


MASMHHC



Promoting Rational Thinking Using Cognitive Theory

John Crocker
Director of School Mental Health &
Behavioral Services
Methuen Public Schools



Is it OK...

...to talk to your students about their thoughts?

...to talk to your students about how they feel?

...to talk to your students about their actions and behavior?

Can you identify a time when a student was not thinking rationally about something?

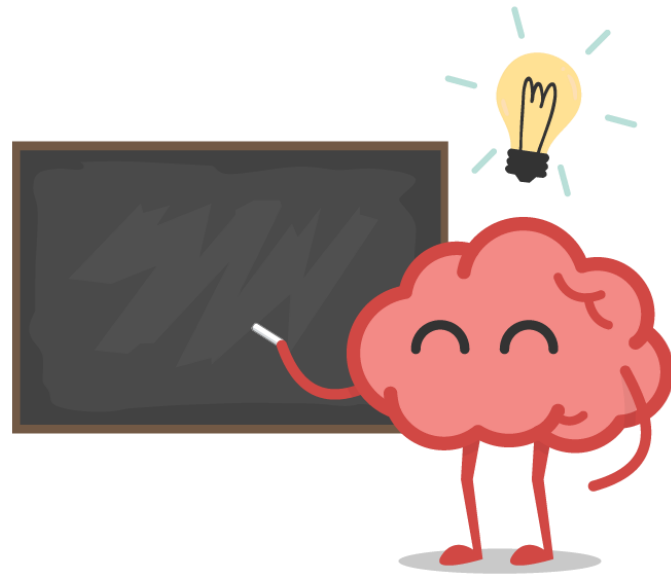
How about a time when their mood improved because you gave them some insight, provided an alternative perspective?



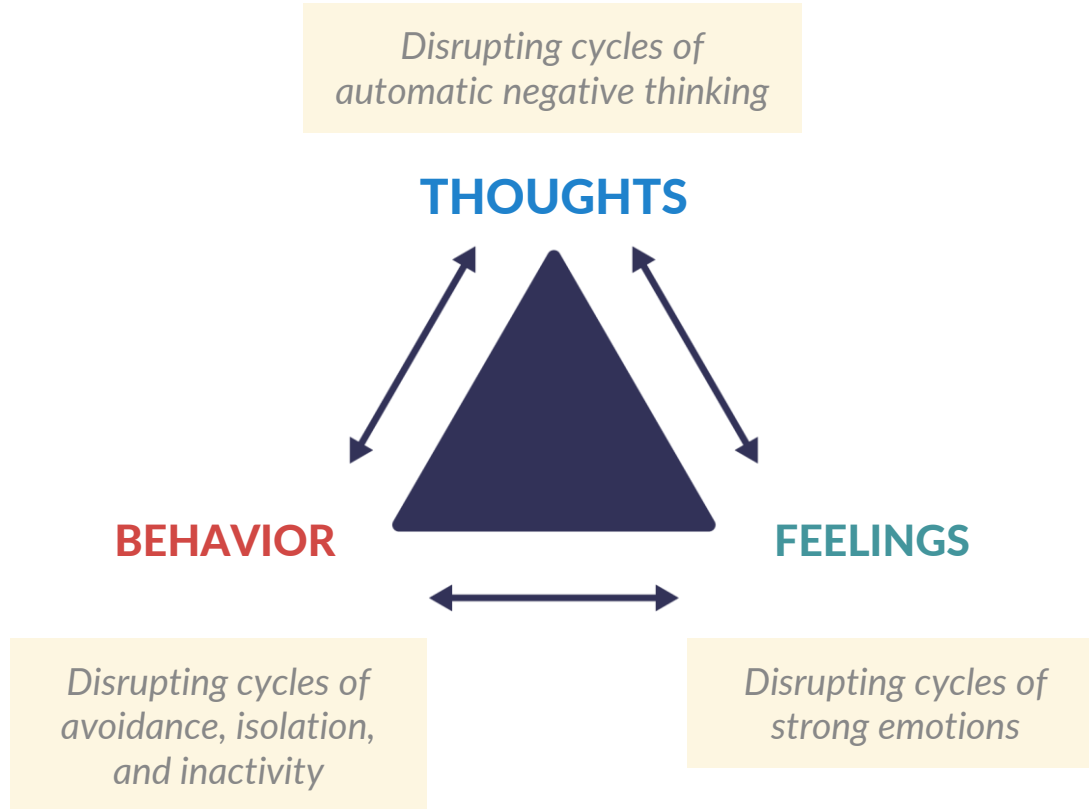
Using CBT to Promote Well-Being in the Classroom

- CBT is a **framework** for understanding our internal and external experiences
- and a **set of tools** to help disrupt unhelpful thought and behavior patterns

You are likely using CBT tools in your classroom already!



How Can CBT Help You to Disrupt Unhelpful Cycles?

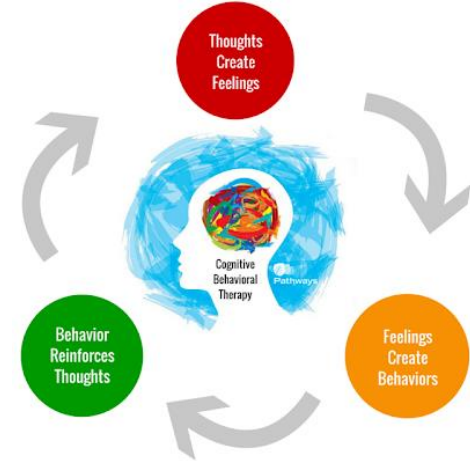
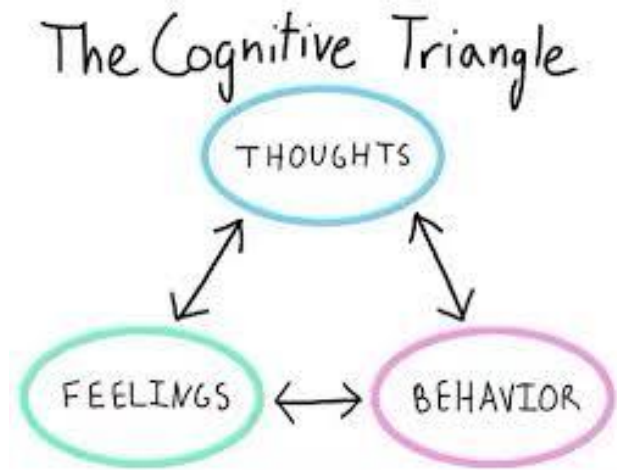


Simple Cognitive Coping

What language and skills can we provide to students to combat negative automatic thoughts?

- Catching cognitive distortions / thinking traps
- Weighing out the evidence (challenging automatic thoughts)
- Replacing automatic negative thoughts with rational thoughts (coping thoughts)

When you think more rationally, you tend to feel better; when you feel better, your behavior tends to be more positive; when your behavior is more positive, you tend to have better outcomes.



Unhelpful Thinking Styles

When we are upset our thinking can change in unhelpful ways. Our thinking can become *distorted* or *unbalanced*. These are some of the most common unhelpful thinking styles. By recognising our unhelpful styles we can begin to change them.

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

Jumping to conclusions



$2 + 2 = 5$

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

*I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot*

Over-generalising

"everything is always rubbish"

"nothing good ever happens"

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

should
must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Personalisation

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

15 Common Cognitive Distortions

Filtering: You take the negative details and magnify them while filtering out all positive aspects of a situation.

Polarized Thinking: Things are black or white, good or bad. You have to be perfect or you're a failure. There is no middle ground.

Oversgeneralization: You come to a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence. If something bad happens once you expect it to happen over and over again.

Mind Reading: Without their saying so, you know what people are feeling and why they act the way they do. In particular, you are able to divine how people are feeling toward you.

Catastrophizing: You expect disaster. you notice or hear about a problem and start "what if's". What if tragedy strikes? What if it happens to you?"

Personalization: Thinking that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to you. You also compare yourself to others, trying to determine who's smarter, better looking, etc.

Control Fallacies: If you feel externally controlled, you see yourself as helpless, a victim of fate. The fallacy of internal control has you responsible for the pain and happiness of everyone around you.

Fallacy of Fairness: You feel resentful because you think you know what's fair but other people won't agree with you.

Blaming: You hold other people responsible for your pain, or take the other tack and blame yourself for every problem or reversal.

Should: You have a list of ironclad rules about how you and other people should act. People who break the rules anger you and you feel guilty if you violate the rules.

Emotional Reasoning: You believe that what you feel must be true-automatically. If you feel stupid and boring, then you must be stupid and boring.

Fallacy of Change: You expect that other people will change to suit you if you just pressure or cajole them enough. You need to change people because your hope for happiness seem to depend entirely on them.

Global Labeling: You generalize one or two qualities into a negative global judgment.

Being Right: You are continually on trial to prove that your opinions and actions are correct. Being wrong is unthinkable and you will go to any length to demonstrate your rightness.

Heaven's Reward Fallacy: You expect all your sacrifice and self-denial to pay off, as if there were someone keeping score. You feel bitter when the reward doesn't come.

by John M. Grohol, Psy.D.

Cognitive Distortions / Automatic Negative Thoughts

"It is not a situation in and of itself that determines how people feel, but rather how they construe a situation (Beck, 1964; Ellis, 1962)."

Automatic Thoughts (AT) - Automatic thoughts are the thoughts and images that involuntarily pop into our head in certain situations. They make up how we "read" or interpret a situation. AT's are dangerous because usually we take for granted that they are True. Even more dangerous, we have a tendency to accept them as the only explanation or view of the scenario. Reactive behavior is based on automatic thinking.

Cognitive Distortions - Irrational thoughts (thoughts that lack evidence or thoughts that are only partially true) that can influence your emotions, Everyone experiences cognitive distortions to some degree, but when they are extreme, they can be damaging to how we feel and behave.

Perception is reality.

Lee Atwater

QuoteAddicts

The Cognitive Model

Basic Model

Situation / Event



Automatic thoughts



Reaction (emotional, behavioral, physiological)



Complex Model

THOUGHTS

What we think affects how we feel and act

T

E

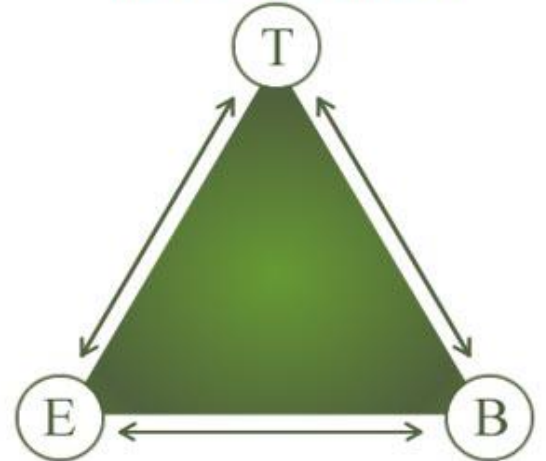
B

EMOTIONS

How we feel affects what we think and do

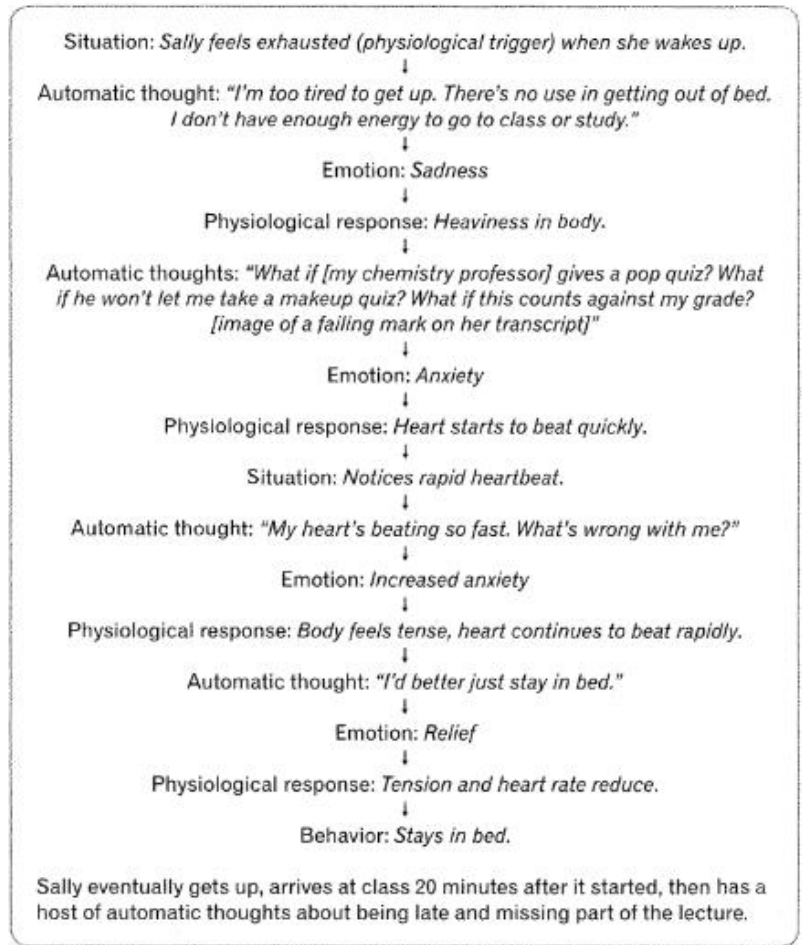
BEHAVIOUR

What we do affects how we think and feel



Complex Cognitive Model

- Reinforcing negative interplay between each component of the sequence
- Reinforces negative cycles of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- CBT techniques seek to disrupt these cycles through:
 - Cognitive restructuring
 - Behavioral activation
 - Passive coping (to address immediate physiological needs)
 - Mindfulness



Recognizing and Challenging Thinking Traps

1. Try to **SEPARATE** thoughts from actual events

- a. **What is the situation?** What actually happened? Just the “facts”
- b. **What are your thoughts?** What are you telling yourself about the situation?

2. **IDENTIFY** the “thinking trap”

- a. Are there any thinking traps in your thoughts?

3. **CHALLENGE** the “thinking trap”

- a. **Check the facts:** Is there any evidence to support this thought? To disprove it?
- b. **Double Standard:** Ask yourself, “Am I being harder on myself than I am on others?” “What would I say to a friend?”
- c. **Survey:** Find out whether other people you trust agree with your thoughts.
- d. **Behavioral Experiment:** Test your beliefs to see if you get the result you were expecting.

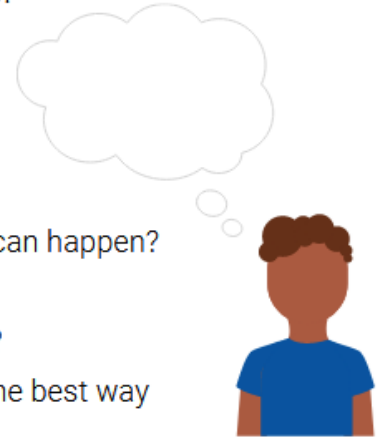


Resources:

- [Healthy Thinking Handout \(TRAILS to Wellness\)](#)
- [Psychology Tools Behavioral Experiments](#)

Steps to Guide Cognitive Restructuring

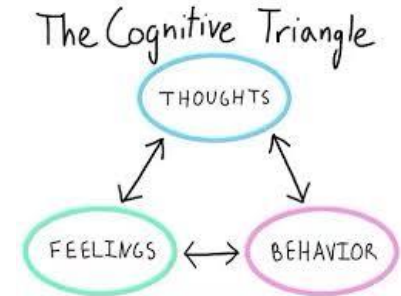
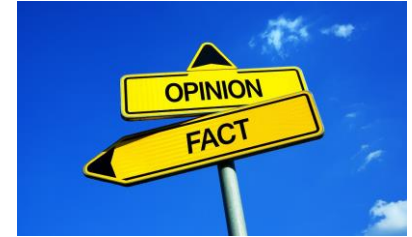
1. ID the problem situation
 2. Elicit automatic thoughts
 3. Is this a cognitive distortion?
 4. If so, consider the questions on the right.
 5. What's a better way of thinking about the problem situation?
1. What is the evidence for this thought being true?
 2. What is the evidence against this thought?
 3. Is there another way to look at this?
 4. What would I tell a friend in this situation?
 5. How would [role model] handle this situation?
 6. Even if this is true, what is the worst thing that can happen?
 7. What is the most likely thing to happen?
 8. If my thought did come true, how would I cope?
 9. What steps can I take right now to respond in the best way possible to this situation? What help do I need?
 10. What would happen if I didn't believe this anymore? How might things change for the better?



Challenging Automatic Thoughts

(Automatic thought) "I'm going to really struggle using CBT."

1. So when you have that thought, what feeling do you have? How intense is that feeling (0-10)?
2. What evidence do you have to support this thought?
3. What evidence disproves this thought?
4. Based on the evidence, what is a more rational, balanced way of thinking about your original thought?
5. When this new thought comes to mind, how intense is the feeling you identified earlier (0-10)?



Cognitive Restructuring

Helping students translate this:

(Automatic thought) "I'm going to really struggle using CBT."

To this:

(Coping thought) "I can learn CBT. I'll likely make mistakes and need to practice, but I can do this."

Simplified Series of Questions

- What evidence is there to support this thought?
- What evidence disproves this thought?
- Based on the evidence, what is a more rational, balanced way of thinking about your original thought?

What's a Behavioral Experiment?

“Behavioral experiments are planned experiential activities to test the validity of a belief. ... **Behavioral experiments** are an information gathering exercise, the purpose of which is to test the accuracy of an individual's beliefs (about themselves, others, and the world) or to test new, more adaptive beliefs.”

- “Try this problem out before you give up...check in with me about how it goes.”
- “Why not try asking to join their table/group/conversation? See what happens when you ask them to join in.”
- “I know you think turning your camera on is going to be overwhelming; try it out for a minute and then we can check in about how it felt.”
- “How do you know you won't like activity/new experience?...try it out before you make decision.”

Friends, you already perform behavioral experiments...what other examples can you offer?

Exposure



[TRAILS: Facing My Fears Worksheet](#)

- Address avoidance and decrease anxious associations through repeated engagement in activities that are anxiety provoking
- Start with low to moderately anxiety provoking situations and build up to activities/situations that induce more anxiety
- Guide students to monitor their thoughts and feelings (predicted and actual) as they continue to engage in the situation/activity
- Process the results of these behavioral experiments and use the gathered data to reformulate beliefs about these situations/activities