

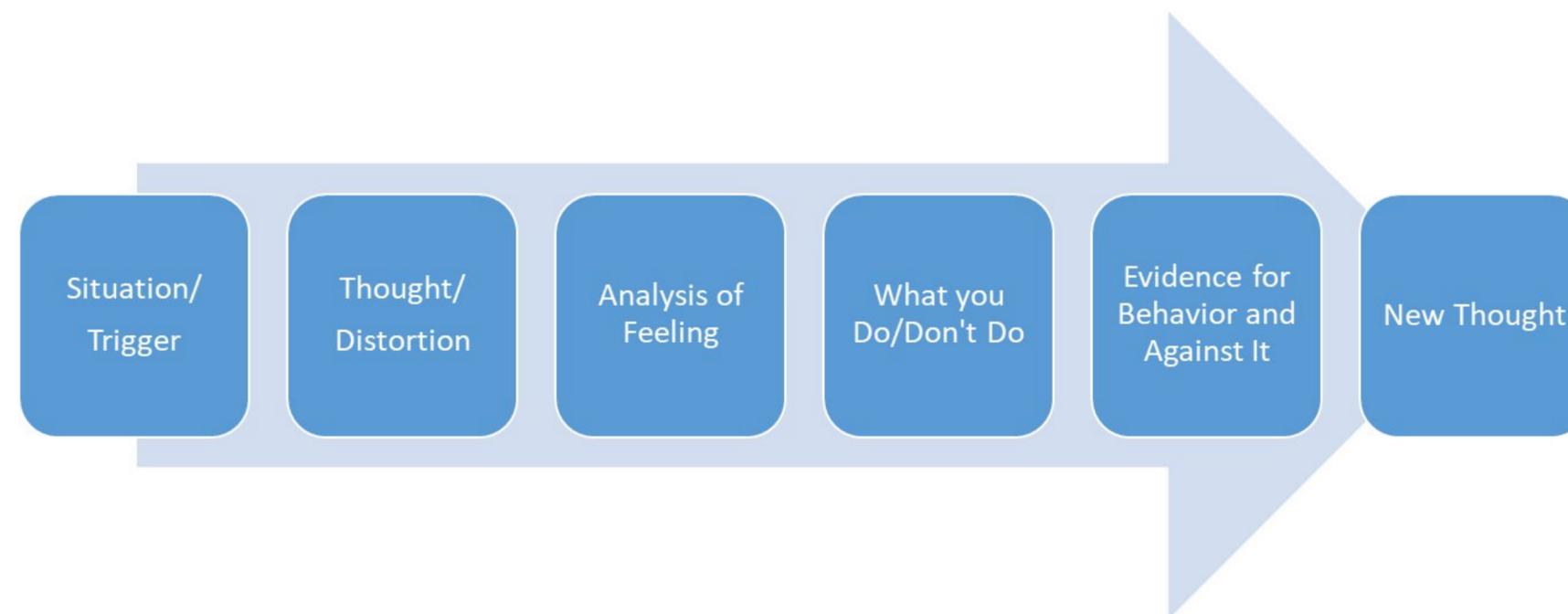
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

What comes first - thoughts or emotions?

The feelings come first and the thoughts come later. This means that we cannot change our thinking and make the feelings go away. In CBT, we seek to form new thoughts to challenge unwanted feelings, and slowly teach our body not to produce the unhealthy emotional response.

What is a cognitive distortion?

Cognitive distortions are simply ways that our minds convince us of something that isn't really true. These inaccurate thoughts are used to reinforce negative thinking or emotions — telling ourselves things that sound rational and accurate, but really only serve to keep us feeling bad about ourselves.



Common Thinking Traps

#1. All or Nothing Thinking

Life events are rarely 'all good' or 'all bad.' Similarly, our feelings should not be this black and white. However, in times of stress, we may find ourselves in a fight or flight mode that leads us down this common thinking trap. Avoid using words such as "always, never, ruined, and perfect" when describing people or situations.

Example: "I can never do a good job at work. I am always in trouble."

Healthier Thought: "I really blew it with that project. I need to resolve interpersonal conflict with my peers in a healthy way."

#2. Overgeneralization

Often, it is helpful to make conclusions based on factual events we have experienced. However, we can make the mistake of generalizing from one event to the next. This type of thinking is not helpful because it does not take all situations or events into account. For example, sometimes we make mistakes, but we don't always make mistakes.

Example: "I always blow it in interviews. No one will ever hire me."

Healthier Thought: "I'm disappointed that I didn't have the answer to that question. I won't make that mistake next time."

#3. Emotional Reasoning

This common thinking trap happens when a person believes that what he or she is feeling is true regardless of the evidence. Emotional reasoning justifies itself and traps a person into believing their negative emotions are 'right' when sometimes we attribute our feelings to things inappropriately.

Example: "I'm really not feeling connected to my husband right now and that makes me feel insecure. They must be having another affair."

Healthier Thought: "I'm not feeling connected to my partner right now and that makes me feel insecure. I should take the time to reconnect and talk with him ."

#4. Mind Reading

We often think that we “know” how someone else is thinking and feeling but research shows we get it wrong 50% of the time. Even if we know someone very well, assumptions are not a healthy choice.

Example: “My boss was not as friendly to me today. She thinks I’m stupid because I asked her that question.”

Healthier Thought: “ I shouldn’t assume people are reacting negatively to me when there is no definitive evidence. My boss could just be having a bad day.”

#5. Personalizing

Automatically assuming the responsibility and blame for negative events that are not under your control. This leads to feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy .

Example: Your child receives a bad remark on their report card. “I must be a bad mother - I should have done more.”

Healthier Thought: “My child is responsible for their behavior and I am responsible for how I respond to it. Now that I know there is trouble I will do what I can to help at home.”

#6. Catastrophic Thinking

Imagining and believing that the worst possible thing will happen. Be aware of “what if” thinking when considering all the worst case scenarios. Be sure to contrast the best case scenarios as well.

Example: “I think I failed the bar exam, If I failed this means that I will never be a good attorney”

Healthier Thought: “I might fail the exam but best case scenario is that I did well enough to pass. If I fail, it will be embarrassing but I will try again.”

#7. Filtering

Imagining and believing that the worst possible thing will happen. Be aware of “what if” thinking when considering all the worst case scenarios. Be sure to contrast the best case scenarios as well.

Example: Believing that you did a poor job on a presentation because some people looked bored, even though a number of people looked interested and you received several compliments on how well you did.

#8. Fortune Telling

This is when we predict that things will turn out badly. But, in reality, we cannot predict the future because we don't have a crystal ball!

Example: "I know I'll mess up."

Healthier Thought: "It is possible that I will mess up but I have new tools to cope."

#9. Labeling

Sometimes we talk to ourselves in mean ways and use a single negative word to describe ourselves. This kind of thinking is unhelpful and unfair. We are too complex to be summed up in a single word!

Example: "I'm stupid."

Healthier Thought: "We all feel stupid sometimes. It might take me longer but I can figure this out."

#10. Over Estimating Danger

This is when we believe that something that is unlikely to happen is actually right around the corner. It's not hard to see how this type of thinking can maintain your anxiety. For example, how can you not feel scared if you think that you could have a heart attack any time? Ask yourself: is it possible, probable, or imminent danger?

Example: "If I go hiking, I will get bit by a snake."

Healthier Thought: "It's possible that I could get bit by a snake. I'll take steps to make it less likely by watching where I step and wearing good hiking boots and staying on the trails."

#11. Should Have, Could Have

This is when you tell yourself how you "should", "must", or "ought" to feel and behave. However, this is NOT how you actually feel or behave. The result is that you are constantly anxious and disappointed with yourself and/or with others around you.

Example: "I shouldn't have done that. "

Healthier Thought: "I wish I had done that differently. Here's what I need to do to feel better: ... "