



An Introduction to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

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Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) was developed by Aaron Beck in the 1960s and quickly grew to be the most widely used therapy in North America.

Basically, CBT assumes that the way we feel is largely determined by how we think and how we behave. It is also true that our mood can affect how we think and behave, and our physical body affects and is affected by these factors as well. This interaction of thinking, behaviour, physical body and mood is shown in Figure 1 on next page. This arrangement can lead to a negative spiral where the mood “traps” the behaviour and thoughts. Once you get depressed, you stop doing the things you love, taking care of your body, and you tend to have negative thoughts. It can be hard to break loose of this cycle.

Unfortunately we cannot change mood directly. If you can remember being angry and someone telling you NOT to be angry, you know this first hand. You cannot simply change your mood state directly and have another mood. However, mood *can* be affected by the physical body indirectly through the action of psychotropic drugs (e.g. antidepressants and anti-anxiety medication). However, there is growing research evidence that shows psychotherapy can produce physical changes in the brain as well. The basis is CBT is that we can indirectly affect our mood by changing our thoughts and behaviour.

The behaviours that are often a focus of CBT include exercise, healthy eating, socializing, and engaging in pleasurable activities. More specific behaviours include physical relaxation exercises (e.g. deep breathing and muscle relaxation).

The most important part of CBT is changing thoughts, beliefs and thinking patterns. Problematic thoughts can often be automatic (i.e. we are unaware of them). Some problematic thoughts can be thought of as “twisted thinking” or cognitive “errors”; inaccurate ways of assessing a situation. CBT is NOT “positive thinking”, rather it is looking at situations accurately and not making assumptions, especially assumptions that are emotionally upsetting. CBT also examines more core beliefs about yourself, other people and the world.

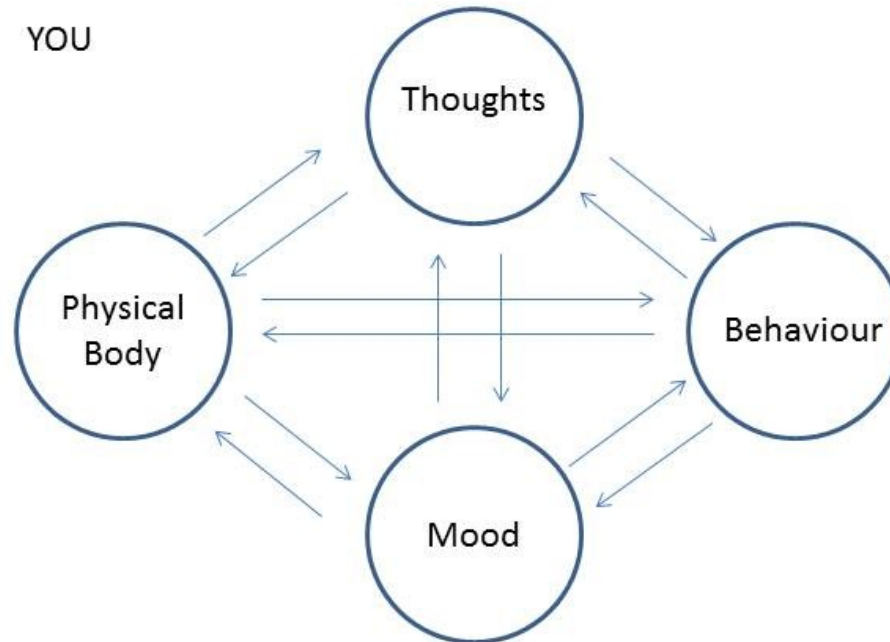
One of the most important things to know about CBT is that it works. CBT is an “empirically supported therapy”, i.e. there is an extensive body of research which demonstrates that it is an effective therapy. In addition to being an effective therapy, CBT has been shown to be effective for a wide variety of difficulties including: anxiety, depression, personality disorders, psychosis, problem gambling, irritable bowel syndrome and the list goes on and on.



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Model

The World

YOU



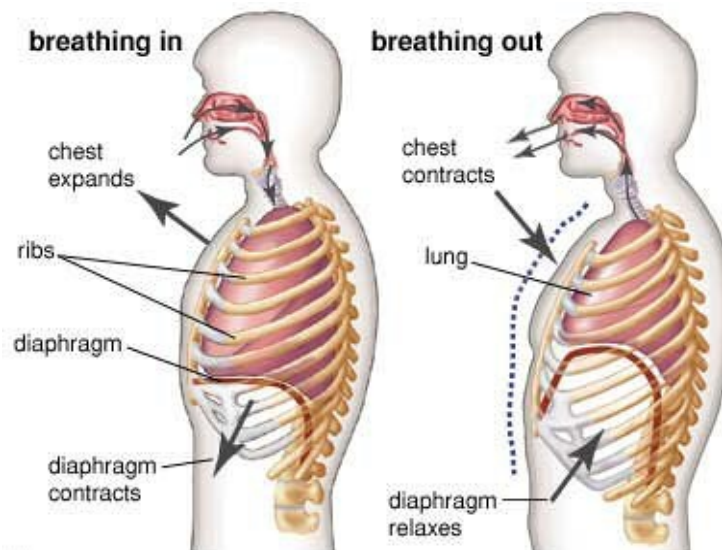
Adapted from “Mind Over Mood”, Greenberger and Padesky



Diaphragmatic Breathing

The key to diaphragmatic breathing or belly breathing is to breathe *naturally*. If you want to see good belly breathing, watch a baby. We are born to breathe naturally. Unfortunately we can develop bad habits and become chest breathers. A quick test to see if you are a belly breather or a chest breather is to place one hand on your chest, the other on your belly and take a big breath. The hand on your belly should move, the hand on your chest should NOT.

When you breathe properly, your diaphragm pulls down, and the belly distends. This happens NOT because you are putting air in your stomach, but because the diaphragm displaces the digestive organs (stomach, liver etc). If you have trouble learning to belly breath, try laying down on a bed and putting a book on your belly. The weight and sight of the book provides a cheap form of biofeedback that helps you control your muscles as your breath.



When you chest breathe, you try to expand your chest when you take a deep breath. Thus your lungs work against the resistance of your rib cage. Your diaphragm cannot pull all the way down, because your abdominal muscles hold it back. You can't get a good lung full of air, and it takes more effort to get that partial lung full. This resistance is "detected" by the emotional part of the brain and can increase anxiety or stress. It as if the brain says "there must be something WRONG, look at how laboured the breathing is!"

Just the opposite happens when the breathing is natural and relaxed (belly breathing). The brain gets the message "everything must be OK". Breathing is a way to speak to the body in the body's language.

Once you get the belly aspect of the breathing, the next step is to slow it down. We can do this by counting to 3 after taking a deep breath or exhaling.

Inhale Deeply, then Count: 1 one thousand 2 one thousand 3 one thousand

Exhale Completely, then Count: 1 one thousand 2 one thousand 3 one thousand

Repeat three times. Don't do more than 3 or you may feel light headed, causing distress.



Muscle Relaxation

Easing Muscle Tension helps CALM emotions.

You get a better relaxation in a muscle after tensing the muscle.

Tensing and relaxing also builds a body awareness - you learn to notice when you're tense.

Tense the muscles for 6-8 seconds, then relax.

Go head to toe to do a full scan of the body.

Do the head-to-toe exercise every night before bed.

Practice any portion of this during the day to target tense muscle groups.

It may take a week or two before you feel the effects

Muscle relaxation is good to relieve *background* anxiety

Muscle relaxation is a good treatment for tension headaches

Tense 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8

Relax 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8

1. Raise your eyebrows as high as you can
2. Close your eyes tightly shut
3. Close your nostrils (if you can)
4. Purse your lips, like blowing a kiss
5. Clench your Jaw
6. Tilt your head forward, chin to chest
7. Tilt your head backward, back of head touches back
8. Tilt your head so left ear touches left shoulder
9. Tilt your head so right ear touches right shoulder
10. Shrug your shoulders up to your ears
11. Flex your biceps
12. Curl your wrist (flexes lower arm)
13. Make a fist
14. Give yourself a bear hug and tense chest muscles
15. Throw your shoulders back to make shoulder blades touch in the back
16. Tighten your tummy muscles (abdominal) suck it in
17. Arch your back backwards, tighten spine muscles
18. Put legs out in front of you, tighten top of thigh
19. Flex femoral bicep. Drive your heels through the back of the chair
20. Flex calves, up on tippy toes
21. Flex shin muscles, heel on floor, point toes to ceiling
22. Curl your toes and tense foot muscles (make a fist with your feet)



Thinking Strategies

The core of CBT is thinking strategies. The goal of CBT is to eliminate thinking errors or “twisted thinking” which is an inaccurate way of looking at situations. CBT is NOT about Positive Thinking. There is NO benefit to convincing yourself that a BAD situation is GOOD. Basically, you won’t believe it.

Thinking errors can include exaggerations or assumptions. When you have an inaccurate thought about a situation and that thought upsets you, you are basically upsetting yourself for no reason. If you exaggerate a problem, then you may be upsetting yourself more than you NEED to be. Some common thinking errors are described on the following page.

The first step in changing thinking errors is to start paying attention to the automatic thoughts running through our heads throughout the day. Often we are not aware of these thoughts, yet the thoughts can affect our mood. These background thoughts, or automatic thoughts are like a radio playing in the background throughout the day. If the radio announcer was saying “no one likes you” and/or “you will never have any friends”, can you imagine that this message might seep in and affect your mood, even if you were not paying close attention to the radio program? Are there any thinking errors in your automatic thoughts?

The second step in changing maladaptive thoughts is to argue back. You basically play the part of a judge. In court, a judge has a crown prosecutor and a defence attorney present evidence FOR and AGAINST the person accused of a crime. The judge has to weigh the evidence for and against and make a judgement about what is most likely the truth (the balance of the evidence). So you too must look for evidence that supports your thoughts, and evidence that does not. After the evidence is gathered, you must come up with a more realistic thought. What is a more accurate way of looking at the situation? The process of arguing with these thoughts is demonstrated in the thought record on page 7. The goal is not to be completing spreadsheets for the rest of your life. Hopefully after using the spreadsheets, the process will become automatic and you can do this in your head. Better yet, you can avoid using the inaccurate ways of thinking and aim to think about things in a realistic and accurate way. Ultimately, looking at things in an accurate manner and avoiding assumptions and exaggerations, you will have a beneficial and positive effect on your mood.

Thinking Errors

Some common forms of thinking errors or “twisted thinking” include the following:

1. All-or-nothing thinking: You see things in black-or-white categories. If a situation falls short of perfect, you see it as a total failure.
2. Overgeneralization: You see a single negative event, such as a romantic rejection or career reversal, as a never-ending pattern of defeat by using words such as "always" or "never".
3. Mental filter: You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolours a beaker of water.
4. Discounting the positive: You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count."
5. Jumping to conclusions: You interpret things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion. Mind reading: Without checking it out, you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you. Fortune-telling: You predict that things will turn out badly.
6. Magnification: You exaggerate the importance of your problems and shortcomings, or you minimize the importance of your desirable qualities.
7. Emotional reasoning: You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel terrified about going on airplanes. It must be dangerous to fly."
8. "Should" statements: You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be. "Should" is berating and not encouraging.
9. Labeling: Labeling is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking where you attach a negative label to yourself or others. For example "I'm a loser" or my boss is a "moron"
10. Personalization: Occurs when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn't entirely under your control.

To be more accurate in your thinking, look for evidence that supports and does not support your upsetting (HOT) thought.



Thought



Record

Situation	Mood (rate)	Automatic Thoughts	Evidence that Supports the “HOT” thought	Evidence that does NOT Support the “HOT” thought	Alternative or Balanced Thought	Rate Mood Now

Adapted from “Mind Over Mood”, Greenberger and Padesky

Tips for the Thought Records

Cognitive distortions can be below our level of awareness. The first step in changing them, is becoming aware of them. They are often automatic, like a habit that has developed over many years. They can be like a radio playing in a room that you are not paying attention to, but you may be affected by the messages without being aware. Therefore, it can be difficult to change these, argue back to them, and come up with other ways of thinking about situations. The first step is to pay attention to these thoughts. Then you must actively argue back and develop more realistic thought. This is not positive thinking, rather this is looking at the situation in a realistic manner. Your job is like the judge in a courtroom listening to a defence attorney and crown prosecutor present evidence for and against the accused. The judge must look at the evidence and come to a conclusion as to what is the most likely TRUE situation. Your job is similar. Look at a situation and try to determine what is actually going on, and determine if some of your upsetting thoughts are unlikely or distorted ways of thinking that are upsetting you more than you need to be.

The following strategies can be used to find evidence that does not support our cognitive distortions and to develop more balanced thinking:

- Have I had any experiences in the past where this thought has not been true?
- If I thought this way in the past, what did I do/think that was helpful?
- What would you tell your best friend or loved one if they had such a thought?
- What would your best friend or loved one if THEY had this thought?
- Are there any small things that contradict this thought?
- Five years from now if I look back at this situation, would I think any differently about it?
- Am I neglecting any positives in the situation?
- Am I engaging in any of the 10 forms of distorted thinking?
- Write a summary of the evidence for and against.
- If the hot thought was true, what is the worst possible outcome? Could I survive that? How?

Additional Information

“Mind Over Mood”, Dennis Greenberger & Christine Padesky and [CBT: General]

“Feeling Good”, David Burns [CBT: Depression]

“Think Good Feel Good”, Paul Stallard [CBT in terms children can understand]

“Reinventing Your Life”, Jeffrey Young & Janet Klosko. [CBT for Core Beliefs]

“Mastery of Your Anxiety and Panic”, David Barlow and Michelle Craske [The chapter on Why Panic Attacks are Not Harmful can resolve simple panic issues almost instantly]

“Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Adult ADHD”, Mary Solanto [CBT with specific strategies for adults with ADHD]

“The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook”, Martha Davis et al [Relaxation Strategies]

“The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook”, Edmund J Bourne [Relaxation Strategies]

“How Psychotherapy Changes the Brain” Hasse Karlsson, Psychiatric Times, Vol 28, No 8, August 2011. [Just one article of many on how psychotherapy alters brain functioning]