

Cognitive Therapy

The power of your mind

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What is cognitive therapy?

Cognitive is mind or thinking, so cognitive therapy is basically using your thoughts as therapy. Taking control of our thoughts eventually and often immediately changes our emotional state. CBT - Cognitive Behavior Therapy was developed and expanded on by Dr. Aaron Beck. REBT, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, a form of CBT, was developed by Dr. Albert Ellis. There are many others who've expanded on the initial concepts and research, one of the most prominent is Dr. David Burns.

Taken from Albert Ellis's website: "REBT, it is largely our thinking about events that leads to emotional and behavioral upset. With an emphasis on the present, individuals are taught how to examine and challenge their unhelpful thinking which creates unhealthy emotions and self-defeating/self-sabotaging behaviors. REBT is a practical approach to assist individuals in coping with and overcoming adversity as well as achieving goals. REBT places a good deal of its focus on the present. REBT addresses attitudes, unhealthy emotions (e.g., unhealthy anger, depression, anxiety, guilt, etc.) and maladaptive behaviors (e.g., procrastination, addictive behaviors, aggression, unhealthy eating, sleep disturbance, etc.) that can negatively impact life satisfaction." www.albertellis.org/rebt-cbt-therapy

The information in this lesson is from a few sources I need to give credit to: Dr. Albert Ellis, Dr. David Burns, Dr. Neil Nedley, and those who taught and inspired these men like Dr. Beck. I highly recommend the following 3 books: "The Feeling Good Handbook" by Dr. David Burns. This book has been scientifically studied and is shown to be effective as a self-help tool. Those who read it actually are helped with anxiety and depression. "SOS: Help for Emotions" by Lynn Clark, which offers help for anger, depression, anxiety, and more. Very easy read. and thirdly, "Tell Yourself the Truth" by William Backus. I've been able to find these books in used book centers because they are such big sellers, but you can find them in most bookstores in North America as well as online stores like Amazon which has electronic versions for those living in other countries who may have more trouble finding these resources.

And there is lots of free stuff online as well. I also recommend you watch Dr. Burns on YouTube, and he has free podcasts on his website and iTunes as well, all of which have helped thousands of people. His website is: www.feelinggood.com

Dr. Albert Ellis has passed away, but his program is still running and helping people: www.albertellis.org Again, there are some free videos on YouTube by those now running the foundation, there is a great one on self-control for those trying to lose weight. Ok, with that let's get into the nuts and bolts of this therapy.

The ABC's Of Thought

We start cognitive therapy with understanding how thoughts work to control our emotions. Dr. Albert Ellis lays out the ABC's of thought something like this:

A - Action - something happens to trigger a thought or a thought may randomly come 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/Dispute - decide what you believed was accurate or not, and determine if you should dispute or 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 to C, that there is an activating event and the consequences or emotional responses just follow suit. We don't realize B even exists until we stop to think about it clearly. As this is practiced it will become more 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 because you think they are being mean, 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.

An Example Of ABC in Real Life

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.

Cognitive Distortions or Pitfalls of Thought

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, of course some of these do overlap. These 10 cognitive distortions are adapted from 10 distortions by Aaron Beck one of the founders of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, as well as has been elaborated on by Dr. David Burns.

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. Overgeneralization - 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 Mislabeling. 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.

Now What?

Ok, so you can see there is a process of A-B-C from an action to your fear, anxiety, anger, or so one, and maybe you can even identify your cognitive distortion. Now what? Sometimes just realizing your thoughts are not true is enough to affect real change. The D - or dispute the thought. How you dispute the thought can take on many forms and there are several techniques. Again, I recommend you get the book "The Feeling

Good Handbook” Dr. Burns walks you through several methods and activities step by step. He calls them 10 Ways to Untwist Your Thinking, here is just a very brief overview of them:

1. Identify the Distortion - we’ve talked about that already
2. Examine the Evidence - what evidence is there to prove your thought right or wrong. Have you ever been bit by that dog?
3. Double-Standard Method - would you talk to a close friend the way you are talking to yourself?
4. The Experimental Method - do an experiment to test the thought. Stop and watch others ride by the neighbor dog, do they get bit?
5. Thinking in Shades of Grey - number the thought from 0 to 100. Instead of I hate that neighbor, as in our example. I’m afraid of the dog - 75; I dislike the dog itself - 50; I dislike the neighbor for having the dog - 30. This puts perspective on the situation and gives you a starting point to see your own progress.
6. The Survey Method - ask others questions to see if your thoughts are realistic.
7. Define Terms - good for distortions involving labeling or blame. IE: I’m an idiot for thinking that dog is a problem. What exactly is an idiot? Do they have to make 1 mistake a day, 10? Perhaps you could say, It would be better if I didn’t fear that dog, but I’m human and it’s ok to be fearful. That doesn’t make me an idiot.

Again, these are adapted from the book, “The Feeling Good Handbook” by Dr. David Burns. This book has helped millions overcome depression, anxiety, fears, panic attacks, self-defeating attitudes, marital conflicts, and helps people unleash their potential for success.

This short handout is not intended as a substitute for consulting a mental health professional. I hope, in fact, it will motivate you to seek help from a solution focused therapist who understands CBT. Dr. Burns describes helping people in just a few session who’ve suffered from issues over decades and been to all kinds of therapists. IT WORKS, and it works pretty fast. Many, many therapists are now practicing forms of CBT so create the you, you want to be right now starting with your own thoughts.

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