

Daily Mood Log (Part 1): Understanding

By increasing awareness of your own thoughts and emotions, you create the foundation for meaningful change.

What Is a Daily Mood Log?

The Daily Mood Log is a foundational tool designed to help us understand ourselves better. Specifically, it illuminates the powerful connection between how we think and how we feel in difficult situations. Ultimately, it is a roadmap that helps us change the way we think, feel, and behave.

Whenever we want to improve a skill, the first step is understanding what isn't working so we can practice doing it differently. Just as an athlete reviews game footage to learn from their missteps, we can review our own thoughts and emotional reactions to learn and grow.

While there are hundreds of therapeutic techniques available to help us change, we cannot utilize them effectively if we don't know what we are up against. It is incredibly important to first understand exactly what is happening inside us.

Why Understanding Comes First

Completing this part of the Daily Mood Log can be a humbling and sometimes painful experience. Reflecting on upsetting events naturally brings up negative emotions. For others, however, it can be deeply relieving to finally get all their swirling thoughts and feelings down on paper. Whichever reaction you have is completely okay. The sole intention of this first step is simply to understand.

Identifying a Specific Moment in Time

We experience countless upsetting events over a lifetime. If we try to process and improve all of them at the exact same time, the task feels impossible.

Instead, the key is to isolate just *one* specific moment in time. By focusing our lens on a single event, we can achieve a clearer understanding without feeling flooded. Once you learn to effectively process one specific moment, those new skills will naturally ripple out, making it easier to handle future challenges.

Thoughts and Emotions

The next step is to identify the exact thoughts and feelings that came up for you during that specific moment. Doing this provides a much deeper understanding of why the event was so upsetting.

For example, a patient shared that she was angry because she lost \$1,000 in a scam. On the surface, it is obvious why she was upset. She lost a significant amount of money. But when we unpacked the event further, we discovered a much deeper layer of emotional pain:

- She was feeling embarrassed and inadequate because she was telling herself, "I shouldn't have fallen for this scam."
- She was feeling hopeless and discouraged because she thought, "I will just end up falling for something like this again."
- She was feeling angry because she thought, "Those people are horrible; they shouldn't be scamming innocent people."
- She was feel ashamed, sad and anxious because she thought, "If my parents knew they would be so disappointed in me"

Once we slowed down and looked closely, we discovered a complex web of thoughts and emotions driving her distress, not just anger about the money.

After identifying the emotions and thoughts, we rate how intensely we feel each emotion (0-100%) and how completely we believe each thought (0-100%). This helps us measure our baseline, setting us up for the next stages of the Daily Mood Log where we will actively challenge those beliefs and relieve those painful emotions.

How You Can Use This Technique (Part 1)

If possible, working through the Daily Mood Log with a therapist can be especially helpful. You may also find the book *Feeling Great* by David D. Burns, M.D., to be a valuable companion resource.

Step 1. Identify one specific moment in time when you felt upset.

Step 2. Check the negative emotions you felt during that moment, and rate how intensely you felt them on a scale of 0 to 100%.

Negative Emotions	Percentage
<input type="checkbox"/> Sad, blue, depressed, down, unhappy	
<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious, worried, panicky, nervous, frightened	
<input type="checkbox"/> Guilty, remorseful, bad, ashamed	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inferior, worthless, inadequate, defective, incompetent	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lonely, unloved, unwanted, rejected, alone, abandoned	
<input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed, foolish, humiliated, self-conscious	
<input type="checkbox"/> Hopeless, discouraged, pessimistic, despairing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated, stuck, thwarted, defeated	
<input type="checkbox"/> Angry, mad, resentful, annoyed, irritated, upset, furious	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe) _____	

Step 3. Write down the specific negative thoughts that drove those emotions, and rate how much you believe each thought to be true on a scale of 0 to 100%.

Negative Thoughts	Percentage

What Comes Next

This first part of the Daily Mood Log focuses purely on understanding. The next step involves deciding whether you truly want to change these emotions. We do this by exploring the potential advantages and core values these negative emotions and thoughts actually represent.

A helpful tool for this next stage is the **Positive Reframe**, which explores how these painful thoughts and emotions might actually be helping you, and what beautiful things they say about your core values.

Important Things to Keep in Mind

- **Separate Thoughts from Facts:** When writing down your negative thoughts, try to avoid statements of fact like "I am sad," as these are much harder to defeat. Instead, write down what you are thinking *about* the fact. For example, "I shouldn't feel sad."
 - **Seek Support if Needed:** This step can be challenging, so having a therapist help you identify your specific thoughts and emotions can be incredibly helpful.
 - **Prompting Yourself:** If you are having a hard time coming up with your thoughts, try asking yourself: "*What specific thought is driving my negative emotion of _____ (e.g., sadness)?*"
 - **Narrow the Focus:** Within a single situation, there may be multiple smaller moments. Try to narrow your focus as much as possible to just one isolated moment. For example, in the situation where the woman was scammed, she felt very differently right after it happened versus one hour later when she shared the story with her friends and felt more self-conscious.
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Final Note

The first part of the Daily Mood Log is dedicated entirely to understanding. Prioritizing this understanding first is a crucial step in learning how to become your own therapist. By using this as a mindful exercise to focus closely on a single moment in time, you can truly understand your internal experience and lay the groundwork for meaningful change.