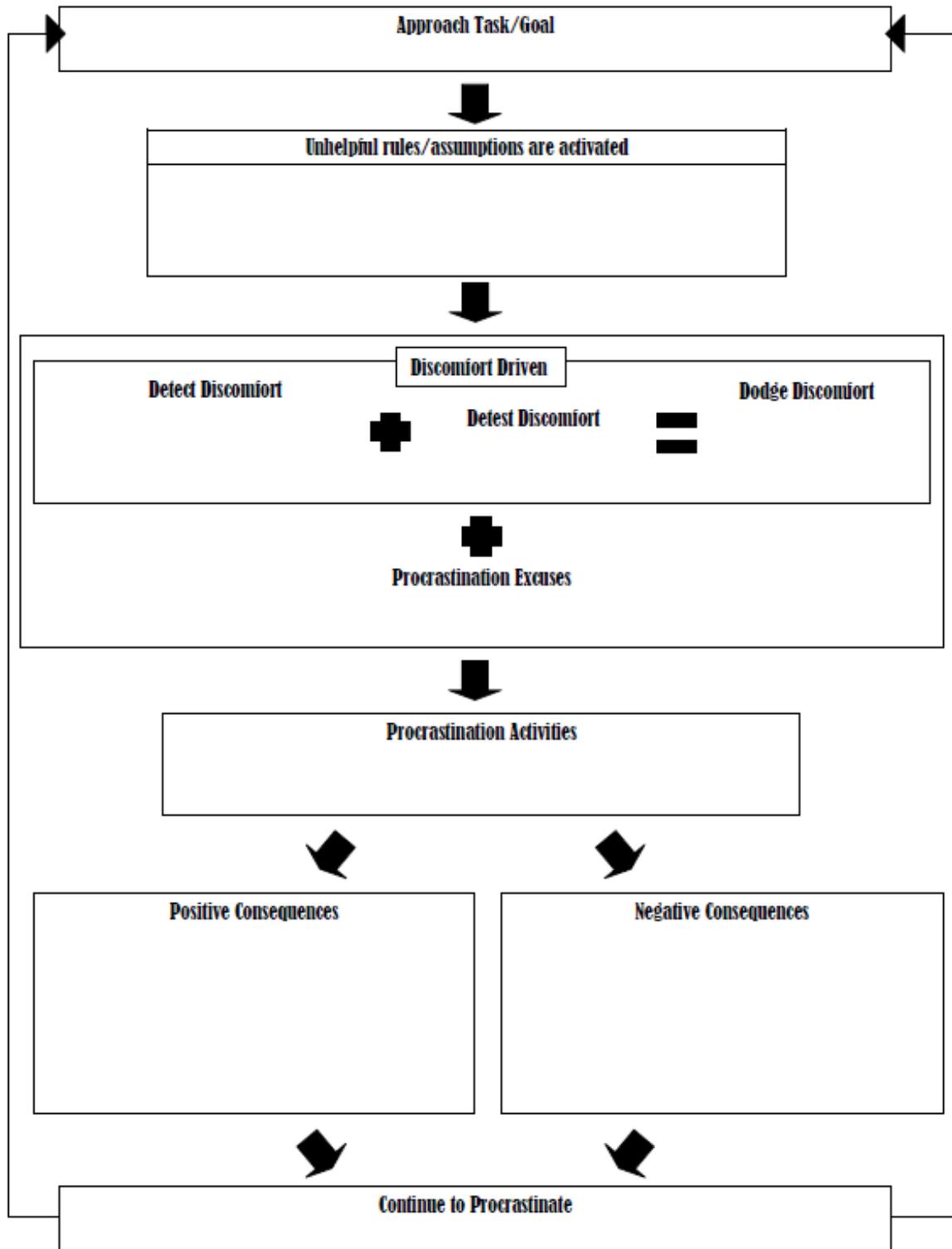
Procrastination Excuses

- I'm too tired. I'll do it tomorrow
- I don't have everything I need, so I can't start it now
- I don't have enough time to do it all, so I will wait until I do
- It's is too late to start now
- I won't get much done, so I'll just leave it for now
- It is better to do it when I am in the mood or feeling inspired
- I will miss out on the fun happening now, I can do it another time
- It is too nice of a day to spend on this
- I will do it once the other things are finished
- I've got to organize my desk/kitchen/laundry, etc. first
- I've to exercise first
- I am too busy to do it now
- I have plenty of time so I can do it later
- I work better when I am stressed, so I will leave it to the last minute
- It might not be good enough so why bother doing it
- Working on it today won't make any difference
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Unhelpful Rules and Assumptions

<p>Need To Be In Charge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I must be in charge at all times • Things should be done my way • I shouldn't have to do things that I don't want to • I shouldn't have to do things because someone else says so • If I'm not 100% in charge of what I do, then I am weak 	<p>Pleasure Seeking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life is too short to be doing things that are boring or hard • Fun should always come first • Life should be fun at all times • Pleasure here and now should be all that matters • If I forgo fun, then I will become a boring lifeless drone
<p>Fear Of Failure Or Disapproval</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I must do things perfectly • I must not fail • I can't have others think poorly of me • If I try, then I will only fail • If I put my work out there, then others will think badly of me 	<p>Fear Of Uncertainty or Catastrophe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I must be certain of what will happen • I should be prepared for the worse • I can't stand not know the outcome • If I take action, then something bad will happen • I am better off not doing anything than risk it going bad
<p>Low Self-Confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can't do things because I am incapable • I'm too inadequate so I can't get things done • If I try things, then my inadequacies will show through • I shouldn't try things when I know I'm no good • If I know I won't be able to do something, then I shouldn't bother 	<p>Depleted Energy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can't do things when I am stressed/fatigued/unmotivated/depressed • I must rest when my energy is low • I must be energized to be able to do things • If I do things when I am stressed/fatigued/unmotivated/depressed, I will make things worse • If I do things when I am not energized, then it won't work out.





Disputing Questions

- Do I know for certain that ___ ?
- Am I 100% sure that ___ ?
- What evidence do I have that ___ ?
- What is the worse that could happen?
- How bad is ___ ?
- Do I have a crystal ball?
- Is there another explanation for ___ ?
- Does ___ have to lead to or equal ___ ?
- Is there another point of view?
- What does ___ mean?
- Does ___ really mean that I am a (n) ___ ?
- Am I confusing a thought with a fact?
- Am I jumping to conclusions?
- What alternatives are there?
- Am I assuming my view of things is the only one possible?
- What is the effect of thinking the way I do?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking this way?
- Am I asking questions that have no answers?
- What thinking errors am I making?
- Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms?
- Am I using ultimatum words in my thinking?
- Am I condemning myself as a total person on the basis of a single event?
- Am I concentrating on my weaknesses and forgetting my strengths?
- Am I blaming myself for something which is not really my fault?
- Am I taking something personally which has little or nothing to do with me?
- Am I expecting myself to be perfect?
- Am I using a double standard?
- Am I paying attention only to the worst side of things?
- Am I overestimating the chances of disaster?
- Am I exaggerating the importance of events?
- Am I fretting about the way things ought to be, instead of accepting and dealing with them as they are?
- Am I assuming I can do nothing to change my situation?
- Am I predicting the future instead of experimenting with it?

How to Change Procrastination

- Awareness, insight, and understanding procrastination is often a catalyst for change
- Go slow and take small steps
- Changing excuses
 - Challenge your procrastination excuses on page 2 using the questions on page 6
- Find the humor/absurdity in what we go through to procrastinate
- Test your excuses
 - “I’m too tired”—see what happens if you work on something for just 5 minutes
- It is about REDUCING procrastination activities, not ELIMINATING them
- Prioritize your tasks for the day, week, month, semester, etc.
- Rule of ½
 - If you have 10 things on your to do list for the day, consider cutting it down to 5 or even 2 or 3 tasks
 - It often takes us longer to complete tasks than we think
- Cross things off a list—it is rewarding to see what you have accomplished
- Break tasks into manageable chunks
 - <https://writing.ku.edu/assignment-planner>
- If you find something that works, do more of it; if something does not work, do something *DIFFERENT* until you find what works and then do more of it
- Do the hardest/most undesirable task first instead of the smaller/easier tasks
 - OR do the smaller/easier tasks but then QUICKLY change to a larger task
- Set a goal to work for 5 minutes, then see what you have accomplished and challenge yourself to work another 5 minutes or increase it to 10 minutes
- Set a time goal
 - Don’t say “I’m going to work on this until it’s done”; instead say “I’m going to devote 30 minutes to working on this”
- Work for 15 to 25 minutes without distractions, take a 5 to 10 minute break, and then work another 15 to 25 minutes
- Know the times of the day when you are most productive and plan your work accordingly
- Find the location where you work best
 - Depending on the task, this location may change
- Figure out how much stimulation you need
 - The amount of stimulation may depend on the type of task you are working on
- If something comes to your mind, make a note of it. Then review it later to see if it was just a passing thought or something you need to attend to.
- Create rewards for yourself:
 - Extra Small: __Checking phone during 5 to 10 minute breaks__
 - Small (end of day): _____
 - Medium (end of week): _____
 - Large (end of month): _____
 - Extra Large (end of semester): _____
- Adjust unhelpful rules and assumptions (see page 8)
- Tolerating discomfort
 - Thoughts and emotions do not last forever but some may last longer than others
 - Do not judge your thoughts/emotions
 - Do the opposite of what your thought/emotion says

Changing Rules and Assumptions

• **Needing To Be In Charge**

- **What is the unhelpful rule or assumption I would like to adjust?**
 - It may be something like:
 - I must be in charge at all times
 - Things should be done my way
 - I shouldn't have to do things that I don't want to
 - I shouldn't have to do things because someone else says so
 - If I am not 100% in charge of what I do, then I am weak
- **Where did this rule or assumption come from?**
 - Possibly:
 - Messages or sayings I received growing up from either family, others around me, or society (e.g., "you need to be top dog to get any respect in this world" or "it's my way or the highway").
 - Past experiences of being dominated by others, and vowing never to be in that same position again.
 - Seeing the benefits that people in positions of power received.
- **In what ways is this rule or assumption unreasonable? unrealistic? unfair? unhelpful?**
 - To get along in society you are going to need to follow someone else's orders at some point. No matter how high up you are, there is always going to be someone higher. Give and take is necessary for society to function. We all have to do things we don't particularly like doing at certain times, it is a part of life. It is simply not possible to be in control and hold the power at all times.
- **What are the negative consequences of having this rule or assumption?**
 - I alienate others, it creates conflict with people around me, I get aggressive, I don't get promoted because I don't get along with others or follow their instructions.
- **What is an alternative more helpful rule or assumption?**
 - It may be something like:
 - I can tolerate doing things I don't want to
 - It is ok to follow other people at times
 - Doing things that don't suit me doesn't make me weak, but a normal functioning member of society
 - Things don't have to always be my way
- **What can I do to put this rule or assumption into practice on a daily basis?**
 - Follow someone else's orders. Do things I don't want to. Give some power and control over to someone else for a change. Don't be independent and in charge all the time, but instead ask for help at times.

• **Pleasure Seeking**

- **What is the unhelpful rule or assumption I would like to adjust?**
 - It may be something like:

- Life is too short to be doing things that are boring or hard
 - Fun should always come first
 - Life should be fun at all times
 - Pleasure here and now should be all that matters
 - If I forgo fun, then I will become a boring lifeless drone
- **Where did this rule or assumption come from?**
 - Possibly:
 - Messages I received growing up that fun was a priority (e.g., “don’t be a party pooper”).
 - Past experiences of being deprived of fun and pressured to work hard, and as such vowing never to live life like that again.
 - Observing in others the negative consequences of being a workaholic, and rebelling against that lifestyle.
 - My achievements not being valued by others or not seeing others around me striving to achieve.
- **In what ways is this rule or assumption unreasonable? unrealistic? unfair? unhelpful?**
 - To get anywhere in life is going to involve some hard work, achievement or sacrifice at certain points. If life is only about fun, we get stuck and don’t get to where we want to be in life. We all have to put up with some boredom at times, it is a part of life.
- **What are the negative consequences of having this rule or assumption?**
 - Things don’t get done, I don’t move forward, I stay stuck whilst watching others around me progress, I feel left behind and dissatisfied with my life achievements.
- **What is an alternative more helpful rule or assumption?**
 - It may be something like:
 - I can tolerate short term boredom for long term gain
 - Pleasurable times are often more enjoyable after I have achieved something
 - Fun and achievement are equally important
- **What can I do to put this rule or assumption into practice on a daily basis?**
 - Plan fun things after I have achieved something. Practice forgoing fun temporarily to get a task achieved. Practice doing mundane or boring tasks for increasing periods of time to build tolerance and patience. Plan a balance between the proportion of fun and achievement activities in my week.
- **Fear Of Failure Or Disapproval**
 - **What is the unhelpful rule or assumption I would like to adjust?**
 - It may be something like:
 - I must do things perfectly
 - I must not fail
 - I can’t have others think poorly of me
 - If I try, then I will only fail

- If I put my work out there, then others will think badly of me
 - **Where did this rule or assumption come from?**
 - Possibly:
 - Messages and sayings growing up from the people around me (e.g., “unless you are first, you are last”, “perfection is a virtue”, “you have to give 110%”).
 - Being criticized when I didn’t do well at something.
 - Only ever being praised when I did exceptionally well.
 - Past experiences of not doing well or failing at something.
 - **In what ways is this rule or assumption unreasonable? unrealistic? unfair? unhelpful?**
 - Perfection is unattainable, as imperfection is inevitable. It is more realistic to expect to do well at certain things, mediocre at others things, and not so well at some things – it all evens out in the end. It isn’t so black and white that things are either a success or failure. People generally aren’t out to judge everything we do, they are often more wrapped up in themselves. Constructive criticism is a part of learning.
 - **What are the negative consequences of having this rule or assumption?**
 - I feel afraid about doing things, I predict failure and disapproval constantly, I don’t get things done or I waste time trying to get things perfect, I don’t try, I don’t put myself ‘out there’.
 - **What is an alternative more helpful rule or assumption?**
 - It may be something like:
 - Imperfection is part of being human
 - Doing things imperfectly doesn’t always lead to failure or disapproval
 - On the whole I do things well and don’t fail or get judged poorly
 - I can tolerate not doing well or receiving some criticism
 - **What can I do to put this rule or assumption into practice on a daily basis?**
 - Plan to do things imperfectly (e.g., purposely make a mistake and see what happens). Aim for a ‘good enough’ job, rather than perfection, and see if I can be OK with this. Purposely try to generate some form of criticism from others, and practice being able to tolerate it.
- **Fear Of Uncertainty Or Catastrophe**
 - **What is the unhelpful rule or assumption I would like to adjust?**
 - It may be something like:
 - I must be certain of what will happen
 - I should be prepared for the worst
 - I can’t stand not knowing the outcome
 - If I take action, then something bad will happen
 - I am better off not doing anything, than risk it going bad
 - **Where did this rule or assumption come from?**
 - Possibly:
 - Messages growing up (e.g., “a good scout is always prepared”)

- Having an unstable and unpredictable life growing up, and vowing that life will never be like that again.
 - Past experiences of having suffered some catastrophe or trauma in my life.
 - **In what ways is this rule or assumption unreasonable? unrealistic? unfair? unhelpful?**
 - It is impossible to be certain about everything. Some degree of uncertainty is a part of life we all have to tolerate. Not taking action or worrying about things, doesn't making anything more certain and doesn't prevent a catastrophe.
 - **What are the negative consequences of having this rule or assumption?**
 - I feel afraid about doing things, I predict catastrophe constantly, I worry, I don't take action, I avoid, I stay within my 'comfort zone'.
 - **What is an alternative more helpful rule or assumption?**
 - It may be something like:
 - Uncertainty is a part of life that everyone has to tolerate
 - Catastrophes are unlikely events
 - I can take action and cope with any consequences that arise
 - I can cope if bad things happens, and worrying about it doesn't prevent it
 - **What can I do to put this rule or assumption into practice on a daily basis?**
 - Take action or make decisions, and see what happens. If something doesn't go well, use it as an opportunity to practice being able to cope with that.
- **Low Self-Confidence**
 - **What is the unhelpful rule or assumption I would like to adjust?**
 - It may be something like:
 - I can't do things because I am incapable
 - I'm too inadequate so I can't get things done
 - If I try things, then my inadequacies will show through
 - I shouldn't try things when I know I'm no good
 - If I know I won't be able to do something, then I shouldn't bother
 - **Where did this rule or assumption come from?**
 - Possibly:
 - Criticism from others growing up or later in life (e.g., "you are no good", "you will never amount to anything")
 - Lack of praise or recognition from others for my abilities.
 - Past experiences of attempting things and them not turning out well.
 - **In what ways is this rule or assumption unreasonable? unrealistic? unfair? unhelpful?**
 - I don't take into account both my strengths and weaknesses, but am biased and unfair towards myself by just focusing on my weaknesses. I just assume I can't do things, rather than finding out for real.

- **What are the negative consequences of having this rule or assumption?**
 - I don't try or attempt things, I give up easily, I feel down about myself, I criticize myself.
- **What is an alternative more helpful rule or assumption?**
 - It may be something like:
 - I can do more than I give myself credit for
 - I have strengths and weakness just like anyone
 - I am capable and adequate in most things
- **What can I do to put this rule or assumption into practice on a daily basis?**
 - Don't back away from challenges. Try new things. Give things a go and see how I do. Pay attention to my strengths and achievements (e.g., write them down each day).
- **Depleted Energy**
 - **What is the unhelpful rule or assumption I would like to adjust?**
 - It may be something like:
 - I can't do things when I am stressed/ fatigued/ unmotivated/ depressed
 - I must rest when my energy is low
 - I must be energized to be able to do things
 - If I do things when I am stressed/ fatigued/ unmotivated/ depressed, I will make things worse
 - If I do things when I am not energized, then it won't work out
 - **Where did this rule or assumption come from?**
 - Possibly:
 - Past experiences of people in my life not challenging or pushing me during tough times, but telling me to "take it easy" and treating me as fragile.
 - Past experiences of people pushing me too much when my energy was low, and vowing never to do that to myself again.
 - Seeing others manage stress, fatigue, poor motivation and depression by taking it easy.
 - Having overdone things at some point in my life, which led to a negative outcome (e.g., nervous breakdown).
 - **In what ways is this rule or assumption unreasonable? unrealistic? unfair? unhelpful?**
 - I never test myself in different situations to see I can manage and get some things done at certain times. We are often not going to be in the right frame of mind to do things, and if we wait for the right frame of mind it may never come, and we will never get anything done.
 - **What are the negative consequences of having this rule or assumption?**
 - I don't get things done, I view myself as fragile, I can't live a normal routine, I can't take on a variety of commitments, I feel restricted in what I can do.
 - **What is an alternative more helpful rule or assumption?**

- It may be something like:
 - I can do more than I think when my energy is low
 - Energy, stress, motivation and mood often improve if I tackle things step by step, rather than rest
 - Rest often de-energizes me
 - Rest is not always the answer, often taking action is
- **What can I do to put this rule or assumption into practice on a daily basis?**
 - Try taking action rather than resting when I feel stressed/ fatigued/ unmotivated/ depressed, and see what happens. Break tasks into steps and start with just one step when my energy is low, and see where it leads.