

Disputing Unhelpful Beliefs Using Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy

Purpose:

This exercise is designed to help you recognize unhelpful or automatic beliefs that may contribute to substance use or emotional distress. By questioning these beliefs and replacing them with more realistic, recovery-supportive alternatives, you strengthen your ability to respond mindfully. Mindfulness-based ecotherapy integrates awareness of your body, thoughts, and natural surroundings to ground and regulate emotions while developing new, constructive thought patterns.

Part 1: Noticing Unhelpful Beliefs

Unhelpful beliefs are automatic thoughts or habits that feel “true” in the moment but often make recovery harder. Common examples:

- “I can’t handle this without using.”
- “I’ll always fail.”
- “I’m weak for feeling anxious.”

Use this worksheet to help you dispute beliefs and thoughts that act as relapse triggers.

Exercise: Observe in Nature

Use this observing in nature exercise to dispute thoughts and beliefs that can lead to relapse.

1. Step outside or look out a window at trees, grass, water, or sky.
2. Take 3–5 slow, deep breaths.
3. Notice your body and any tension that arises with your thoughts.
4. Name the thought as it appears: e.g., “I feel like I can’t cope.”

Your unhelpful belief (the thought you want to dispute):

Where do you feel it in your body?

How does being in nature clarify your intention and your motivation?

Part 4: Action Plan

Now, link your helpful beliefs to practical steps by filling out the exercise below.

Example:

- Trigger: *Feeling stressed after work.*
- Old Belief: *“I can’t handle this without using.”*
- Helpful Belief: *“It might be hard, but I can manage this moment.”*
- Action: *Step outside for 5 minutes, focus on breathing and noticing the trees, then journal about the experience for 5 minutes.*

Trigger / Situation:

Old Belief:

New Helpful Belief:

Next Action (small, mindful step I can take to dispute the old belief):

Remember

Spend 5–10 minutes each day observing and describing your thoughts in a natural setting. Whenever an unhelpful belief arises, write it down, question it, and create a helpful alternative using this worksheet as a template. Repeat this process daily to strengthen your mental flexibility and resilience.