EMDR negative and positive cognitions

Adults

Asking for the negative cognition

"What negative belief about yourself comes up right now?"

Asking for the positive cognition

"What positive belief about yourself would you prefer to hold?"

Self-worth

Beliefs about one's value

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I am not good enough	**I am good enough**
I am worthless	**I have value**
I am unlovable	**I am lovable**
I am a bad person	**I am a good person**
I am a failure	**I can succeed**
I am stupid	**I am capable**
I don't belong	**I belong**
I don't deserve good things	**I deserve good things**

Safety

Beliefs about danger and trust

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I am not safe	**I am safe now**
I am in danger	**It is over, and I am safe now**
I am going to die	**I survived**
I can't trust anyone	**I can choose whom to trust**
I can't trust myself	**I can trust myself**
Something terrible will happen	**I can deal with what comes**
I can't show my feelings	**I can safely show my feelings**
I can't let anyone close	**I can let people close**

Helplessness

Beliefs about control and choice

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I am helpless	**I have choices now**
I have no control	**I have some control now**
I am powerless	**I can stand up for myself**
I can't handle it	**I can handle it**
I can't protect myself	**I can protect myself now**
I am weak	**I am strong**
I can't get what I need	**I can get what I need**
I have to be perfect	**I can make mistakes**

Responsibility

Beliefs about guilt and blame

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
It was my fault	**I did the best I could**
I should have known better	**I did the best I could with what I knew**
I should have done something	**I did what I could at the time**
I did something wrong	**I learned from it**
I should have stopped it	**It was the adults' job to protect me**
I am responsible for their pain	**I am responsible for my own choices**
I let them down	**I can forgive myself**

Tip. Start from the client's own words and use the list when they get stuck. If a positive cognition feels out of reach, a softer step such as "I am learning to trust myself" can work.

EMDR negative and positive cognitions

Teens, about 12 to 17

Asking for the negative cognition

"When you think about it, what does it make you believe about yourself?"

Asking for the positive cognition

"What would you rather believe about yourself?"

Self-worth

Beliefs about one's value

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I'm not good enough	**I'm good enough**
I don't matter	**I matter**
I don't fit in	**I belong**
I'm a loser	**I'm okay as I am**

Safety

Beliefs about danger and trust

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I'm not safe	**I'm safe now**
I can't trust anyone	**I can trust some people**
It will happen again	**It's over now**
I can't show how I feel	**I can show how I feel to people I trust**

Helplessness

Beliefs about control and choice

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I have no control	**I have some control now**
I can't handle it	**I can handle it**
I'm weak	**I can stand up for myself**
Nothing I do matters	**What I do makes a difference**

Responsibility

Beliefs about guilt and blame

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
It was my fault	**It wasn't my fault**
I should have done something	**I did what I could**
I ruin everything	**I make mistakes, like everyone**
I should have seen it coming	**I did what I could with what I knew**

Tip. Keep it plain and close to how they talk. Offer two or three options rather than the whole list, and let them change the words.

EMDR negative and positive cognitions

Children, about 6 to 11

Asking for the negative cognition

"When you think about it, what bad thing do you think about you?"

Asking for the positive cognition

"What would you like to think about you instead?"

Self-worth

Beliefs about one's value

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I'm bad	**I'm good**
Nobody likes me	**People like me**
I'm stupid	**I can learn things**
I'm not important	**I'm important**

Safety

Beliefs about danger and trust

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I'm not safe	**I'm safe now**
Something bad will happen	**Grown-ups can keep me safe**
It's still happening	**It's over now**
I'm all alone	**People help me**

Helplessness

Beliefs about control and choice

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
I can't do anything	**I can do things**
I'm too small	**I can ask grown-ups for help**
I can't stop it	**I can tell someone**

Responsibility

Beliefs about guilt and blame

Negative cognition	Positive cognition
It's my fault	**It's not my fault**
I should have stopped it	**It was the grown-ups' job to stop it**
I made it happen	**It happened, and I'm okay**

Tip. Use short, concrete words and offer a choice of two or three. In the responsibility theme, "It's not my fault" is often the clearest positive cognition for a child, even though it contains "not".

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