

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT and Feeling Good, Dublin, Ireland) – The Revolution in Psychotherapy – “thinking about thinking...”

Many of today's mental health experts are recommending Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as a first choice treatment for pretty much all emotional disorders – stress, depression, anxiety, anger management etc., rather than medication, or spending years undergoing the old style Freudian 'shrink' psychiatry.

Why? It's elegant and efficient. If applied diligently by somebody who is capable of self-awareness and self-critique, it can be life changing. It's the only measured and proven psychotherapy in the world. And it's fast (improvements show in few sessions, which means it's cheaper for governments to provide as healthcare). Studies show that it's effects stay with participants after treatment. Quite simply – it works.

CBT is different to the traditional 'talking therapies'... instead, it is a *psycho-educational* approach that teaches clients to apply methods and techniques to their problems – effectively becoming their own therapists by understanding and managing their **thinking** (cognitive), **feelings** (emotions), and **doing** (behaviour). According to CBT, it is largely our thinking about (and interpretation and processing of) events, no matter how challenging they are, that leads to our emotional and behavioural upsets. We human beings cause our own upsettiness, therefore we can uncause it! Think about it - 10 different people can find themselves faced with exactly the same situation, but all 10 will think and feel and behave differently about it. Those with good emotional health and good coping skills will manage the situation in a better way than those with automatic negative thinking styles, they will *feel and behave* differently.

CBT doesn't aim to stop people from having emotions: emotions are a normal part of life. But, if you're experiencing excessive / debilitating emotions (extreme level upsettiness in response to an event), it can help you to examine how and why this is happening and address it. The goal is not to stop people from having emotions, but to help people decrease their distorted, dysfunctional responses to situations. (People who have used CBT successfully develop healthy and appropriate responses/emotions to adverse situations – ie. sadness or concern or disappointment, rather than depression or anxiety or hopelessness.). Some negative feelings are healthy and appropriate and manageable – and some are unhealthy and inappropriate and cause self sabotaging behaviours – depending on our thinking and interpretation.

The theory that our thinking causes our problem emotions rather than events is nothing new - we see that this has been the view of many deep intellectual thinkers with insight through the ages.



Epictetus (Stoic - Ancient Greek Philosopher) said:

- What disturbs men's minds is not events but their judgments on events.
- There is only one way to happiness and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will.
- It is not he who gives abuse that affronts, but the view that we take of it as insulting; so that when one provokes you it is your own opinion which is provoking.

Buddha said:

- We are what we think.
- All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make our world.
- What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind.



And **Shakespeare**? :

- Make not your thoughts your prisons.
- There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so.
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I could go on and on, but you get the picture?!

CBT theory posits ‘the only thing in this world that can make you anxious, aggressive, or depressed... is.... YOU! ‘



It says that human beings create their own needless suffering of negative emotions when their stress has become a disorder and created a *shift in thinking* to an automatic negative and distorted style. For instance, check out the following simple Thinking and Feeling and Behavioural response to a situation:

- **if you THINK that you are useless at talking to people,**
- **you may FEEL anxious,**
- **and GO QUIET on social occasions...**

A CBT therapist would work with you to help **identify your negative automatic thoughts**, that cause the anxiety, that causes the self sabotaging / avoidance behaviour (examples. ‘I’m useless at talking to people’, ‘I’m boring’, ‘nobody likes me’, ‘I won’t be funny’, ‘they’ll think I’m dull’, ‘they don’t want to be stuck here with me’... and so on and so forth).

Then the therapist will get you to **examine the evidence and question the absolute validity of this thinking**, and whether it has been helpful or poison in your life so far. “So where is the evidence?” they’ll constantly ask. “What are alternative possibilities?”. For instance, if you say ‘nobody likes me’, well... back it up! Example questions to ask yourself: Is *anybody* nice to you, ever? well, yes!. Do you have *any* family/friends who like you and show it? Well, yes. Have you been out socially with *anybody at all* recently where you were comfortable? Well, yes. – Well, okay – that’s put the lie to that negative automatic thought - that distorted unhealthy absolute statement that stops you living your life with enjoyment! We aim to help you to see that this kind of self talk is distorted, and causes distress and self sabotaging behaviour.

So – what to do? Quick tips:

Keep a journal - write your thoughts and feelings down when you feel upset... catch irrational thoughts, and challenge and dispute them... stop yourself in your tracks whenever you find yourself automatically thinking these thoughts in future, and ‘thought stop’ and replace with new healthy rational calm self talk instead. Do it over and over and over, until the new healthy thinking is natural to you.

Examples of new thinking / self talk to dispute our example statement:

No! It’s not true that ‘*nobody* likes me’ – when I say things like that it’s irrational and only serves to makes me upset and feel hopeless.. it’s an irrational thought. Throughout my life I have had, and do have, people in my life that like me.. I just have a bit of anxiety that I’m working on at this point in my life, and it makes me feel and behave in self-defeating and self-limiting ways that make it hard to connect and enjoy social activities. But millions of people all over the world have anxiety disorders at some point, and it’s totally fixable. It doesn’t have to be like this forever. I’m working on ways to live the life I want and deserve. In the meantime, it’s okay to be quiet. I am a worthwhile person, people would be lucky to know me. It’s understandable that occasionally a person might be uncomfortable around my discomfort, and react to me in a negative way. If that happens occasionally it’s okay, I accept it. I would prefer if that person was kind and respectful, but ‘it is what it is’, just because someone does a bad thing doesn’t make them bad. And if somebody thinks little of me I don’t have to agree with them! I am a good person who’s just doing my best.

Build self awareness. Catch your irrational thinking. Challenge and dispute it with rational healthy thinking - over and over and over, until you have a new automatic way of thinking. It works. It’s proven.

Change your mind, change your mood. Think about thinking.

www.CBTandFeelingGood.com low intensity CBT sessions take therapy out of the counseling rooms, teaching you to:



- Distinguish between thoughts and feelings
- Become aware of how our thoughts can influence our feelings in ways that are not always helpful
- Learn about thoughts that seem to occur automatically and how they can affect emotions
- Evaluate (based on 'evidence') whether these 'automatic thoughts' and assumptions are accurate or perhaps biased.
- Develop the skills to recognise, interrupt, and correct this unhealthy thinking.

Summary: The basic theory is that we humans tend to let our thoughts run our emotions much more than we realise, needlessly upsetting ourselves over situations inappropriately if those thoughts are off-base. This can cause very real and debilitating problems. It's easy to imagine how an individual susceptible to anxiety or depression could let thoughts like 'I'm a terrible person' or 'my life is hopeless' take over. CBT can help to rewrite that script.

Benefits of diligently applied CBT:

- Decrease incidences of stress by correcting distorted perceptions of situations
- Understand and accept/manage the physiological effects of stress
- Increase emotional wellbeing – we will 'feel good' more of the time
- Improve social skills & interactions
- Improve self image & confidence
- Improve focus, performance and productivity
- Decrease self-defeating and self-sabotaging behaviours
- Better understand ourselves & others...

Notes: CBT is the worlds fastest growing psychotherapy, fast becoming the lead paradigm in clinical psychology ('the evolution and revolution of therapy'). Published studies have shown it to be as effective as antidepressants for many forms of depression, and slightly more effective than antidepressants in treating anxiety. In the United Kingdom, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence recommends CBT as the first treatment of choice for some mental health difficulties. In fact the UK government have also instructed the NHS to offer an option of CBT self-help (in the form of bibliotherapy (books) and online courses (computers) as it is a psycho-educational model so lends itself very well to that. You can learn the science of CBT and how to become your own therapist.

Book a session, or go to my FREE SELF HELP RESOURCE BLOG for more information and downloadable worksheets: <http://iveronicawalsh.wordpress.com/>

Low intensity CBT is recommended for mild to moderate anxiety or depression & stress management. The 'third wave' of CBT is a holistic view of treatment that includes relaxation and visualisation, breathing exercises, physical exercise, mindfulness, acceptance, and living in the present. Be good to yourself. See links on my website and blog that will help you to make a careplan.

Contact me for more information : veronica@cbtandfeelinggood.com - 086 8113031