

Self-Help Contract

25 GOOD REASONS FOR NOT DOING THE SELF-HELP ASSIGNMENTS BETWEEN SESSIONS

The following are some of the reasons why you may resist doing the self-help homework assignments between sessions. Put a check in the box to the right that best indicates how you usually think and feel.	Rarely	Some	A lot
1. Love Addiction: You may feel that being loved by someone you care about is the only real key to happiness and self-esteem. Therefore, you can't conceive of finding happiness by learning to cope with your problems on your own. Self-help techniques may seem too cold or mechanical. Do you feel like this?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Perfectionism: You may feel that if you can't do things perfectly, there's no point in doing them at all, or they're worthless if not perfect. Does perfectionism sometimes make it hard for you to complete tasks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Fear of Disapproval: You may be afraid that your therapist will think less of you when s/he reviews your self-help assignments. You may think that if you make a mistake, you will appear incompetent or stupid. Do you sometimes get defensive and upset when you are criticized?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Putting the Cart Before the Horse: People who procrastinate have the idea that motivation comes before action. They tell themselves, "I don't feel like it now, so I'll put it off until later when I'm in the mood." But the motivation doesn't come, and they end up doing nothing. In contrast, highly successful people know that action comes first, and motivation comes later. They get started, whether or not they "feel like it." Once they start they feel more motivated. Do you sometimes put things off because you don't feel in the mood?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Unexpressed Anger: You may resent something I (your therapist) said or react negatively to my personality. Instead of expressing these feelings, you may avoid the problem and express your feelings indirectly—by canceling sessions at the last minute, by arguing, or by failing to complete the self-help assignments. Do you have a tendency to avoid talking things over when you're angry with someone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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<p>6. Hopelessness: The prognosis when you feel depressed is excellent. Nevertheless, many people feel convinced that their problems will go on and on forever, no matter what. If you feel hopeless and demoralized, you may give up and do nothing. Then nothing changes, and you feel more convinced that you're hopeless. Do you have any feelings of hopelessness that might make it hard for you to do the self-help assignments?</p>			
<p>7. Coercion Sensitivity: You may at times feel that people are trying to force you to do things. Friends or family may seem pushy and bossy. Consequently, you may dig in your heels and resist, because you don't want them to control you. Do you sometimes feel as if people are bossing you around?</p>			
<p>Put a check in the box to the right that best indicates how you usually think and feel.</p>	Rarely	Some	A lot
<p>8. Fatalism: You may feel that your moods are governed by forces beyond your control, such as hormones, fate, or God, so there may seem to be little point in trying to change the way you feel. Do you think this way?</p>			
<p>9. Blame: Some people feel that others are to blame for their bad moods. If you feel your problems aren't your fault, it may seem unfair that you should have to work hard to feel better. As one woman put it, "Why should I have to change? My husband is the one who's making me miserable!"</p>			
<p>10. Shame or Guilt: You may have a problem that would be difficult to discuss, such as alcoholism or drug abuse, a sexual indiscretion, violence, or an angry reaction to something I said. Do you have any problems that you feel reluctant to discuss with me?</p>			
<p>11. Medical Model: If you go to the doctor because of a fever, you expect him to diagnose the illness and prescribe bed rest plus an antibiotic. By the same token, some people who are anxious or depressed feel that only a pill could make them feel better. The idea of doing self-help assignments does not make sense to them. Do you sometimes feel that only a medication would make you feel better?</p>			

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<p>12. The “Realism” of Depression: Some people are reluctant to work at getting better because they are convinced that their problems are real and their misery is inevitable. They do not believe they have a treatable illness. Some people feel there’s no point in trying to correct the distortions in their thoughts, because they are convinced their negative thoughts are absolutely valid? Do you sometimes feel as if your negative feelings are absolutely realistic and valid?</p>			
<p>13. Reluctance to Give up Negative Feelings: Some people are reluctant to give up feelings of anger, guilt, depression or anxiety because they believe these feelings are beneficial to them. A psychologist with test anxiety was so petrified about flunking her licensure examination that she was unable to study for it. However, she resisted therapy because she thought her worrying would motivate her to prepare for the examination more carefully. Do you sometimes feel reluctant to give up your negative feelings?</p>			
<p>14. Low Frustration Tolerance: Many people don’t stick with tasks if they don’t get immediate results. If they have a setback, they give up instead of persisting. A number of ups and downs are in inevitable part of any treatment, and there will be times when you feel stuck. If you have a low frustration tolerance, you may have the urge to stop doing the assignments. Do you sometimes give up on things when you feel frustrated?</p>			
<p>Put a check in the box to the right that best indicates how you usually think and feel.</p>	Rarely	Some	A lot
<p>15. Superman/Superwoman: You may feel that if you ask a therapist for help, it means that you’re weak, defective or inferior. You may feel like you should be able to solve all your problems on your own. Do you sometimes feel like this?</p>			
<p>16. Lack of Motivation: You may be in therapy because you feel pressured by someone, such as your parents, the court, or your spouse. If you aren’t motivated to be in treatment, you obviously won’t want to spend time doing self-help assignments between sessions. Do you have negative feelings about therapy?</p>			

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<p>17. Feeling Over-Committed: Some people are over-committed to work and to family. You may think the self-help assignment will only add to your burdens instead of giving you new energy to solve your problems. Do you feel that the self-help assignments may be too much for you?</p>			
<p>18. Resistance to “Homework”: You may have bad memories of being in school and having to do homework every night. Do you have a negative reaction to the idea of doing homework between therapy sessions, because it’s too much like being in school or being a kid again?</p>			
<p>19. Feeling Overwhelmed by Depression: Some people feel so overwhelmed by all the problems in their life that they simply don’t know where to start. Other people feel like it wouldn’t do much good just to work on one problem at a time. Do you feel as if you don’t know where to start or what problem to work on first?</p>			
<p>20. The “Talking Cure”: Some people feel that just talking to their therapists and getting their problems off the chests should be enough to make them feel better. Others feel that if they talk about their childhood experiences, they will develop an insight that will change the way they feel. Do you feel that just talking to a therapist once a week, without doing self-help assignments, should be enough?</p>			
<p>21. Passivity and Helplessness: Some depressed people feel passive and inadequate. They may be unaware that they control other people by acting helpless and often get rewarded for this behavior. During a marital therapy session a severely depressed woman announced: “I think I need a cigarette.” Her obedient husband immediately picked up the pack of cigarettes from the table, took one out, placed it in her mouth, and lit it for her. His behavior rewarded her for acting as if she couldn’t do anything for herself and had to be waited on. Do you sometimes feel passive and helpless when you’re in a bad mood?</p>			
<p>22. Fear of Change: In spite of their misery, some people are afraid that any change in the status quo will make things worse. Others think their identity depends on being chronically angry and depressed. Do you have any fears about changing your life? Do you sometimes feel reluctant to give up your depression or anger?</p>			

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<p>23. Self-Pity/Martyrdom: Although depression can be intensely painful, some people take pride in their suffering. As one man put it, “I think I like being depressed and feeling sorry for myself.” When he made a list of the advantages of being depressed and the disadvantages of being happy, he discovered that if he remained depressed, he would get lots of attention from his wife and wouldn’t have to contribute to the household or get a job, which frightened him. Paradoxically, this insight motivated him to work harder in therapy. Do you sometimes feel sorry for yourself and reluctant to let go of your depression?</p>			
<p>24. Resistance to Brief Therapy: Some people feel committed to the idea that treatment must involve years and years of exploring the past. The idea of being treated for a severe depression in a short period of time using self-help assignments may seem gimmicky. You may tend to think of any fast-acting therapy as a psychological “Band-Aid” or “the power of positive thinking.” Do you sometimes feel like any short-term treatment is bound to be superficial?</p>			
<p>25. Entitlement: Some people feel entitled to happiness and fair treatment from others. They deeply resent the implication that they are responsible for how they feel. Do you sometimes feel entitled to a better life and think that you shouldn’t have to work at things so hard?</p>			
<p>Other: Can you think of any other reasons for not doing the self-help assignments? Please record your ideas here:</p>			

SUMMARY

After reading this memo, you may have a better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of doing self-help assignments between therapy sessions. Indicate how you feel about this issue now. We can discuss it at our first meeting.

Put a check in the box to the right to indicate how you now think and feel about homework assignments.	Unsure	No	Yes
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1. I believe that the self-help assignments could be an important part of my treatment.			
2. I am willing to do the self-help assignments between therapy sessions.			
3. I would prefer to be referred to a therapist who does not use self-help assignments as part of treatment.			

* This form was adapted from David Burns, MD (Tools Not Schools of Therapy)