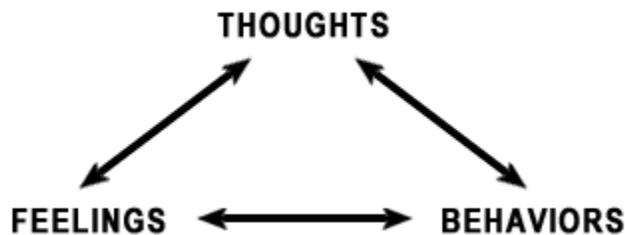


Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy: An Overview

Research on mood disorders has shown us two very interesting things. First, that our mood states can cause us to think in characteristic ways. Second, how we think can influence our mood states. This is good news because it gives us the opportunity to change how we feel by changing how we think!

The strategies that are presented are from a counseling approach called Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT is based on the premise that how we perceive and think about the world directly impacts how we feel and behave. You can see this concept illustrated below. Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors all impact and are impacted by each other. Strategies of CBT intervene mostly at the thought level to impact feelings, but sometimes the behavioral level as well.



Here is an example of how this works. As you are sitting there reading this information you might not be thinking of too many other things. For a few moments, let yourself think about a recent event that elicited a strong emotional reaction for you. It could be something that was embarrassing or exciting, or something that led you to feel angry, sad, or frightened. You might close your eyes and think about this event in some detail for at least one or two minutes. Be sure to notice what you feel when you do this. After you spend a little time thinking about this event recall what you experienced. Did you notice feeling even slightly different than you did before this exercise? What emotions or physical sensations did you have? Did your thoughts cause you to do anything like fidget, clench your fists, smile, frown, or furrow your eyebrows?

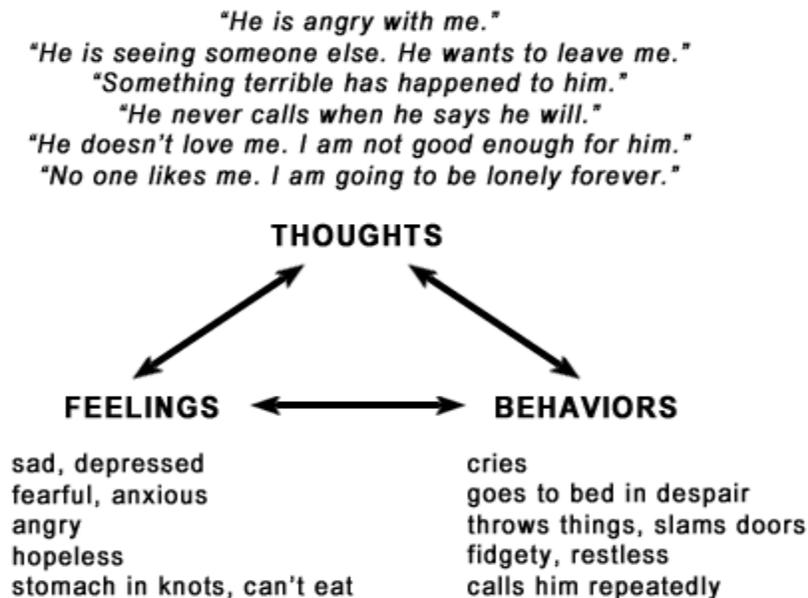
Other examples that might help demonstrate the power of thoughts are if you suddenly remember something important you forgot to do, or something you have to do sometime soon that you are really dreading. Thoughts like these can elicit feelings like apprehension, fear, guilt, anger, or sadness. Thinking about other things like sexual activity, having to speak in front of a large group, going back to work on Monday morning, giving a gift to someone special to you, winning the lottery, and so forth can all elicit some change in how you feel emotionally and physically.

The common theme among all these examples is that simple thoughts alone can cause changes in how we feel. You were just sitting where you are, not really experiencing the events themselves. It was the thought about the event that caused the feeling. If these examples didn't seem to do it for you, consider the scenario on the next page.

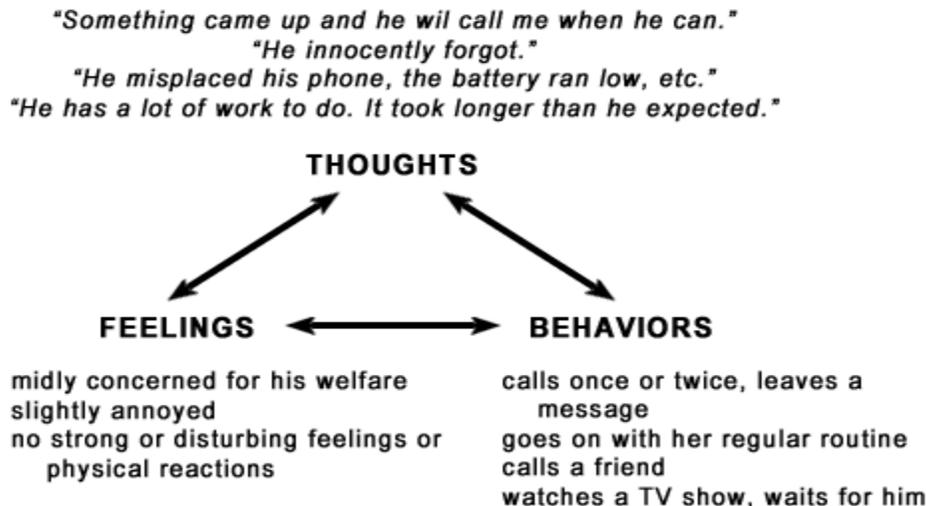
CBT Principles in Action: Some Examples

As an example of CBT principles, we'll follow a fictional character named, Helen. Imagine that Helen's husband has told her that he needs to work late one evening, and that he would call her by 8:00 pm. However, at 8:35 pm Helen's husband has not called. What might she think? How might she feel? Below are two examples, Response A and Response B. For each response, notice first the thoughts that Helen has about her husband not calling on time. Then, notice the feelings and the behaviors associated with the thoughts. See if it makes sense to you that the kinds of thoughts Helen has would likely generate the types of feelings and behaviors listed as well.

Response A:



Response B:



What are some differences between the types of thoughts listed in Response A and Response B? Given that Helen and her husband are not having any significant problems in their relationship, which thoughts seem more balanced or realistic? Does it make sense that the more extreme thoughts in Response A would lead to more distressing feelings and behaviors than the types of thoughts in Response B?

Of course, we don't know everything about Helen's situation with her husband. We don't really know if he is angry with Helen, or if something terrible has happened to him, or if his oversight in calling her is innocent. So, we can't really know what the more realistic, accurate thoughts are for her situation. The examples presented above are really just to illustrate how certain types of thoughts can lead to certain types of feelings and behaviors. For instance, it would seem quite strange for Helen's thoughts in Response A to generate the more mild feelings of Response B. Instead, it makes more sense that those strong or extreme thoughts would generate the more distressing feelings listed in Response A.

Think back to some situations you have experienced that might be similar to Helen's. Have you ever gotten very upset about something, certain that a terrible event had happened, only to find out that you were totally off base? Have you ever misinterpreted someone else's intentions or reactions, believing that it was some reaction towards you, only to discover that it had nothing to do with you at all? Have you ever jumped to a conclusion about something and later found out that your assumptions were inaccurate? Sometimes, our faulty thinking doesn't cause us too many problems, but then again sometimes it does.

In Helen's case, she has learned over time that she has a tendency to jump to drastic conclusions or become frightened by thinking about outcomes that are unlikely to happen. Sometimes this leads her to become angry quickly and verbally lash out at her husband. Other times she feels sad and withdrawals quietly to her room. We will use Helen's situation above in our discussion on specific CBT strategies shortly. First, we need to cover a few more ideas about the CBT approach.

Thoughts Cause Feelings, Not Events

Here is a concept that you may think is a bit strange at first. Many people believe it is an event that happens around us that causes us to feel emotions. In reality, it's not the events themselves that cause us to feel certain emotions. Instead, it is our thoughts about the event that cause feelings. We have to make meaning out of a situation before we can feel an emotion about it. This can be difficult to believe since there is often just a split second between an event and an emotion we experience around it.

To illustrate this, imagine you are at a grocery store trying to decide which brand of cereal to purchase. You are facing the cereal boxes with your back to the aisle. As you are looking at them, you are suddenly hit from behind with a shopping cart. Even before you can turn around, what is your very first thought about this event? Many people might think something like, "What an inconsiderate so-and-so!" or "They should be looking where they are going" or "They hit me on purpose!" or "They don't respect me." Again, before you can turn around, what feelings might you have? Some might feel anger or rage at being hit with a shopping cart. So, in a split second

you have made some meaning of this situation and experienced a feeling about it. Suppose you turn around and discover that the person who hit you was a small elderly woman who hadn't realized what she has done until you turn around? She seems to struggle as she walks and it's clear that she's having trouble managing her cart. As you turn toward this woman who looks up at you with surprise and begins to apologize, what thoughts and feelings do you have now about this event? You might immediately change your thought to something like, "Oh, it was an accident," or "She didn't mean it." What would happen to feelings of anger or rage? Those strong feelings may turn quickly to forgiveness or a much milder form of irritation. The event itself has not changed, but your thoughts about it have. The different thoughts you had about the same situation before and after you turned around generated very different feelings.

Automatic Thoughts

As mentioned earlier, the thoughts we have about events happen almost instantaneously. Whether they are rational or not does not matter. They just come automatically. In fact, in the world of CBT the concept of an automatic thought is just that - a thought or an image that comes to mind seemingly automatically in response to an event. A key part of what you will need to do in order to make all the other CBT strategies effective for you is to learn to recognize your automatic thoughts. This is often a challenging task at first, but with some practice you will get the hang of it. For instance, the thoughts provided earlier in Helen's Responses A and B are good examples of automatic thoughts. You might think of automatic thoughts as being in the form of phrases or sentences. For Helen's examples earlier I put her thoughts in quotes to help remind us of that.

Combining our previous discussion about how thoughts cause feelings, we can be more precise in using the term automatic thought as in the example below.

| Event | Automatic Thought | Feeling |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| A car is coming towards you | <i>"I am in danger!"</i> | fear, anxiety |

In this situation we see an example of how automatic thoughts and their subsequent feelings can be very useful, even protective. If you are in this situation, your "behavior" would be to quickly jump up onto the curb and get out of danger. Sometimes, however, our automatic thoughts can lead to feelings that are not so useful for us. For example, let's revisit Helen's situation at the outset of this chapter.

| Event | Automatic Thought | Feeling |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Helen's husband hasn't called | <i>"He is angry with me."</i> | sad, fearful |

Helen has jumped to a conclusion without really knowing the facts of the situation. She is feeling distressed with sadness and fear, perhaps needlessly so.

Sometimes Our Thoughts Are Not Realistic

We have never really been taught to evaluate how we think about things. We just simply think things. In fact, lots of thoughts go swimming around in our minds all the time. Sometimes we notice them, but many times we do not. We certainly don't tend to grab a thought and say to ourselves, "Is that thought realistic?" We generally just assume that all our thoughts are realistic and accurate.

You may have gathered from the information presented so far that CBT suggests we don't always think in realistic ways. Sometimes our thoughts are exaggerated, sometimes they are self-defeating, sometimes they reflect our worst fears, and sometimes they are not as fair or balanced as they could be.

One of the most interesting things about CBT is that we can change how we feel by changing the way we think. That may sound a bit strange at first, but it's true! We can actually improve our mood by modifying our automatic thoughts. We will learn how to do that shortly.

If you find yourself thinking, "There's nothing wrong with my thinking," I would like to ask you to stick with this discussion for a little while longer and then see what you think. The concepts of CBT can take a little getting used to, but if you hang with it and work on applying the principles to your own life, you just may be surprised at how you can modify your thinking and affect your mood all at the same time.

How Depression Affects Thinking

Dr. Aaron Beck, a prominent researcher and theorist in the field of Cognitive Therapy conceptualized what he has called the "cognitive triad" of depression (Beck et al. 1979). He found that our thoughts when we are depressed are characteristically negative, permeating and coloring our view of ourselves, our world, and our future. Examples of such negative thoughts are provided below.

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Self | <i>"I am no good." "No one likes me." "I can't do anything right." "I'll never amount to anything."</i> |
| World | <i>"Everything sucks." "There's nothing out there for me." "People are out to get me." "Things are just too hard."</i> |
| Future | <i>"Things will never get better." "I'm doomed to be miserable." "I won't be able to accomplish anything." "Things are hopeless."</i> |

If you are aware of the symptoms of depression, you may recall that a few symptoms are related to thought processes. For instance, the thoughts and feelings of worthlessness or guilt brought on by depression reflect the negative sense of self illustrated above. Similarly, thoughts of hopelessness suggest a belief that the future has nothing positive to offer. Also, because depression often impairs your ability to concentrate, you may have difficulty thinking clearly and making decisions.

Thinking Styles

Remember Helen's automatic thought, "He is angry with me"? Does it seem to you that she may be trying to read her husband's mind, or personalizing his behavior as some sort of reaction towards her? Again, while he may indeed be angry with Helen, we just do not have that information. For all we know, it may be more likely that he simply forgot to call.

Those who have studied cognitive-behavioral concepts over the years have categorized certain types of thinking that are irrational or inaccurate, or otherwise lead to problems with mood. These kinds of thinking go by many names, including "cognitive distortions," "maladaptive thinking," "dysfunctional thinking," and so forth. They all refer to the same thing, meaning errors in thinking or thoughts which lead to negative mood states. I tend to prefer the term, Thinking Styles, as it seems a little more user friendly.

I have provided a list of Thinking Styles below. Before you read over them, it is important to remember that we all think these ways from time to time. It's not only those who struggle with mental illnesses that do it. Everyone does. The task for each of us is to recognize which Thinking Styles we engage in ourselves.

As you read over them, you might circle any that apply to you. Go back after you are done and put some stars by the ones you believe you do the most. Just so you'll know, it is not at all unusual for people to find that they do most or all of these styles of thinking from time to time.

Thinking Styles List

The following styles in thinking can be subtle yet very powerful in causing us to experience needless emotional distress. Interestingly, the more distressed we become, the more our thinking can become narrowed and focused, making it difficult to think in balanced ways. Many times, simply identifying which Thinking Style/s we are using can be very liberating, allowing us to break free from narrowed, unhealthy thinking patterns.

All-Or-Nothing: Events are only good or only bad. They are black or white with no gray areas between the extremes. If something falls short of perfection, then it is seen as a complete failure. *"My work today was a total waste of time."*

Overgeneralization: You draw general conclusions based on one event or a single piece of evidence. If something bad happens one time, you see it as an unending cycle of defeat. *"People are always mean to me."*

Mind Reading: Even though they have not told you so, you believe you know what people think and feel about you, as well as why they behave the way they do towards you. *"He thinks I'm stupid."*

Catastrophizing: You expect things to turn out badly. *"If I ask my boss for a raise he will yell at me."*

Chain Reaction: You continue down the chain, link by link, with how one bad thing will lead to another bad thing, ending in a larger bad outcome with regard to an overall goal. *"If I fail this test I won't pass this class, then I will fail out of school, then I won't graduate, then I won't get a good job, then I will be unhappy in a dead-end job forever."*

What If's: You ask questions about bad or fearful things that could possibly happen in the future, while being unsatisfied with any answers. *"What if something happens to her?"*

Personalization: You think that things people say or do are in reaction to you, or you believe you are responsible for things people do or say. *"He looked at his watch because I'm boring."*

Shoulds/Musts: You have strict rules about how you and others should/must feel and behave. You feel angry if others break these rules and guilty if you break them. *"I shouldn't take any time off. I must work hard all the time."*

Filtering: You magnify or dwell on the negative details of a situation while ignoring all the positive ones. *"Look at all the things I have done badly."*

Jumping to Conclusions: You make illogical leaps in believing that A causes B without enough evidence or information to support your conclusions. *"My boyfriend was late in picking me up. He doesn't really want to go out with me tonight."*

Comparisons: You compare yourself to other people, trying to figure out who is better, smarter, more attractive, etc. *"She is so talented. I'll never amount to anything."*

Discounting Positives: You automatically discount or reject positive actions or events as if they don't matter. If you did something well, you tell yourself that it doesn't count, it wasn't good enough, or anyone could have done it as well or better. You don't allow yourself to enjoy even small accomplishments. *"If I had spent more time preparing for my presentation it could have been better."*

Maximization/Minimization: You maximize your problems or blow the effects of them out of proportion to the situation. Or, you minimize the value of your positive qualities. *"This is the worst thing that could happen. I can't manage it."*

Blaming: You blame yourself for things that are not in your control. Or, you hold others responsible for your misfortunes. *"It's my fault that my husband drinks. If I were a better wife he wouldn't do that."*

Emotional Reasoning: You automatically believe that what you feel is true for you. If you feel strange, boring, stupid, etc. then you believe you are these things. *"I feel embarrassed. I am so awkward and foolish."*

Being Right: You are always trying to prove that your opinions and behaviors are the right ones. You cannot accept that you might be wrong or inaccurate, and you will go to great lengths to prove that you are right or others are wrong. *"You don't know what you're talking about. We have to do it my way or it won't work."*

Reward Fallacy: You expect to receive rewards or payoffs as a result of your own deeds or sacrifices, as if someone is keeping score. You feel angry or resentful if your actions do not reap rewards. *"I spent all that time fixing a nice dinner and no one appreciated it."*

Change Fallacy: You believe that if you pressure people enough they will change to suit you. You also believe they must change since you let your happiness depend on them. *"If she told me she loved me more often, then I could feel happy."*

Fairness Fallacy: You believe you know what is fair, but since others don't agree with you, you feel resentful or angry. *"I deserve a day off from work since I worked hard over the weekend, but my boss won't allow it."*

Thinking Styles: Example

Here are some of Helen's Automatic Thoughts, and the Thinking Styles that describe them:

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>"He is angry with me."</i> | Mind Reading, Personalization |
| <i>"Something terrible has happened to him."</i> | Catastrophizing |
| <i>"He never calls when he says he will."</i> | Overgeneralization |
| <i>"He doesn't love me. I am not good enough for him."</i> | Mind Reading, Personalization, Blaming |
| <i>"He is seeing someone else. He wants to leave me. No one likes me. I am going to be lonely forever."</i> | Catastrophizing, Mind Reading, Chain Reaction |

As you can see, some thoughts reflect more than one Thinking Style. This is not uncommon. From Helen's example, it seems that some of her most common Thinking Styles are Mind Reading, Personalization, and Catastrophizing.

Summary of CBT Principles

At this point, you have learned some basic principles of CBT:

- Our thoughts can influence our moods in powerful ways
- Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are closely related, influencing each other
- Thoughts cause feelings, not events
- Our thoughts about events may be realistic, unrealistic, or somewhere in between
- There are characteristic styles of thinking that can lead to unnecessary distress

In the remainder on the workshop, you'll learn how to put all of this together towards improving your mood.

Keeping an Automatic Thought Record (ATR)

An important part of CBT is keeping Automatic Thought Records. An Automatic Thought record (see below) is a one-page chart that allows you to capture key pieces of information to which you can apply CBT strategies. The purpose of keeping this record is to help you catch your automatic thoughts, recognize the feelings that go along with them, and work on balancing out your thinking towards modifying your mood.

The Automatic Thought Record has six columns within which you are asked to enter certain information such as Date and Time, the Situation, your Automatic Thoughts, and so forth. There are also some bulleted prompts to help you remember the specific details you need. It may look like there are a lot of things to do on this chart, but we'll take it a step at a time. It will take a little patience, and perhaps some fumbling through from time to time, but you can do it!

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT RECORD

When you notice your mood getting worse, ask yourself, "What's going through my mind right now?" As soon as possible, fill in the table below.

| Date, Time | Situation | Automatic Thoughts (ATs) | Emotion/s | Adaptive Response | Outcome |
|------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What led to the unpleasant emotion? • What distressing physical sensations did you have? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What thoughts or images went through your mind? • How much did you believe the thought at the time (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What emotion/s did you feel at the time? • How intense was the emotion (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which thinking styles did you engage in? • Use questions below to respond to the automatic thoughts/s. • How much do you believe each response (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much do you now believe your ATs (0-100%)? • What emotion/s do you now feel? At what intensity? |
| | | | | | |

Questions to compose an Adaptive Response: (1) What is the evidence that the automatic thought is true? Not true? (2) Is there an alternative explanation? (3) What's the worst that could happen? What's the best that could happen? What's the most realistic outcome? (4) If a friend were in this situation and had this thought, what would I tell him/her?

Doing this well takes some patience and practice, but if you stick with it you will be very pleasantly surprised at the results you can get. It is common for people to initially express doubt that this technique will work for them. They may say things like, "How can this possibly help me to feel better?" or they otherwise express disbelief that it is possible to change their moods at all.

However, people who work with this technique get to the point where they become quite adept at catching their Automatic Thoughts, responding to them, and modifying their mood without even needing to use the record any longer.

We will work step by step through how to properly use your Automatic Thought Record. Notice at the top that you are prompted to fill one out when you notice that your mood has become worse. When you do, it is helpful to ask yourself, "What am I thinking and feeling right now?" You want to capture what is going through your mind just as soon as you can and get it down onto paper. If you wait hours or days to fill out your Automatic Thought Record, you will lose precious information as the details of the moment will certainly fade away.

The Difference Between Thoughts and Feelings

Before we start filling out an Automatic Thought Record, it is important to make a distinction between thoughts and feelings. It's quite common to mix these up a bit, and doing so will make it difficult to use an Automatic Thought Record effectively.

To start, thoughts tend to be phrases of two or more words we say to ourselves, while a feeling is generally one word. For example, I might think, "My job is too stressful." While there is a feeling word in my thought (stress), this is really a thought I have about my job. The feelings I might have in association with this thought could include "stressed," "anxious," "sad," "overwhelmed," etc.

Take a look at the charts below and notice the differences between thoughts and feelings. You might even refer back to this page if you need some help identifying which feelings you have about a thought.

Sample Thoughts

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>"I'm not good enough."</i> | <i>"I fail at everything I try to do."</i> |
| <i>"No one likes me."</i> | <i>"I'm useless."</i> |
| <i>"He shouldn't treat me that way."</i> | <i>"Problems at work are all my fault."</i> |
| <i>"The future holds nothing for me."</i> | <i>"My partner needs to change for me to be happy."</i> |
| <i>"I can't do anything right."</i> | <i>"I know I'm going to get fired."</i> |

Sample Feelings

| <u>Frightened</u> | <u>Ashamed</u> | <u>Angry</u> | <u>Sad</u> | |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| afraid | embarrassed | annoyed | abandoned | hopeless |
| anxious | guilty | disgusted | alone | inadequate |
| apprehensive | humiliated | enraged | defective | incompetent |
| dread | insulted | frustrated | dejected | inferior |
| edgy | invalidated | grouchy | depressed | insecure |

horrified regretful hatred despair isolated
 nervous remorseful hostile disappointed lonely
 overwhelmed shamed irritated discouraged neglected
 panicked jealous empty rejected
 scared mad grief unhappy
 tense outraged helpless worthless
 resentful

Step #1: Recording Your Situation, Automatic Thoughts, and Feelings

Below you see an Automatic Thought Record for Helen with only the first several columns filled out. In the first column, notice that she has briefly described the situation we saw earlier. She has also recorded some of her Automatic Thoughts, the Thinking Styles that characterize her thoughts, and her feelings. Essentially, she has taken some of the information in the cognitive triangle at the beginning of the chapter and put it into her Automatic Thought Record.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT RECORD

As soon as you feel your mood worsening, fill in the chart below by asking yourself, "What am I thinking and feeling right now?"

| Date, Time | Situation | Automatic Thoughts (ATRs) | Emotion/s |
|----------------|--|---|--|
| 2/4 8:35 pm | My husband didn't call when he said he would | <i>"He is angry with me"</i> <i>"He is seeing someone else"</i> <i>"He wants to leave me"</i> <i>"Something terrible has happened to him"</i> <i>"He never calls when he says he will"</i> <i>"He does this to make me angry"</i> <i>"He doesn't love me"</i> | sad, scared anxious, sad, jealous angry, sad, alone fearful, anxious sad, angry angry, resentful hopeless, sad, inadequate |

It is common for people to need a little tweaking in how they provide information so they can use it later on when we get to the specific CBT strategies. Here are a few guidelines for how to respond to the first several columns.

Time, Date: Be as specific as possible about the time and date. Stay away from entries like, "morning," or "when I got home." Sometimes, the actual time is key in understanding aspects of the situation.

Situation: Write a brief statement, no more than a few sentences, that summarizes the situation. It is not uncommon for people to be tempted to describe their situations in great detail, as if they are making a case to justify their reactions. In doing this they tend to include thoughts and feelings, when those should be saved for their own columns. All you need to do here is write a simple description that helps you remember the situation later on.

Automatic Thought/s: Writing your thoughts is actually a little trickier than it looks. It takes a little practice to write them in ways in which you can respond effectively to them later on. Consider the following suggestions:

- **Write one thought at a time.** Sometimes people put several thoughts together in the same statement. It will be easier to respond to them later if you break them up into single statements. This can also illustrate for you the fact that it's possible to have a multitude of thoughts all at the same time around a single event.
- **Don't write questions.** Reframe them as statements, even if the statement feels a little strong. For example, "Why does he do this to me?" should be written as something like "He doesn't respect me," or "He makes me angry," or "He shouldn't do this."
- **Stay away from exclamatory statements** like, "Oh darn!" or "Crap!" or "Oh great!" Instead, identify the underlying thought expressed by the exclamatory statement. It is better, for instance, to write something like "I can't handle this!" or "This always happens to me!" or "She doesn't like me anymore!"
- **Save feelings for the "Feeling/s" column.** Thoughts are not feelings and feelings are not thoughts. It is common for people to include feeling words in their thought statements. For instance, "Things are hopeless now," could be written as a thought like, "Things will never get better," and "hopelessness" could be entered into the "Feeling/s" column.
- **Automatic Thoughts can be images that come to mind.** Some people tend to think more in images than with words. For instance, instead of noticing a thought like, "My boss will yell at me," a visual person might vividly imagine his or her boss yelling, glaring and waving a finger. For the Automatic Thought/s column, you can go ahead and describe the image, but also try to write out what the image means to you in a thought or statement form.

Feeling/s: Entries in this column will generally be one or two words at most. If you are not used to recognizing your feelings or putting words to them, you might find this challenging at first. The previous page of this workshop has a feeling word list you can refer to. Make sure you write down what feelings you experience for each separate thought. It may be only one feeling, or it could be several. Notice that for her first thought, "He is angry with me," Helen has recorded two feelings ("sad" and "scared").

Step #2: Rating Your Thoughts and Feelings, Identifying Thinking Styles

The next step is to make ratings for how much you *believe* your thoughts and how *intense* your feelings are. If you look again at Helen's Automatic Thought Record you see that she has put ratings next to each thought and each feeling.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT RECORD

As soon as you feel your mood worsening, fill in the chart below by asking yourself, "What am I thinking and feeling right now?"

| Date, Time | Situation | Automatic Thoughts (ATRs) | Emotion/s |
|----------------|---|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What led to the unpleasant emotion? • What distressing physical sensations did you have? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What thought/s or image/s went through your mind? • How much did you believe the thought at the time (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What emotion/s did you feel at the time? • How intense was the emotion (0-100%)? |
| 2/4 8:35 pm | My husband didn't call when he said he would | <p><i>"He is angry with me"</i> 90% (personalizing, mind reading, jumping to conclusions)</p> <p><i>"Something terrible has happened to him"</i> 65% (catastrophizing)</p> <p><i>"He never calls when he says he will"</i> 45% (overgeneralization)</p> | <p>sad 55% scared 90%</p> <p>fearful 60% anxious 75%</p> <p>sad 50% angry 40%</p> |

On a scale from 0 to 100 percent, you should rate how much you believe each separate thought. As you might imagine, 0 percent would be absolutely no belief in the thought, while 100 percent indicates that you completely and wholeheartedly believe that the thought is true. It's not unusual to have a variety of thoughts about any situation, but you'll likely find that some thoughts are stronger than others.

For Helen, her strongest thought was "He is angry with me," as she rated her belief in it as 90 percent. She rated her belief in her thoughts, "Something terrible has happened to me" as 65 percent, and "He never calls when he says he will" as 45 percent.

Helen then rated the intensity of her feelings of anxiety (90 percent) and sadness (55 percent). Here, 100% would be the most extreme experience of a feelings, 50% might be a moderate feeling, while 0% would be no feeling at all. As with each of your thoughts, make sure you give each feeling its own rating of intensity.

With regard to Thinking Styles, look at each Automatic Thought you recorded, then go to the Thinking Styles list and try to identify which one describes each thought. Sometimes only one Thinking Style characterizes a thought, while at other times two or even three Thinking Styles seem appropriate. Go ahead and write each one that applies next to each thought. Oftentimes, people find that simply recognizing the Thinking Styles they are engaging in is helpful. It signals an error in thinking. This signal is a good first step to reducing a belief in a negative thought and the intensity of the distressing feelings it causes.

Step #3: Responding to Your Automatic Thoughts

Now you are getting to the heart of learning how to modify problematic Automatic Thoughts and improving your mood. The Strategies for Balanced Thinking as described below are powerful CBT strategies for modifying thoughts that cause us distress. Take a few minutes to read over them. We will be demonstrating some of them as Helen responds to her first Automatic Thought, "He is angry with me."

When you use your own Automatic Thought Record and try out these strategies, you should refrain from trying to move through them too quickly. It is best to sit with each strategy for several minutes until you truly exhaust all possibilities. It can be useful if you have someone who can help you brainstorm responses to your thoughts using these strategies.

Strategies for Balanced Thinking

What is the evidence *for* your thought? *Against* it? (Rate % of each = 100%)

This is where you need to put on your scientist's "cap" and really look objectively at the evidence you have that your Automatic Thought is both *true* and *not true*. Don't worry about how valid or ridiculous your evidence might seem at first, just write it down. Then, rate each group of evidence that supports your thought as true, and then not true. The two ratings should total 100 percent. Don't rate the two sides purely on how many statements you have for and against. Each item will likely have different weights for you based on their importance or validity. Just make a judgment call based on how valid you think each side is.

Would others agree that your thought is true?

Try to step outside of yourself as you answer this question. It can be very tempting to quickly answer, "Of course others would agree!" But would they really? Think of several family members or friends who, if they were right there with you, could give their opinions about whether your thought is true. Why might they disagree with you? Be careful about letting your thoughts be influenced by your emotions, or using only pieces of evidence to support your arguments.

What are some alternative explanations for your thought?

Again, with the scientist's "cap" on, let yourself come up with a list of probable or even not so probable alternative explanations to your thought. The longer you sit with this list, the more alternatives you are likely to generate.

What's the worst thing that could possibly happen? The best? Most realistic?

Also add, "**Can I live with the worst outcome?**" Sometimes we can become very distressed by events when we don't consider them in context with other things that could possibly happen. Our distress can seem like it's the worst thing we have ever felt, but when we compare it with something like experiencing nuclear holocaust, or death, the intensity of our feelings can diminish in comparison. So, to ask yourself, "Can I live with it?" the answer is yes!

If a friend in this situation had this thought, how would you respond?

Allow yourself to step outside of the situation for a moment by imagining your friend has come

to you with the very same situation, thoughts, and feelings. As a compassionate friend, what would you tell him or her? Would you make the same conclusions and tell your friend he/she should feel distressed? What keeps you from being compassionate with yourself?

What are the benefits of this thought? The costs? (Rate % of each = 100%)

Here you are looking at the pros and cons. How beneficial is it to believe the thought versus not to believe the thought? Rate each side with both totaling 100 percent. Again, they shouldn't be rated by how many items you have for each side, but how much weight each holds for you.

Set up an experiment.

In the spirit of trying to gather evidence to test the validity of your thoughts, you can arrange an "experiment" to gather data and evaluate the outcome. For instance, if you believe, "I never do anything right," then for several days in a row you can record all the things you do right. Such things could include, "got the kids off to school," "drove safely to the store," "was nice to the clerk," "called to check on a friend," "took a walk to get some fresh air," "helped kids with homework," and "went to bed at a reasonable hour."

Define your terms.

When you label yourself or other people as "failure," or "loser," or something else, take a moment to define exactly what those labels mean as if it were a dictionary entry. You'll likely find that no one really meets such definitions.

Examine the logic.

Do your Automatic Thoughts have you jumping to conclusions that don't logically follow from the situation? Examples might include "I'm a terrible artist" because your painting didn't win first place in a competition. Determine what would be a more logical thought to have based upon the situation. For instance, "I'm a good artist. Not winning this contest doesn't mean I'm bad. I may place higher in a different competition."

Recognize limited information.

Do your Automatic Thoughts have you jumping to conclusions without enough information to back them up? You might find you are only looking for evidence that backs up your thought rather than evidence that doesn't support it, or even refutes it.

Examine shades of gray.

Instead of thinking about events in extreme terms, consider putting them on a scale from 0 to 100. What really is a 0 and what should be a 100? Where does your thought fit in? What other situations would also be on this scale? Rather than think about your experience as a total failure, let yourself acknowledge that it is a partial success. This technique is useful for modifying an "All-Or-Nothing" Thinking Style.

Examine your language.

Listen to how you speak to yourself, and/or examine the language of your Automatic Thoughts. Try using words that are less dramatic and emotionally laden. For instance, if you say or think to yourself, "I must get 'As' on all my tests," you might substitute, "I would like to do well in my classes. I will do the best I can." This technique is useful for modifying "Shoulds/Musts."

Examine your attributions.

Instead of blaming yourself for things that don't work out well, consider all the outside factors that have contributed to the situation. Rather than focusing on self-blame and guilt, let yourself work on solving the problem. This technique is useful for modifying a "Blaming" Thinking Style.

Take a poll.

Ask other people their opinions on an issue reflected by your thought. See if the evidence supports or refutes your thought. For instance, if you believe it is shameful and strange to feel shy or embarrassed in groups of people you don't know, ask a handful of your friends and family if they have ever felt shy when meeting new people.

Distinguish between people and behaviors.

Be careful about taking one behavior, situation, or feeling and letting that determine who you believe you are as a person. For instance, losing a competition doesn't make you a "loser" as a person.

Acknowledging variability in mood, thoughts, and behaviors.

Particularly with depression, it is important to accept that you will have variability in your behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. To expect strict consistency is unrealistic and sets you up for discouragement. If you see variability on your Automatic Thought records, be patient with yourself and determine whether this is expected and "normal" for depression.

Be your own "defense lawyer."

Pretend that you have hired yourself to defend yourself (e.g., make a positive case for yourself), and write down the strongest case you can think of in your own favor. It doesn't matter whether you believe it or not.

Helen's Responses to Her Automatic Thoughts

Helen's responses using some of the Strategies for Balanced Thinking are shown in her Automatic Thought Record below. You might find you need to have several copies of an Automatic Thought Record in order to effectively respond to your own thoughts. Although there are some strategies for disputing thoughts at the bottom of the record, don't forget to use the other strategies we have covered.

Note that Helen rated her belief in each of her responses to her Automatic Thought. Please don't skip this step. Rating your responses is very important since it gives you the opportunity to evaluate your thought at a deeper level. It is a key part of being able to help yourself think in more balanced ways.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT RECORD

... mood worsening, fill in the chart below by asking yourself, "What am I thinking and feeling right now?"

| Automatic Thoughts (ATs) | Emotion/s | Adaptive Response |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What thought/s or image/s went through your mind? • How much did you believe the thought at the time (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What emotion/s did you feel at the time? • How intense was the emotion (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which thinking styles did you engage in? • Use questions below to respond to the automatic thoughts/s. • How much do you believe each response (0-100%)? |
| <p><i>"He is angry with me" (90%)</i></p> <p>(personalizing, mind reading, jumping to conclusions)</p> | <p>sad (55%) scared (90%)</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evidence that my thought is TRUE (30%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He didn't call on time • He has been angry before NOT TRUE (70%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has forgotten to call before • We have been getting along well • He seemed to be in a good mood earlier • There's nothing he would be mad about 2. Would others agree that my thoughts is true? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probably not (50%) 3. Alternative explanations (70%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He innocently forgot to call • He got busy and couldn't call • He's on his way home now • He's on a business call now 4. If a friend has this thought, I would say: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't worry, nothing is wrong (40%) • You are overreacting (65%) • Wait until you really know (60%) • If he is angry, you can deal with it (95%) • You haven't done anything wrong (95%) |

Step #4: Getting Results, Changing How You Feel

As you do the work of responding to your Automatic Thoughts on your own Automatic Thought Record, you may notice your mood changing, if even slightly. For many people, just getting their thoughts down on paper and reading them back is a powerful experience. It makes a big difference to see our thoughts in a more objective manner. Sometimes, just reading what you wrote allows you to see your thoughts in a new way even before you get to the work of using strategies to modify them.

Now it's time for Helen to evaluate the results of her work. In the last column of her Automatic Thought Record (below) you see she was asked to revisit her belief in her original Automatic Thought and the intensity of her feelings. Helen recognized that she still feels some anxiety and sadness, although the intensity of them has dropped to 25 and 60 percent respectively. She also re-rated her belief in her Automatic Thought, "He is angry with me," at 65 percent. While she still has this thought, Helen's belief in it has dropped a moderate amount. Because her belief in her thought has diminished, so has the distress she initially experienced.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT RECORD

... mood getting worse, ask yourself, "What's going through my mind right now?" As soon as possible, fill in the table below.

| Automatic Thoughts (ATs) | Emotion/s | Adaptive Response | Outcome |
|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What thought/s or image/s went through your mind? • How much did you believe the thought at the time (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What emotion/s did you feel at the time? • How intense was the emotion (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which thinking styles did you engage in? • Use questions below to respond to the automatic thoughts/s. • How much do you believe each response (0-100%)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much do you now believe your ATs (0-100%)? • What emotion/s do you now feel? At what intensity? |
| <p><i>"He is angry with me"</i> (90%)</p> <p>(personalizing, mind reading, jumping to conclusions)</p> | <p>sad (55%) scared (90%)</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evidence that my thought is TRUE (30%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He didn't call on time • He has been angry before NOT TRUE (70%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has forgotten to call before • We have been getting along well • He seemed to be in a good mood earlier • There's nothing he would be mad about 2. Would others agree that my thoughts is true? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probably not (50%) 3. Alternative explanations (70%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He innocently forgot to call • He got busy and couldn't call • He's on his way home now • He's on a business call now 4. If a friend has this thought, I would say: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't worry, nothing is wrong (40%) • You are overreacting (65%) • Wait until you really know (60%) • If he is angry, you can deal with it (95%) • You haven't done anything wrong (95%) | <p>Belief in original thought: (65%)</p> <p>Intensity of feelings: sad (25%) scared (60%)</p> <p>A more balanced thought: <i>"There could be many reasons why my husband hasn't called yet. It might not have anything to do with me."</i> (70%)</p> |

After all her efforts in responding to her Automatic Thought, Helen was able to generate a more balanced thought. She wrote, "There could be many reasons why my husband hasn't called yet. It might not have anything to do with me." She subsequently rated her belief in this thought as 70 percent. Helen did a nice job evaluating her original Automatic Thought in a fair, objective manner. Her narrow focus on the belief that her husband was angry with her led Helen to feel needless distress at a time when she really had no practical information about the situation.

Appropriate Expectations about Your Efforts

This is a good time to talk about appropriate expectations for how much you will be able to modify your thoughts and feelings. The goal here is not to keep from having distressing Automatic Thoughts or feelings ever again. They won't go away completely. To believe they will is unrealistic and will just lead to frustration and discouragement. Instead, an appropriate goal is that you will be able to modify your thoughts and feelings from a small to a moderate amount. With more practice, you may be able to do much more. For many people though, even small changes can mean the difference between being able to function despite having strong feelings on the one hand and being immobilized by them on the other. Reducing the intensity of your feelings by modifying your thoughts can have an amazing impact on your daily life.

Along the same lines, an appropriate goal would include being able to respond quicker and more effectively to your Automatic Thoughts with practice. This will allow you to manage your emotions before they become overwhelming to you. You will also be able to recognize your Thinking Styles much more quickly. Sometimes people even find humor in their use of Thinking Styles. The realization, "There I go 'personalizing' again!" can take the sting out of a situation very quickly.

Troubleshooting

If, when you start completing your own Automatic Thought Records, you find you are having trouble reducing the intensity of your mood consider the following questions:

Have you accurately identified and described the distressing situation?

Sometimes, being inaccurate or vague about the situation that initiated the distressing feelings makes it difficult to take the next steps. Try recording specific information about the event. If you have trouble identifying it exactly, think back to the time when your distress began. What had been going on around that time? Who had you been talking to? What were you doing? You might have to retrace your steps a bit until you can accurately identify the precipitating situation in detail.

Have you accurately identified, written, and rated your Automatic Thought/s?

Writing Automatic Thoughts in a way that lets you respond effectively takes some practice. We can be tempted to write them out at some length which makes them cumbersome to respond to. Try to boil your thought down to no more than a dozen words getting to the heart of it as best as you can. You may also need to refer again to the suggestions provided earlier for writing Automatic Thoughts in "Step #1."

Sometimes a problem exists in how people rate their thoughts. Remember to rate the percentage of your belief in your Automatic Thought. One-hundred percent indicates complete belief or certainty in the thought, while zero percent is no belief in the thought at all. You might need to reflect on your experiences and identify an event that would equate to 50 percent belief in a thought and use these marker points in how you rate your belief in your current thought.

Are you responding to the Automatic Thought that generated the mood you wish to change?

Look again at the Automatic Thoughts you listed and determine whether another thought might have greater influence on your mood than was originally apparent. You may find you need to respond to a different thought in order to notice some change in your mood.

Do you need to respond to more Automatic Thoughts around the situation?

Each thought can lead to more than one mood, and the same mood may be caused by multiple thoughts. For these reasons you may need to re-evaluate whether your target mood is being caused by an additional thought. It may not be enough to respond to only one Automatic Thought in order to experience a shift in your mood. You may need to work on more thoughts, particularly if they are related to some of your more distressing feelings. Also, consider whether you may have overlooked some important Automatic Thoughts when you first identified them. It

might be fruitful to spend some extra time reflecting back on the situation to determine whether additional ones should be recorded and responded to.

Have you accurately identified and rated your feelings?

Sometimes, people find it challenging to identify the mood they are experiencing. Refer again to the list of feelings provided in “Step 1.” and see if this helps you to accurately identify your feelings. Also, before you make your ratings, consider your frame of reference. Remember that 100 percent refers to the most intense quality of that feeling you have ever experienced. Fifty percent is the mid-range. Think of examples of each so you can compare your current experience and provide an accurate rating.

Are your responses to your Automatic Thought/s valid, convincing, and complete? Have you moved too quickly through the Strategies for Balanced Thinking?

A common stumbling block to changing our mood is following our temptation to have quick fixes. Becoming skilled at modifying your mood takes some patience and practice. Be careful about trying to move too quickly through the Strategies for Balanced Thinking. Spend the time you need with each strategy until you exhaust all possibilities. Ask a person you trust and who knows you well to help you brainstorm responses to your thoughts using the strategies. Also consider that you may need to write another new thought in the Results column that seems more credible to you.

Are you invested in supporting your Automatic Thought/s and/or feelings?

We can often have mixed feelings about whether we wish to feel better. At times our distress may serve some purpose for us whether it seems logical or not. For instance, if we seem to gain something from being sad or anxious, or we get our way by expressing anger, then it may be uncomfortable to think about getting our needs met in other ways. In such cases, it may be useful to create a list of advantages and disadvantages to feeling distressed.

Do you need to change your thoughts or do something else?

Sometimes our distressing thoughts and feelings can be a signal to us that we need to take some action. For instance, if someone has done something inappropriate towards you, or you have done something you need to apologize for, it may be best to speak with the person to resolve the situation rather than focus on changing your feelings about it. Taking this action may help improve your mood.

Conclusion

In this workshop, we have discussed how thoughts and perceptions affect mood. You have seen how the concepts of cognitive-behavioral therapy can help you to change your mood by responding to your Automatic Thoughts and changing the way you think. Hopefully, you have identified which Thinking Styles tend to get you into trouble when you experience excessive distress. Remember to be patient with using your Automatic Thought Records. It takes a little time to get the hang of it, but you can do it with some practice. You can do things to help improve your mood!

You may wish to record your progress using a Daily Mood Chart. This will help you keep track of important factors in your life so that you can monitor your progress with doing things that might help improve your mood. Compare your charts from week to week.