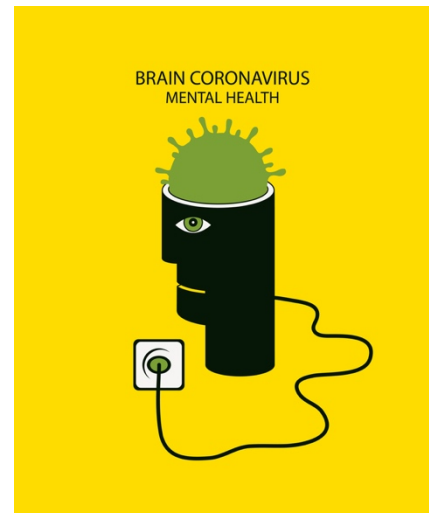


## Catch and reframe Covid19 self-talk

(A CBT handout – for angry swearsy adults)

### How are you explaining the Covid19 pandemic situation to yourself?

In these dramatic times it is important to *regulate overly dramatic self-talk* - things are bad enough without giving them a distorted exaggeration, right?



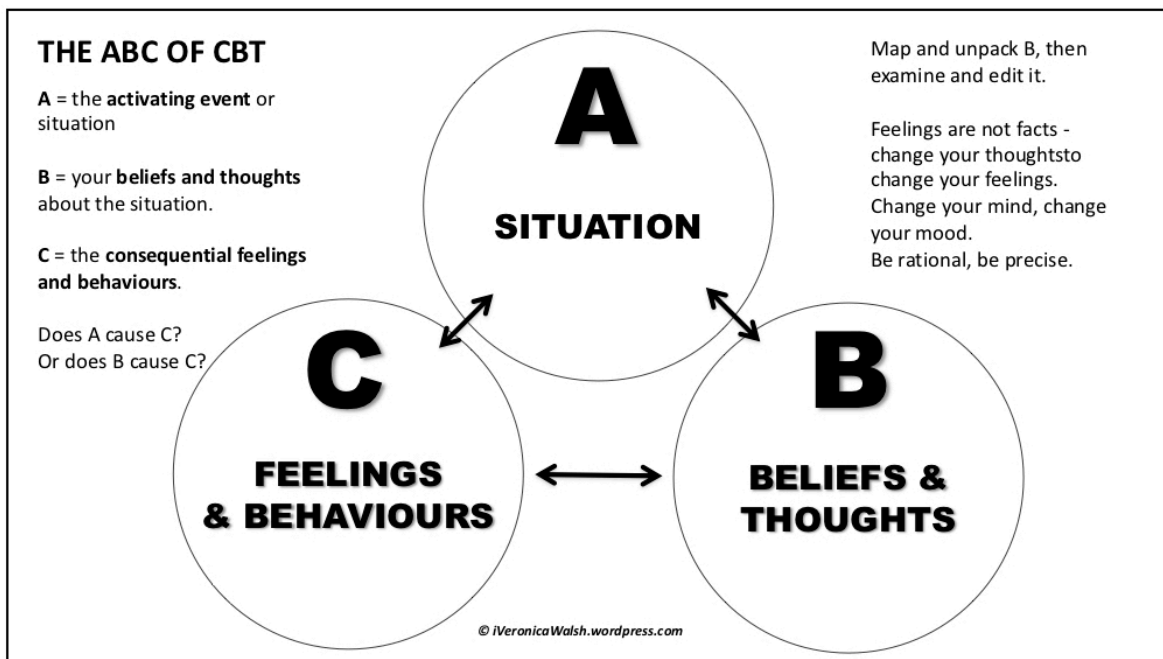
Yes, it is a pandemic, it's a very big deal.. It is a sudden lockdown and restriction of normal life. It is a sudden uncertainty of the future, socially and financially. It is a threat. It is not a neutral or positive event, it is most definitely a highly negative event - and we are not robots so we're going to have a negative response to a negative event - with emotional and physical upset. CBT can help you moderate your responses.

With CBT – no matter what the circumstances – we build a skillset of *awareness and management of how we explain the world to ourselves*, because overly negative self-talk can cause us unnecessary upset, and maximises our discomfort – in other words, be careful what you are saying to yourself, your body is taking it literally.

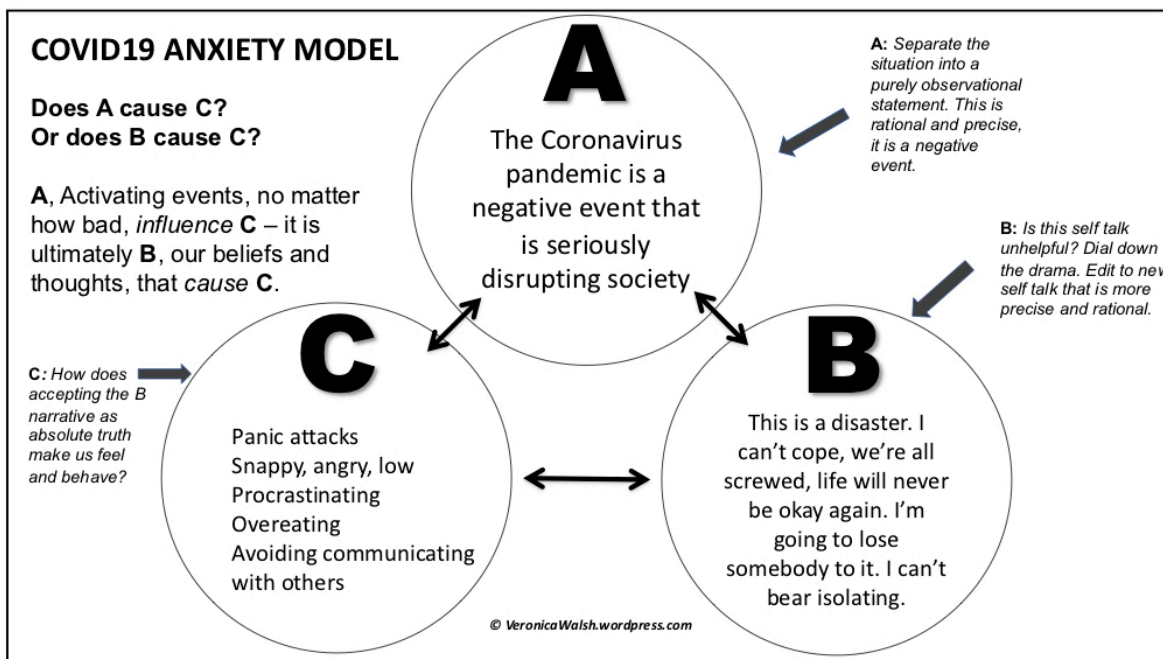
### CBT journaling: notice and map your-self talk habits in writing.

Why? When we write down how we explain things to ourselves, it is easier to see when the thoughts and beliefs are not helpful and not precise – it is more efficient to identify sensationalised dramatic statements, and then to edit the statements to dial down the dramatics and replace with a new cooler more precise and proportional self-talk. This is called 'learning by discovery' in a way that your brain likes, where you catch and edit your own style of narrative, not your therapists. Change how you view the world, and it will change how you feel and behave. You can learn to cope very well – it's a real training science, and it really can rewire the brain, and skill you up with good habits.

# Look at these ABCD models to see how to map thoughts and how they make us feel and behave –



1



Consider your **B**, and ask yourself: is this overly dramatic? Is it helpful or unhelpful? Is it rational or irrational? If I accept these statements 100% how will it make me feel and behave? Will this kind of thinking make me cause myself and others unnecessary upset? What is a more cool and

rational way to explain the situation? \* design new self talk that dials down the drama, **edit your language.**

Check out the following examples of unhealthy **B** and **C** examples that could do with some editing:

Omg this is a f-ing disaster.

My family will die.

We are so screwed.

If I get it I'll be one of those who dies, alone.

I can't bear it.

If I get it I'll be left disabled, it destroys your hearts and kidneys.

I can't cope.

It destroys families.

It's not fair.

There will be a Great-Depression unlike any we've ever seen.

We'll never get back to normal life.

It will keep coming at us until we're destroyed.

Society is gone!

Life will never be the same again.

Democracy is gone!

Covid19 is evil.

I'll be unemployed and won't be able to get a job.

We are under attack.

The kid's school year is destroyed and they'll never get back on track.

I am totally alone.

A year of school/college is totally wasted.

I'll never see my friends again.

My friends/family aren't there for me.

There's no point in working/studying as everything is on hold.

People are bastards.

It will be like this for years.

I'll never date again.

I'll never have sex again.

I can't help but eat every ten minutes, I'm disgusting.

I'm going to get it and it will be horrible and unbearable.

I shouldn't go out for exercise. In fact nobody should go out under any circumstances, it's far too dangerous.

Nobody should go to the shop at all unless it's an absolute emergency – one big shop a week, alone, is allowed, people who go more often are evil selfish idiots.

People who bring their children out for walks are terrible parents who don't deserve their kids.

People don't GAF.

People who bring their kids to the shop should be fined! Name and shame!

Joggers are bastards!

Gtfo the middle of the footpath you animal!

People must move to the edge of the footpath when they see me approach, or I am entitled to glare and curse and mutter at them.

Groups must fall into single file formation when others approach on the same footpath, or I am entitled, and indeed obliged, to shout and roar at them.

Cyclists should never break safe distance rules or I will shout 'wtf asshole' after them, and maybe flip the bird.

Politicians are milking the situation to pretend to be statesmen, God I hate [insert who].

**Typical rage behaviours** - the below, shouted or muttered at people breaking safe distance / mask recommendations (it's like *road rage*):

- For effs sake
- You effing a-hole
- Wtf!
- Jesus Christ!
- You selfish bastard / b\*tch!

**What is self talk?** It is *how you are explaining things to yourself*. What are your thoughts and beliefs about a particular situation? What are you predicting will happen. Are you 'anticipating and problem solving' in a cool rational way? What are you 'worrying' about?

Self-talk is also known as: Narrative. Framing. Perception. And indeed, just 'thinking'.

## Key takeaway ideas:

*Dramatic negative self-talk is careless and casual, and contributes to pumping up our threat response (stress hormones), which all makes us feel emotionally upset and more likely to cause us self-sabotaging behaviour.*

I call it 'the language of battling demons' - this kind of shorthand might be efficient and colourful paraphrasing, but it maximises your discomfort and elevates your threat response. (Some might need a beta blocker medication to regulate - google it and ask your doctor).

A regular statement of clients these days: *"I don't know how I'm supposed to get through \*it\*."*

Reframe: know what you can control and what you cannot control. Be present in the moment. We cope because we have no choice – the question is, will we cope well, or badly, (or middle-ish / up and down). Just do your best – it's a fluid situation and we get to remake our attitudes and choices every day.

So how do you define 'it' exactly? What is \*it\*? Unpack that statement... expand, be precise. Explain it as if you were explaining to a child. Talk to your inner child. Then edit a new statement to be more detailed and precise. E.g: *'It is hard dealing with this situation, it's difficult to cope very well and to be cool and rational all the time. Sometimes I get a bit dramatic and unmoored, but actually, if I stay in the present, and accept reality, keeping an eye on when I'm being over the top or hyper with my statements, I'll feel and cope better. I can roll with it and do my best, and things will likely be manageable even if difficult. I've got this. I can cope - I would prefer it if I coped very well all the time, and I'm coping poorly sometimes, but I am coping, and my best is good enough.'*

Regulate your stress hormones and emotions and actions by externalising and regulating your self-talk - create a hyper-rational 'you', and use it to create new self-talk, to challenge the automatic irrational

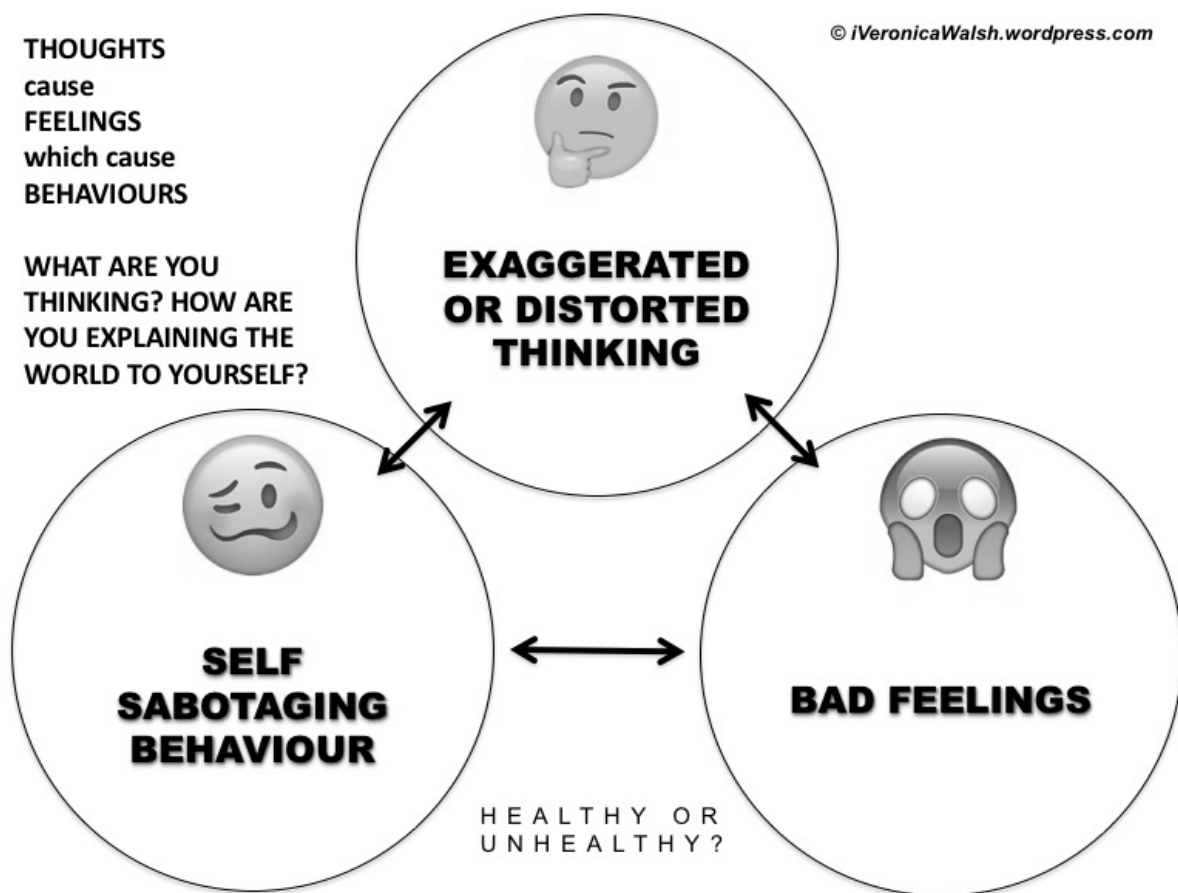
self-talk that you catch yourself doing. Think of it as a ‘Spock’ you, a ‘no-drama-Obama’ you. ‘What would Obama say? What would Spock say?’

Avoid ‘emotional reasoning’ - making sense of things through how we *feel* is not helpful – FEELINGS ARE NOT FACTS. Events, no matter how negative, only influence our emotional state, it is our overall perception (plus our nervous system) that causes it.

Tip: use a sense of humour and strong visuals for your own mantras and guided visualisation.

A mindful rage exercise, visualise and mantra: “Ah, here’s rage, cool down you little ape”.

Use the below template for guidance in thought mapping:



Okay – good luck!