

Worksheet (individual)



Identifying your challenges & practising balanced thinking

Recognising what parts of your life you find challenging will help you identify how particular stressors may impact you. This worksheet will help you know when, and why, you see something as a challenge, identify how you currently manage these situations, and how you respond (thoughts, feelings and actions). You'll also learn about 'balanced thinking'.^{1,2,3,4,5}

The way we think about challenges changes how we respond. If we feel like we can cope with the challenges in front of us, our responses are different to situations where we don't think we have the resources (personally or in our environment) to manage.

"This new job will be challenging. I'm nervous, but know I'll do a good job"

vs.

"This new job is overwhelming. I don't think I can do it"

Often, in positive situations, we recognise our stress response as excitement or anticipation, such as starting a new job, getting a promotion, learning a new skill.

Identifying what we find challenging about situations and how we think, feel and react helps us identify what we need to work on to reduce the stress of each situation.

Think about the first time you tried a new activity like learning to drive, riding a bike, performing on stage or learning to swim. How nervous were you? Your feelings would have been affected by:

- **Previous experiences:** if you had been in an accident or knew someone who had vs. if you had always been around others who were confident doing these activities
- **What did you view the risks as?** High chance of accident or injury, or low?
- **How confident did you feel in your own skills?** Something you could do easily or something you would struggle with?
- **What impact did the actions of the person teaching you have?** Did you feel supported or nervous at what would happen if you made a mistake?

As you learnt the new skill, you probably felt less stressed as your competence and your confidence increased. Some of your fears and worries probably weren't realised and you probably had positive experiences achieving goals.

Your goal was to learn to drive or perform on stage, ride a bike, or learn to swim, but your personal challenges to reach that goal could range from finding someone to teach you, overcoming nerves, or accessing equipment. The challenges and solutions would be different for each of us.

When problem solving, it is often helpful to talk through issues with others and seek support. Others can add new ideas and see things with new eyes.

Activity:

1. Think about times when you feel challenged and what about that situation makes it a challenge.

Some situations only involve physical skills. Others involve your emotions or mental skills. Some situations may be in relationships or about your sense of identity. You may even meet challenges that ask for all of your skills.

Choose something that causes stress in your life and identify what is challenging about the situation for you.

Think about the signs that tell you this is challenging. Recognising the signs you see (or others see) when you are feeling challenged helps you to learn to recognise your stressors and identify your reactions to stress.

(We've provided an example to help guide you)

Example: What is the stressor? (*Asking for time off for a whānau occasion*)

	What do you see as challenging about the situation?	What are the signs for you it is a challenge?
With others (relationships) – Taha whānau	<i>Worry that boss may think I'm lazy or say no and my whānau keep pressuring me to confirm I'll attend</i>	<i>I feel nervous about asking and stressed about talking to my whānau, so I put off doing both</i>
Physically – Taha tinana	<i>Nothing</i>	<i>Headaches</i>
Mentally – Taha hinengaro	<i>Thinking about the best way to ask for the time off</i>	<i>I'm thinking about it a lot and keep avoiding just talking to the boss</i>
Emotionally – Taha hinengaro/Taha wairua	<i>I feel like I'll let people down either way</i>	<i>Lump in my throat whenever I talk about the event with whānau</i>
To your identity and beliefs – Taha wairua	<i>Both work and whānau important to me but this event is very important to my family and I really need to go</i>	<i>Worried I won't be able to go and how I feel when I think about it</i>

What is the stressor?

	What do you see as challenging about the situation?	What are the signs for you it is a challenge?
With others (relationships) – Taha whānau		
Physically – Taha tinana		
Mentally – Taha hinengaro		
Emotionally – Taha hinengaro/Taha wairua		
To your identity and beliefs – Taha wairua		

2. What are some of the ways you manage or cope with challenges?

When we are met with a situation that challenges us, we often react to our immediate thoughts and feelings and choose (sometimes almost instantly) what actions to take. Recognising what our immediate thoughts are, and the feelings they trigger, can help us to weigh up how accurate or helpful they are to meet the demands of the situation.

Consider honestly how you respond and how helpful these reactions are.

	Thoughts What do you think about what's happening?	Feelings How do you feel about the situation?	Actions What do you do to cope or deal with the situation?
<i>E.g. Asking Boss for time off</i>	<i>E.g. Worry that boss may think I'm lazy or say no</i>	<i>E.g. Upset, kind of sad and angry</i>	<i>E.g. Putting in extra hours to get in his good books before asking for time-off</i>

How would you rate how satisfied you are with the results? (1 being very low – 10 being very high levels of satisfaction)

To relieve stress	<i>E.g. 3</i>	
To achieve goals	<i>E.g. 1</i>	
Effect on relationships	<i>E.g. 6 with boss E.g. 2 with whānau</i>	
On self esteem	<i>E.g. 4</i>	
Overall rating	<i>E.g. 2</i>	

If your satisfaction levels are low, you may want to reconsider your course of action.

3. Look at the thoughts you had in each situation and consider the following:

- Do I know the facts or am I guessing what other people think or mean?
- Am I jumping to conclusions about the results of a situation?
- Do I often assume the worst or think things in 'always' or 'never' terms?
- Am I blowing the outcomes and impacts out of proportion?
- Have I looked at times I have succeeded, or only considered failures?
- Am I taking responsibility for something that isn't in my control? (e.g. other people's actions)
- Do I automatically think I can't do this, I won't know how, or I won't get it right?

4. Consider if the immediate thoughts affected your feelings and actions.

- What were you aiming for?
- How effective were your efforts and how did it leave you feeling?
- Are they moving you towards your goal or away from your goal?

From this you can see what successful strategies you already have in your toolkit and what areas might need a new approach.

You can also consider if there are different ways to think, feel or act in similar situations.

Did you think about calling on the supports available to you? Talking through issues with others can offer support and new ideas on how to approach issues.

5. Consider a couple of thoughts you noted above. Evaluate the top evidence for and against it and rewrite your thoughts considering both sets of evidence.

Thought	Evidence for What makes me think that?	Evidence against What does not fit with my interpretation?	Balanced thought
<i>E.g. worry that boss may think I'm lazy or say no</i>	<i>E.g. He told us we are short-staffed so as a team we need to pull together He will need to find a replacement for me</i>	<i>E.g. I've been putting in extra hours so showing I'm not lazy I'm giving a month's notice and have the leave available so I'm following policy</i>	<i>E.g. I do work hard and do extra so not lazy. We are short-staffed but I can legally take leave and am giving enough notice to find a replacement – and the sooner I ask the better</i>

6. Does looking at the evidence on both sides help the way you think and feel about the challenge?

Can you define the challenge you need to overcome more clearly?

Goal: *Asking for time off for a whānau occasion*

Challenge: *Not delaying asking for time off because of worrying about the boss's response*

Use the acceptance and change activity to come up with options and a plan to resolve the stressful situation.

Conversation Guide for problem solving (for team or individual)

You can address a lot of these same ideas (above) without having to go through a worksheet. Sometimes a thoughtful conversation can help identify the issues that need to be worked through.

These conversation guidelines are just that, guidelines. The language you use and how you approach these conversations will depend on your relationship and knowledge of the person or team. Think about what other supports are available and who might be the best person to hold the conversation, so people feel safe.

Key to having a successful conversation is having a relationship where it is safe to be vulnerable, listening non-judgmentally, understanding and respecting different perspectives and working together for a solution.

1. What do you think the issue is or what are we trying to achieve?
2. “What’s happening to make this difficult?” Or “Can you tell me about what’s causing you stress right now?”
 - a. How’s that impacting / affecting things for you?
 - i. Potentially ask about how a person is feeling physically, what are they feeling? And how are their relationships affected?
 - b. What do you think is the hardest part to deal with in the situation? Or what part are you feeling stuck on?
3. What are some of the ways you are managing or coping with this?
4. How are you finding they are working?
 - a. Are they helping with how you feel about the situation (reducing any stress)? How did that impact relationships?
 - b. If you weigh up how you are feeling and the results you are getting, how satisfied would you say you are at the moment with the situation? (If low – would it help to look at it more? OR if satisfied – is there a different part that is causing stress?)
5. Looking at the bits you are most stuck on or the ones stopping you resolving the situation – what do you think and feel about them?
 - a. What impact is that having on you taking action?
6. Let’s weigh up what we know –
 - a. What is happening or has been said that made you think about the issue in that way?
 - b. Is there anything that shows a different way to look at the situation?
7. How could we look at the situation in a way that takes both sets of evidence into account?
8. Does that change anything or identify a new way to approach the situation?

Consider using the [Acceptance and Change](#) worksheet to come up with options and a plan to resolve the stressful situation.