Challenging Anxious Thoughts

Anxiety can be a healthy emotion—it forces us to focus on our problems, and work hard to solve them. But sometimes, anxiety grows out of control, and does just the opposite. It *cripples* our ability to solve problems. When this happens, **irrational thoughts** often play a role.

In this exercise, we will practice catching our irrational thoughts, and replacing them with rational alternatives. With enough practice, this will become a natural process that can help you manage anxiety.

Describe a common situation that triggers your anxiety:
example: "giving a speech in front of a crowd" or "driving in rush hour traffic"

Anxiety distorts our thinking by causing us to **overestimate the likelihood of something going wrong**, and **imagine the potential consequences as worse than they really are**. Sometimes, just taking a moment to think about these facts can help us recognize our irrational thoughts.

Imagine you are faced with the anxiety-producing situation from above. Describe the…

Worst outcome:
Best outcome:
Likely outcome:

Imagine the worst outcome comes true. Would it still matter…

1 week from now:
1 month from now:
1 year from now:

Usually, anxious thoughts focus on the worst possible outcomes, even when they aren't likely. For example, a person who is nervous about giving a speech might think: *"I am going to forget everything and embarrass myself, and I'll never live it down"*.

As an outside observer, we know that an alternate, more rational thought might be: *"My speech might only be OK, but if I do mess up, everyone will forget about it soon enough"*.

Using your own "worst outcome" and "likely outcome" from above, describe your…

Irrational thought:
Rational thought: