

HOW FEARS CONTROL MY EATING

GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

1. Identify the fears that exist under the surface of behavior.
2. Identify how these fears control behavior.
3. Accept and implement a plan of facing fears to reduce their influence on the behavior.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE MOST USEFUL

- None

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

A multitude of fears can exert a powerful influence on the client who has an eating disorder. This exercise is designed to help the client identify those fears, note how they impact his/her behavior, and commit to a plan of replacing the negative automatic thoughts associated with each fear. You will have to help the client become aware of how cognitive distortions precipitate fear and then suggest replacement thoughts that are realistic.

HOW FEARS CONTROL MY EATING

Anorexia and bulimia are behavioral problems that are based on fear. The fear may take many forms and can be caused by many distorted thoughts. For this exercise, try to identify the various fears that seem to control your eating behavior. Then focus on the most powerful fears and understand how they are controlling your behavior. Finally, to overcome your fears, you must find ways to face your fears.

1. Review the following list of fears and place a check by those that you struggle with and those that influence your eating behavior. If the list is missing one or more of your fears, add them to the list at the bottom in the blank spaces provided.

I have a fear of:

- Gaining weight.
- Becoming obese.
- Losing control of my eating and gorging myself.
- Being a failure in many areas of my life.
- Food not being available when I want it.
- Becoming independent and living on my own.
- Developing a sexually attractive body.
- Not being perfect.
- Being rejected by family and/or friends.
- My sexual fantasies leading to impulsive sexual behavior.
- Expressing my thoughts and feelings directly.
- Speaking up for my rights.
- Not having any worth apart from my appearance.
- Becoming close and intimate with the opposite sex.
- Someone else being in control of me.

2. Now list the three most powerful fears in their order of strength.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

3. For each of the three fears listed, write about how that fear influences your behavior. What impact does it have on your life? How might it affect your eating?

Fear #1: _____

Fear #2: _____

Fear #3: _____

Most irrational fears are triggered by distorted thoughts. First, people have thoughts about a situation and then these thoughts cause an emotional reaction. Therefore, the fears are reduced or eliminated if the negative thoughts can be changed to thoughts that are more realistic, hopeful, and positive.

4. For each of the fears listed in 2, identify the thoughts that you have that are associated with each fear. For example, if you fear gaining weight, one or more of the following negative thoughts could be triggering this fear:

- I'm already too fat.
- I'm going to become fat like my mother.
- I want to look skinny like a model.
- If I start to gain, I won't be able to stop.
- I look pretty when I'm thin.
- If I eat normally, I'll get fat.
- I can't eat like most people because I'll get fat.
- The only way I can stay fit is to constantly diet.
- It is not healthy to eat regular portions.

When thoughts like these are held onto, the fear of gaining weight grows. Now write your thoughts that help to maintain or trigger each of your fears.

Fear #1: _____

Fear #2: _____

Fear #3: _____

To reduce these fears, you must replace the negative thoughts with positive, realistic thoughts. For example, for fear of gaining weight, the following realistic thoughts could replace the negative thoughts:

- I'm not fat. In fact, I'm underweight.
- I need to gain some weight.
- I can control my weight gain so it is reasonable.
- Being too skinny is not healthy or attractive.
- I will look more attractive when I gain some weight.
- A fit body needs a normal amount of calories.
- Regular portions of food provide the necessary nutrition the body requires.

When thoughts like these are held onto, the fear of normal weight gain disappears.

5. Now write positive replacement thoughts for each fear that will reduce your irrational fear. Remember, thoughts are under *your control* and they cause your feelings.

Fear #1: _____

Fear #2: _____

Fear #3: _____
