



PRINTABLE RESOURCE

Thinking traps and negative self talk in selective mutism

A CBT informed guide to noticing anxious predictions and developing more balanced thoughts for communication practice.

IN THIS DOWNLOAD

- Common thinking traps in selective mutism
- Build a balanced thought
- Worked example: Build a balanced thought

Use with individualized guidance from the person's treatment or support team.

Common thinking traps in selective mutism

Use these examples to recognize a thinking pattern and build a balanced thought that supports the next practice step. A balanced thought is realistic, not forced positivity.

THINKING TRAP	SELECTIVE MUTISM EXAMPLE	BALANCED COUNTER-THOUGHT
Mind reading	Everyone thinks I am rude or strange.	I cannot know what everyone thinks. I can focus on the next step.
Fortune telling	I will not be able to respond.	I may be anxious, and I can use the planned step or backup.
Catastrophizing	If my voice shakes, it will be awful.	It may feel uncomfortable. Discomfort passes, and I can cope.
All or nothing thinking	If I cannot say the full sentence, the practice failed.	A smaller response is still practice and gives me information.
Discounting progress	It only worked because my parent was there.	That support helped. It shows a starting point I can build from.
Should statements	I should be able to talk by now.	Learning is gradual. I can compare this step with my own earlier steps.
Labeling	I am bad at talking.	Speech is hard in some settings, and communication skills can be practiced.
Emotional reasoning	I feel unsafe, so I must be unsafe.	Anxiety can signal danger even in a planned, safe situation.

Build a balanced thought

Choose one specific communication situation. Write, draw, dictate, or complete the prompts with a trusted person.

SITUATION WHERE WAS I, WHO WAS THERE, AND WHAT WAS HAPPENING?

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT OR PREDICTION:

WHICH THINKING TRAP MIGHT BE PRESENT?

WHAT EVIDENCE SUPPORTS THE THOUGHT?

WHAT EVIDENCE DOES NOT SUPPORT IT, OR WHAT IS ANOTHER POSSIBILITY?

WHAT WOULD I SAY TO SOMEONE ELSE IN THIS SITUATION?

MY BELIEVABLE BALANCED THOUGHT:

MY NEXT COMMUNICATION ACTION:

MY BACKUP METHOD:

AFTER PRACTICE WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED AND WHAT DID I LEARN?

Build a balanced thought

Example for a fictional 15-year-old preparing to ask a teacher for clarification after class.

SITUATION WHERE WAS I, WHO WAS THERE, AND WHAT WAS HAPPENING?

After science class, I needed to ask the teacher which pages were due.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT OR PREDICTION:

My voice will not work and the teacher will think I was not paying attention.

WHICH THINKING TRAP MIGHT BE PRESENT?

Fortune telling and mind reading.

WHAT EVIDENCE SUPPORTS THE THOUGHT?

I froze when I tried to ask a question last week.

WHAT EVIDENCE DOES NOT SUPPORT IT, OR WHAT IS ANOTHER POSSIBILITY?

The teacher has waited quietly before and answered my emailed questions without criticism.

WHAT WOULD I SAY TO SOMEONE ELSE IN THIS SITUATION?

Needing extra time does not mean you were not listening.

MY BELIEVABLE BALANCED THOUGHT:

My voice may feel stuck, and I can use the first sentence I practiced or show my note.

MY NEXT COMMUNICATION ACTION:

Say, 'Which pages are due?' after the other students leave.

MY BACKUP METHOD:

Hand the teacher the same question on a note.

AFTER PRACTICE WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED AND WHAT DID I LEARN?

I said 'Which pages?' quietly. The teacher answered normally. I learned that a shorter first step can still get the information I need.