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Instructions

One of the reasons people suffer from driving anxiety is because they have fear-based thoughts about driving that are either mostly or completely untrue. These irrational beliefs are usually future-oriented. In other words, they are about all the awful things we think MIGHT happen with driving.

One example is the thought, "If I drive on a freeway, I will get into a car accident." Another is, "I must not let my children see how anxious I feel when I drive them. I'd die of embarrassment if they knew how I really feel." Another: "I SHOULD be able to drive over bridges without freaking out! Everyone else can, but I can't and that means I'm a bad person."

Sometimes we KNOW we're being irrational, but often we have these thoughts without realizing it. Habitual irrational thinking increases our driving anxiety, which in turn makes us think even more irrationally. Part of recovering from fear of driving is learning to recognize and then challenge the validity of our fearful thoughts about driving.

Most irrational thoughts are stated in absolute terms, also known as "black and white" thinking. Irrational thoughts frequently involve terms like "must", "should", "have to", "ought to", or "will". For example, the thought, "If I drive on a freeway, I WILL get into a car accident" is probably irrational because it's stated so absolutely (I will).

Once we've identified a potentially irrational thought, we can test it further by asking these questions:

- 1. Is it actually true?**

It's usually fairly obvious whether a thought is true or not. "If I drive on a freeway, I will get into a car accident" is clearly NOT true because it's making a prediction about the future. We don't know what's going to happen in the future. Making predictions about what will or won't happen in the future is almost always a clue that we're thinking irrationally.

- 2. Is it helping or hurting me?**

Another way to test for irrational thoughts is to ask ourselves if a thought is helpful or hurtful to us. Ask yourself whether your belief works to help you achieve your goals or not. Does it help you to be happier or more upset? Overall, irrational thoughts tend to be hurtful and make us unhappy.

- 3. Does it pass the "common sense" test?**

Webster's Dictionary defines common sense as "sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts." Irrational thinking is usually not based on facts but on fears. "If I drive on a freeway, I will get into a car accident" is not a factual thought, it's a thought about what we're afraid will happen.

Print the chart on the next page to help you identify and then challenge the validity of your fearful thoughts about driving. Print out as many copies as needed. You'll find that if you do this exercise regularly, the fear you feel about these thoughts will be gradually eradicated from your mind and body, like air leaking out of a balloon. Exposing and examining our irrational thoughts helps us release our fears and form healthier associations about driving.

Sincerely,



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	Irrational thought (should, must, have to, will)	Is it actually true?	Is it helping or hurting me?	Does it pass the "common sense" test?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Notes: