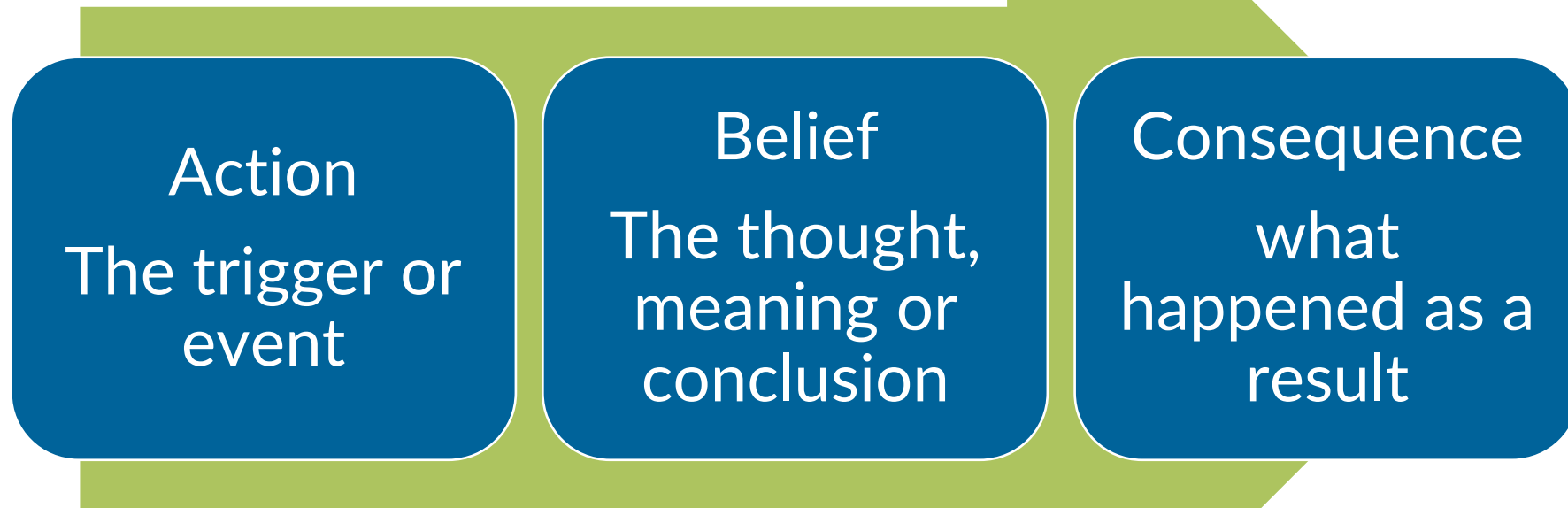


Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

The ABCs of CBT



“WE FEEL THE WAY WE THINK
AND WE ACT ON WHAT WE FEEL”

Cognitive behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Consider meaning



Is the meaning I'm attaching extreme?

Am I drawing a massive conclusions from this one event?

Is the meaning I'm attaching to this event loaded against me?

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Thought distortions

Catastrophising

Taking a relatively minor event and imagining all sorts of disasters from that one small event, without perspective.

- Put your thoughts into perspective
- Consider less terrifying explanations
- Weigh up the evidence

Black & white thinking

Extreme thinking that can lead to extreme emotions and behaviours

- Think like a thermometer, in degrees of temperature not just hot or cold
- Be realistic, life is full of mistakes, accept this as reality and move forward

Fortune-telling and mind-reading

Predicting the future, either how events will play out or what someone else is thinking. You tend to predict what you fear most.

- Test your prediction
- Be prepared to take some risk
- Understand that past experiences do not determine your future
- Consider that your guesses may be wrong

Emotional reasoning

Our feelings can sometimes be unreliable because we tend to come to conclusions without facts. This stops you from looking for contradictory information.

- Notice your thoughts and try to ground them in reality and fact not just emotion
- Ask yourself how would you view the situation if you were calmer

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Thought distortions

Overgeneralising

Drawing a complete conclusion from one or more events. Condemning yourself or someone else on the strength on one mistake does nothing to solve a problem.

- Put your thoughts into perspective
- Suspend judgement
- One thing does not make many

Labelling

Judging and subsequently rating things that are too complex for a definitive label. This excludes potential for change and improvement.

- Allow for varying degree
- Celebrate complexity and uniqueness

Making demands

Using language like “must”, “always” and “have to” are extreme and rigid. This inflexibility means you often don’t adapt to reality as well as you could.

- Pay attention to your language
- Limit approval seeking and understand the world does not play you your rules.

Mental filtering & disqualifying the positive

Processing information and keeping only that which fits with your belief or transforming information into negative from positive. If you only ever take in information fitting with your negative thinking you can easily end up reinforcing negative behaviours.

- Examine your filters
- Be aware of your responses to positive feedback

Cognitive behavioural therapy

Thought distortions

Low frustration tolerance

Assuming that when something is difficult it's intolerable, magnifying the discomfort in reality purely through thinking.

- Push yourself to do things that are uncomfortable
- Affirm message that confirm your ability to withstand difficulty

Personalising

Interpreting events as being related to you personally and overlooking other factors.

- Consider other outcomes you are taking responsibility for.
- Consider why others may respond in a certain way.

Figuring out your thought distortions can be a useful way of practicing CBT effectively. The simplest way is to jot down your thoughts when you feel upset and note what was happening at the time. Then review your thoughts against the list.

When you get better at spotting them you will be able to challenge and eventually change them. You may become aware of patterns of themes that trigger your unhelpful thoughts, which can help you to focus on areas that need the most work.

The Foundations

Physical health

Nutrition is simple - eat a balanced diet.

We connect food with our emotional and psychological state though and are the only beings that eat for more than just sustenance.

Let's just dispel the myths that fat or carbs are bad for you. We need both to survive. Pasta for example is low in fat, sugar and salt. Olive oil contains unsaturated fat which help our cholesterol.



Labelling food “good” or “bad” puts your mind into a state of confusion. For example, strawberries and avocados are both good for you but gram for gram avocados are much higher in calories.

It's important to understand how many calories you need to maintain a healthy weight for you, then balance your food groups between fruits, vegetables, lean meat, fish, dairy and whole grains.

Eating too many high-calorie density food such as avocado, red meat or pasta won't fill you up enough for a full day so you will find yourself having to eat more. Balancing high and low-calorie density will give you the right amount to maintain your health weight.

When we struggle with weight it can negatively impact our mood and problems are exacerbated.

We all know the benefits of physical **exercise** on our physical appearance. What is less commonly know is the value to our mental health.

Even short bursts of exercise increases our mental alertness, energy and positive mood. Exercise can play a large role in preventing the development of mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. Physical exercise has even been identified as a protective factor in studies that examined risk factors for dementia.

We are all different and studies show that simply moving more during the day can have a profound impact on our health. You don't have to join a gym or spend hours running. It could be housework, dancing in the kitchen while cooking or doing some gardening.

The Foundations

Sleep

Adults should aim to have at least 7 hours **sleep** consistently each night. Sleep is reparative, it allows our cognitive function to process and embed the previous days experiences.

There are numerous studies that show brain function, memory and attention are greatly increased simply by achieving between 7 and 9 hours sleep per night.



Tips on how to get the best night's sleep:

Have a bedtime routine

Ideally start your routine approximately 60 minutes before you want to be sleeping. If you are too tired to go to bed then it's too late, you are already overtired and may have problems getting to sleep.

Reduce caffeine – have a supper!

Caffeine can stay in the system for up to 12 hours. Some medication such as cold and flu tablets contain caffeine as does chocolate, protein bars and ice cream. Warm milk contains tryptophan a sleep inducing chemical as does bananas, oats and honey. Carbohydrates also complement sleep, remember though it's a snack not a meal. Avoid spicy food and high proteins.

Exercise

It's an obvious one. Physical exercise will tire you out but will also use up any of those stress chemicals you might have still in your system.

Avoid alcohol

Despite alcohol giving the sense of being “knocked out” it is in fact disrupting your normal sleep cycle. You will likely wake up more frequently, potentially dehydrated with headaches or night sweats.

Technology ban!

You know it already. The light source from the TV, tablet or phone stimulates the brain, not to mention whatever you are watching. Choose reading, tidying up, listening to music or plan a holiday.

Bedroom layout

Think about your mattress comfort, pillow and room temperature (16 degrees is ideal). A dark room triggers melatonin.

Daylight exposure

In the morning, get some daylight exposure as quickly as possible, open the curtains as soon as you get up to regulate your body clock.

The Foundations

Stress & anxiety

We learn at a young age that adulthood is stressful, work is stressful, responsibility is stressful.

It's implied that if we're not stressed, we're either not working hard enough or we're not working to become our best selves.

There's conflict there already, the perception that to be your best you have to be stressed. How can you be your best if you're stressed?



Our alarm response is a completely natural and normal state. It is our body's way of preparing us to cope. It's a reactive state and we have very little control over it.

Our body produces chemicals to prepare us to "fight or flight". Some bodily functions slow down in order to conserve energy, for example our digestive process.

Our mental state is triggered by where our mind rests. When we focus on the past, what has happened, why it happened, we are walking down a path that can lead to rumination, and depressive thoughts. When we focus on the future, we are in anxiety mode, worrying about what hasn't happened, what might happen.

When we bring our minds to the present, we are dealing with facts, we are dealing with right now. This grounds us in reality.

Our brains are built to protect us from danger, but if we live in that place it can overwhelm our normal coping mechanisms.

Eustress is a positive response and not an alarm response. It's what we can perceive at any point as being within our coping ability, it feels exciting and it increases focus. We need this type of stress in our lives because it's what gives us motivation, helps us work towards important goals, feel achievement and positivity about life.

Eustress is just about enough challenge without draining all of your physical, mental and emotional resources. It's about recognising when we tip over between that heightened focus into feeling out of control.

- **Physically** it helps us build muscle and stamina by doing the right amount of physical exercise
- **Mentally** it helps with resilience and self-esteem
- **Emotionally** it builds feelings of contentment, inspiration and motivation