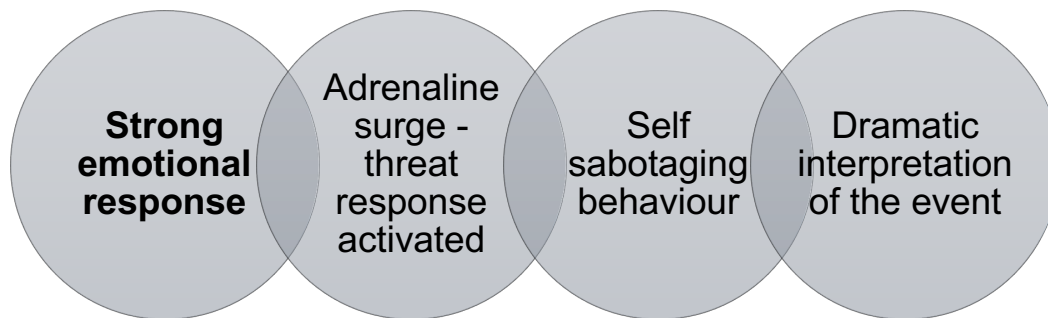


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# *Understanding and regulating your emotional responses*

## Understanding and regulating our emotional responses.

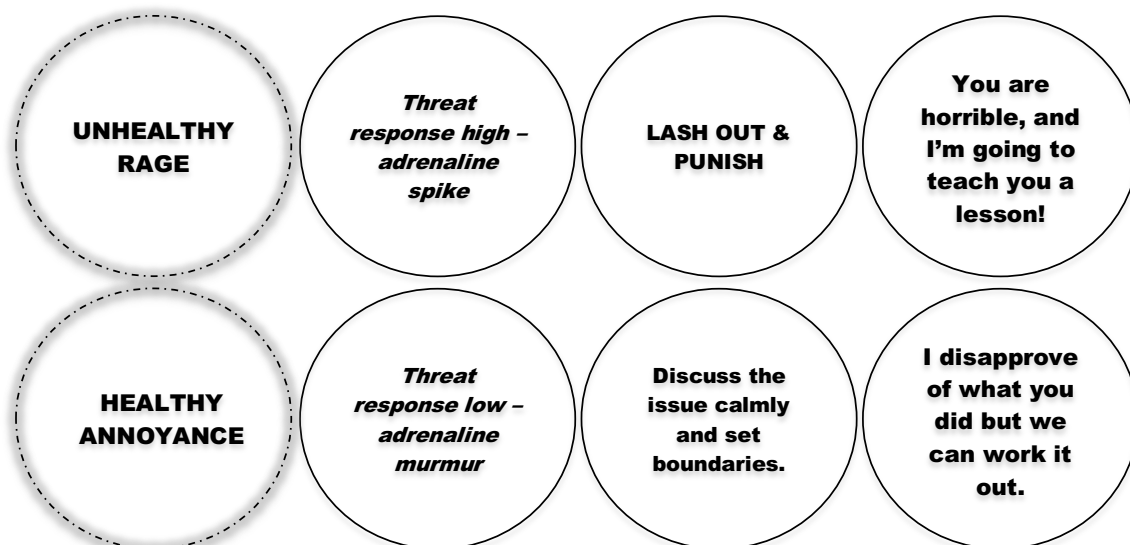
Are you the boss of your emotions? Or are your emotions the boss of you?



*“In a very real sense **we have two minds**, one that **thinks** and one that **feels**”* ~ Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*

Beware – **feelings are not facts**. And that’s a fact. CBT doesn’t aim to stop people from having emotions, that would be ridiculous and impossible. Emotions are a normal and wonderful part of humanity. You are a complex ‘sense making organism’ – your job is to make sense of things, to ‘predict’, to be safe, to survive, and to navigate and create a world that is comfortable and meets your values and needs. The problem is that we tend to try to make sense of what is happening through how we feel (*emotional reasoning*): ‘I *feel* very bad, so it *is* very bad’ – and this is unhelpful at the best of times, but is extremely unhelpful when stress is a disorder causing ‘**emotional dysregulation**’, where emotions and perception can be heightened and exaggerated. If you have strong positive emotions all the time, great, leave them alone. But if you often have an extreme negative or inappropriate emotional responses to situations, you can build the skill of regulating them with CBT.

**Example of different responses to the same event – ‘a friend behaves badly’:**



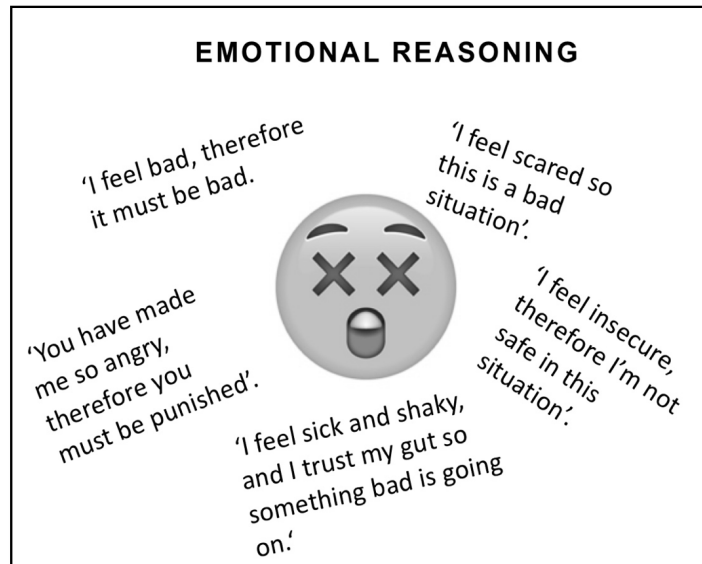
**Key:** the same thing could happen to 10 people, but they will all think and feel and behave uniquely in response to it. And note that when you're "in a good mood" you think differently and *feel* differently about things – you process and cope differently, right?

If a negative event happens, of course you are going to have a negative response, you are not a robot - but it is not the event itself, no matter how negative, that causes your exact level of upset, it is your brain and body's perception and processing of the event.

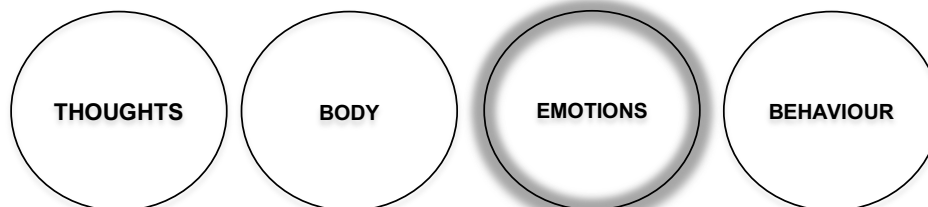
***“Anybody can become angry, that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power, that is not easy.” ~ Aristotle***

Neurobiology has added to the learning about how and why we think and feel and behave the way

we do, so we now know that how your nervous system is wired will affect your perception and feelings and behaviour – and that the way to regulate yourself is through rational reasoning. Building skills to thought-stop and think differently – which will help regulate emotional responses..





Note that if your stress is a disorder – from stress to anxiety to depression – you may have very strong emotional responses to events and situations, and emotions don't exist in a vacuum – your thoughts and body and emotions and behaviours are the four strands of your life experience - working alongside each other in real-time. (If you are fond of saying 'I trust my gut', note that your 'gut' is the stress hormone cortisol spiking, thinking it's being helpful by shutting your digestive system down in order to redirect energy to pump up the rest of your body for a 'threat', real or imagined. It's science!)





**Summary:** a negative situation or event INFLUENCES how you feel and behave; it is how you are explaining it to yourself, *plus* your physical threat response, that ultimately decides it. Practicing CBT means you do not have to be a slave to your automatic emotional responses. Put your *thinking brain* in charge. Map patterns. Be rational. **Regulate.**

**Template examples of healthy and unhealthy negative responses to a negative event:**

	<p><b>Healthy example:</b> If a friend is thoughtless and is excluding you, that is of course a negative event – a psychologically healthy person would respond to this with healthy and appropriate negative responses: e.g. <i>sadness</i> and <i>disappointment</i> (and even <i>annoyance</i> or <i>irritation</i>) – with a realistic and rational view of the event, and productive behaviour in response to the event.</p>
	<p><b>Unhealthy example:</b> a person with a stress disorder might respond to the same situation with an unhealthy anger, or even <i>aggression</i>– these are unhealthy negative responses, they are over the top emotions that are out of proportion to the event – promoting self-sabotaging behaviour - going on and on about it to yourself (and maybe others), 'BAD PERSON BEHAVING BADLY! I WON'T TOLERATE IT! I SHOULD DO SOMETHING!' Not letting it go, setting out to punish the friend, and not feeling safe with them / other friends in the future - seeking validation and reassurance in an over the top way.</p>

Get the picture? The cost of emotional reasoning is too high – dial it down...

**An example table of healthy negative responses vs unhealthy negative responses**

<p><b>Healthy negative response</b></p>	<p><b>Unhealthy negative response</b></p>
	
<p><b>Sadness</b></p>	<p><b>Depression</b></p>
<p><b>Disappointment</b></p>	<p><b>Despair</b></p>
<p><b>Annoyance</b></p>	<p><b>Aggression</b></p>
<p><b>Nervousness</b></p>	<p><b>Anxiety</b></p>
<p><b>Healthy anger</b></p>	<p><b>Unhealthy anger - rage</b></p>
<p><b>Healthy envy</b></p>	<p><b>Jealousy</b></p>

**Who do you want to be? How do you want to be? Change your patterns with CBT.**

Just because you have a strong feeling doesn't mean it is justified or emotionally intelligent. Which of the bad thinking habits will cause emotional dysregulation? All of them! Catch and edit, name & tame them...

**NEGATIVE PREDICTING**



**NEGATIVE MIND READING**



**MUSTY RULES FOR LIVING**



**AWFULISING / DRAMATISING**



**EMOTIONAL REASONING**



**COMPARING AND RATING**



**LOW FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE**



**PERSONALISING**



**INNER CRITIC**



**LABELLING**



The CBT goal is not to turn people into robots or to stop people from having emotions, but to help people recognise and decrease distorted dramatic responses to situations that cause themselves and others unnecessary upset.

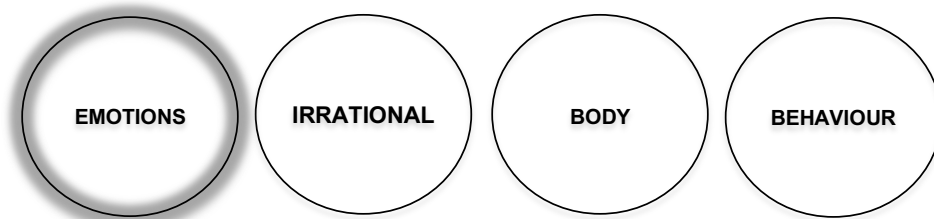
A proven fast and efficient self-management technique is '**name it and tame it**' – learning to step back and evaluate situations coolly when you are very upset - thought-stopping when you recognise unhealthy emotional and behavioural responses, and reframing your self-talk to regulate yourself to a healthy emotional and behavioural response instead -:

**Top tip:** get some acting skills! Design a new cooler way to respond that will get you better outcomes, that will get you what you want, even if you're not really feeling it yet. Be cool.

**Try mapping your key ideas** for unhealthy over the top emotions versus healthy appropriate emotional responses

– have some fun with it if you like, imagination and dramatic imagery can be your friend as well as your enemy:

What drives you bananas? When are you emotionally overly dramatic and dysregulated?



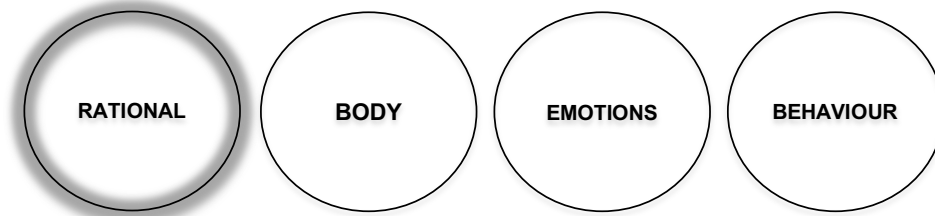
Use this template guide to catch your bad habits – so that you can be ready to thought-stop and regulate next time your emotional reasoning is about to cause you unnecessary upset.

Situation or event, and your thoughts and beliefs about it:		
Emotions	Body	Behave

**Make your THINKING mind the boss of you, not your FEELING mind.**

- *Regulate* how you explain the situation to yourself, reframe, BE RATIONAL
- *Regulate* your trippy nervous system, BREATHE IT DOWN.

Change it up. Think different– **feel different** – behave different – aim for this model:



Situation or event, with a RATIONAL MODERATE reframing – use careful accurate language, and consider what the new emotional and physical and behavioural response would be:		
Emotions	Body	Behave