



Optimal Health

For longevity, happiness, and fullness of life!

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CBT OVERVIEW – CONTROLLING YOUR THOUGHTS

THE ABC'S OF THOUGHT PROCESS GOES SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

A Action - something happens or a thought comes to mind.

B Belief - what you believe forms the basis for your feelings. Your beliefs are made up of the things you believe combined with how you remember things that have happened to you in the past.

C Consequences - there are consequences, good or bad, to your belief. The consequences can be physical, mental, spiritual, or a combination of all three.

D Determine - decide what you believed was right or wrong, and determine if you should disagree with that thought. If you find what you believed was wrong, or overstated in some way, you need to disagree with that thought and bring it back to a more realistic truth. If the thought was correct, then determine to what to do in that situation.

Sometimes these ABC's happen so fast, or B is so ingrained in us, that we think it's just A and C. There is an activating event and the consequences follow suit. We don't realize B even exists, but as you practice it will become clear. It is true, we can go from A to C in an instant, for example if a 4" spider dropped in your lap you are likely to be surprised and jump in an automatic response, but your emotions after that initial gut reaction will be based on your belief of how dangerous you think that spider is. You may laugh because it was a toy, or get angry at the person who through it, or be very anxious or stressed because you thought it was real and you are very afraid of spiders. So this is a case of A to C to B to C. There are others combinations but you get the basic idea that B and D ultimately determine your response.

LET'S DO AN EXAMPLE.

A – Action. You are riding your bike and a dog runs out from a neighbor's driveway, you begin to make thoughts about what is going to happen. This is the 'action', the dog running out.

B - Belief. So the dog comes toward you and you remember the last experience with a dog, or a story/video/etc., (real or imagined) about other people's experiences with dogs. Perhaps you believe the dog might bite you. That is the B or Belief.

C – Consequences. Because you believe the dog might bite you, you become afraid. The consequence of your thought is fear. Keep in mind this happens in milliseconds.

D - Determine. Is the dog really going to hurt you? Here is where you take control of your thoughts. You start thinking about the situation in a rational manner. The dog is friendly and wagging his tail. You've met him before when you visited the neighbor so you know don't need to be afraid. Now you can disagree with your first thought about the dog. Determine to think rationally. You might say "Hi, Rover, I'm just riding to the park today. You better stay home."

But what if the dog looks angry and your thoughts maybe right, that there is something to fear? What then? Get out of the situation of course, but still control your thoughts in a rational manner. And it's a good idea to talk to someone. Don't let the fear sit inside you! You are still in control of how you think even if you can't control the circumstances. You may not be able to prevent the dog from coming out, but you can control how you treat your neighbor after or if you will be afraid of all dogs after this. You see you can make your thoughts take a U-turn. Turn your thoughts right around to positive, right thinking.



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How do you know if your thoughts are rational or not. What if the example is not a dog, but feeling stressed when talking to your sister about something?

LET'S LOOK AT THE 10 COMMON PITFALLS OF POOR THINKING.

1. All or Nothing thinking - Not looking at the whole situation in a relevant manner, having very black and white ideas. You notice the dog running out toward you but you don't see the neighbor on the porch. Or ALL dogs have the ability to bite so they most likely will.
2. Over-generalization - Taking one event or story and using it to analyze all other events. Like taking one bad dog story/event as the basis for what all dogs will do.
3. Negative Mental Filter - Only remembering negative examples/stories. Ie: I know LOTS of bad dog stories, all dogs hate me or all pit bulls are mean, I can't think of one time a dog liked me, etc.
4. Disqualifying the Positive - Making light of positive examples and related situations. Ie: The only time a dog was nice to me, my mom was there, so he had to be nice.
5. Mind Reading/Fortune Teller Error - We think we know what someone else is thinking and we predict the outcome. Ie: That dog is looking at me with fire in his eyes, he WANTS to bite me. If I ride down that street that dog will come out because he is out to get me.
6. Magnifying the Negative - Dwelling on, or making the negative of more importance than it really is, or increasing the risk of bad circumstances past what is logical or statistically realistic. Ie: That dog could kill me and I might die! Dogs are so dangerous, lots of people get seriously hurt from them. (Not true statistically speaking, especially compared to heart disease and what lack of exercise can do to you.)
7. Emotional Reasoning - Emotions override logic. Watch for "I feel" or emotional words in your thoughts. Ie: I am scared so the dog must be bad or at least it is so stressful because dog make me anxious. Dogs don't make you anxious, your thoughts about what they can do makes you anxious.
8. "Shoulds and musts" - Demanding others or the world be a certain way. We all say "life isn't fair" but yet we often expect it to be. Ie: Dogs should not run out of the driveway. Dog must always be quiet and friendly. Owners should be more responsible. While it is true some people are not responsible and some dogs are aggressive, we can't control the world around us and by getting stuck in thinking of 'shoulds' we become frustrated and angry.
- 9 Labeling and Mislabeled. Ie: That is a pitbull and they are a mean and dangerous breed. That neighbor isn't nice for having such a dog.
10. Blaming of others or self. Ie: If the neighbors would tie up the dog, I wouldn't be scared of riding my bike. If dad would have bought me a faster bike, I would just fly past that dog, and he couldn't hurt me.) If I could just ride faster... You get the idea.

These 10 cognitive distortions are adapted from 10 distortions by Aaron Beck one of the founders of Cognitive Behavior Therapy. I highly encourage you to take a course on CBT or REBT, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy or get a book on the subject. We all can use stronger brains and the ability to make better choices. Some VERY helpful books: SOS Help for Emotions by Lynn Clark, Feeling Good the new mood therapy by David Burns, and Telling Yourself the Truth by William Backus.