

Improving Inhibitory Control

Objective

To identify ways to stop or delay thoughts, actions, and impulsive behaviors by improving inhibitory control.

What to Know

Inhibition is an executive function that helps you suppress irrelevant or automatic responses in favor of more appropriate ones. When you have good inhibition, you can stop or delay impulses, thoughts, or actions. Resisting temptations, thinking before speaking or acting, and reducing impulsivity are easier when you have inhibitory control. Discipline and perseverance—staying on task despite setbacks or boredom as well as delaying gratification—also require inhibitory control.

If you have ADHD, inhibiting yourself can be challenging, leading to impulsive choices, inappropriate behavior, and difficulties with regulating emotions. This worksheet is designed to help adults with ADHD improve their inhibitory control.

What to Do

Read the following scenarios and rate your ability to inhibit yourself from 1 to 10, where 1 = it would be very difficult for me to control myself, to 10 = it is very easy to control myself. Then, identify specific strategies you could use for each situation.

Write down your strategies in the space provided.

Scenario 1: You are at a meeting and a colleague is giving a presentation. The presentation is long, dull, and you have an idea you think could improve the project. You realize that interrupting your colleague would be rude and disruptive, but you want to share your ideas.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- take a deep breath and wait for your turn to speak
- write down your ideas to discuss later
- visualize yourself waiting until your colleague finishes speaking before contributing

Strategies:

Scenario 2: You are at a party, and someone offers you a drink. You must drive home later, and drinking could impair your ability to drive safely.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- decline the offer and order a non-alcoholic beverage
- set a limit for yourself and stick to it
- have a friend hold you accountable by reminding you of your commitment to avoid drinking
- if you decide to drink, take a taxi or Uber

Strategies:

Scenario 3: You are running late for work and you notice a text message from a friend. You know that responding to the message will make you even later for work.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- remind yourself of the consequences of being late for work
- set aside time later in the day to respond to the message
- use an app that blocks notifications during certain hours

Strategies:

Scenario 4: You are in an argument with your partner, and you are angry. You know that saying hurtful things will make the situation worse.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- take a break from the conversation and take a few deep breaths
- use “I” statements to express yourself without blaming your partner
- visualize a positive outcome to the conversation before continuing

Strategies:

Scenario 5: You find an interesting article on the Internet. You start reading it, but realize you have other important tasks to complete.

Ability to inhibit: _____

Here are some ideas of what you could do:

- set a timer for a specific amount of time to read the article
- use a website blocker to restrict access to distracting websites during work hours
- prioritize your tasks and remind yourself of the consequences of procrastinating

Strategies:

Next, describe four scenarios from your own life.

Scenario:

Ability to inhibit: _____

Write down some ideas of what you could have done in this situation.

Scenario:

Ability to inhibit: _____

Write down some ideas of what you could have down in this situation.

Scenario:

Ability to inhibit: _____

Write down some ideas of what you could have down in this situation.

Scenario:

Ability to inhibit: _____

Write down some ideas of what you could have down in this situation.

Practicing inhibition exercises can help you improve your ability to control your impulses and make more mindful decisions. Remember that improving inhibitory control takes time and effort, but the rewards of being able to focus, complete tasks, and make better decisions are worth it. Use the strategies you identified in this worksheet to help you develop inhibitory control. By developing this skill, you will improve your relationships, work performance, and overall well-being.

Reflections on This Exercise

How has lack of inhibition negatively impacted your life? Be specific.

What are three things you can do to stop or delay thoughts, actions, and impulsive behaviors?

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
