

Chapter 1

The Principles behind CBC

In This Chapter

- ▶ Focusing on solutions and the future
 - ▶ Watching and evaluating thoughts
 - ▶ Understanding the evolution of CBC
 - ▶ Accepting oneself as fallible
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Some fundamental principles and concepts underpin the practice of CBC. These principles developed from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), whose founders were Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis.

The keystone principle of CBC derives from Epictetus, who was a Greek Stoic philosopher. Stoic philosophy promoted theories of mind that encouraged the development of logic and self-control as a way of living life wisely. Epictetus lived in the first century AD and stated that ‘people are disturbed not by the things that happen, but by the views which they take of those things’ – that is, your own thoughts and opinions shape your feelings about and reactions to an event. By accepting this principle, the individual takes personal responsibility for her own reaction to a situation, whether she is stuck in traffic or made redundant, on the understanding that another person may have a different viewpoint and therefore a different reaction. This attitude opens up new perspectives and approaches to everyday events. The client learns to become an observer of her own thoughts and can assess whether those thoughts help her to achieve her life and work goals.

As the client investigates her thoughts, she may discover that the mind leads her astray occasionally, and therefore she exaggerates difficulties, fears situations that may never happen, or assumes that someone has a bad opinion of her although she has no concrete evidence of the fact. The CBC process applies what is known as Socratic dialogue, which is a form of philosophical enquiry that originated from the Greek philosopher Socrates. In Socratic dialogue, the questioner explores the implications of the opinions and statements of the other person, in order to stimulate rational thinking and insight. Applied in CBC, this form of questioning is designed to reveal the reality of a

situation rather than a 'twisted' version of it. The aim is to develop thoughts that are both realistic and in perspective. The process encourages the individual to develop more self-enhancing and supportive ways of viewing the world so as to manage life's challenges. The questioning aims to help a person analyse her thoughts and, should she in some way not come up to her own standard or expectations, to accept herself as a fallible human being.

In this chapter, I explain some of the theories and concepts underlying CBC, and introduce models that you can apply to the situations that your clients bring to coaching sessions.

Investigating the Evolution of CBC

CBC evolved from cognitive behavioural therapy, or CBT. In addition, sports, acting, and singing coaching have all influenced CBC, as have theories of motivation and goalsetting. The focus of CBT is on treating people with disorders. In CBC, we shift the focus to helping people develop and achieve their goals. This transition has been influenced by interest in personal growth and by the focus of organisations on learning and development as a means to productivity. My own definition of CBC is 'an alliance of cooperation between client and coach. The coach supports the client in developing and achieving the specific goals and objectives identified by the client at the outset. The focus in CBC is developing constructive thoughts and behaviours to support action towards the identified goals.'

Unlike therapy, coaching focuses on the present and the future. Coaching applies problem-solving methods to enhance happiness, performance, and the achievement of personal objectives. CBC focuses specifically on analysing the thoughts and behaviours the client applies to a challenge, and checks whether the client's approach supports or limits her efforts. As thoughts and behaviours are a part of every human endeavour, CBC can therefore be applied to address any situation your client brings to her coaching sessions, such as:

- ✓ Enhancing performance at work
- ✓ Developing confidence
- ✓ Taking action to achieve specific goals
- ✓ Gaining perspective
- ✓ Developing thoughts and behaviours to develop skills
- ✓ Managing situations more effectively

Psychology's been around a long time

People have practised psychology, or the investigation of the human mind, for centuries. The earliest recorded psychology works date back to around 600 BCE and philosophers such as Anaximanda, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and

Aristotle. It was also discussed in the ancient cultures of Egypt, China, and India. Originally, psychology was regarded as an area of philosophy. In the 19th century, psychology became a formal area of study in its own right.

Moving from CBT to CBC

The founders of CBT, Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis, identified that we all have a constant chatter going on in our heads. They termed this chatter *internal dialogue*. Study of this dialogue lies at the heart of both CBT and CBC.



Beck and Ellis's research in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated that some internal dialogue is muddled and contradictory. Perhaps you've noticed this fact yourself. Imagine today is the first day of a new year. Last night you made a resolution to get fit. You lie in bed thinking 'I really ought to go to the gym,' while another voice (but the same brain) argues 'But it's so lovely and warm here in bed. . . .' The voice that 'wins' impacts on your behaviour and actions. Our thoughts are at the heart of the decisions we make about our lives and the actions we take. The key to CBC is to think about thinking.

A report by the London School of Economics, published in June 2006, commented that CBT, being a fixed course of task-oriented sessions rather than an open-ended programme that can extend over years rather than months, makes it attractive. The UK Government has pledged £170 million to train new CBT therapists so that the NHS can offer this form of therapy to around 1 million more people in due course. Rhena Branch, a psychologist who practises CBT at the Priory, believes CBT is more empowering than certain other forms of therapy: 'CBT doesn't just provide someone with an hour of introspection which is then forgotten until the next session. There is much more interaction, and the aim is to give someone the tools to be able to function as her own therapist in the future.' The effectiveness of CBT as a remedial intervention provides credibility to CBC as a development process, because CBC adapts the techniques to help clients move forward and achieve their work and life goals.

Beck and Ellis identified that many people have thoughts, or cognitions, that are unhelpful to their goals. When a person changes the way she thinks, the way she feels also changes. Beck and Ellis applied their CBT methodologies in counselling and therapeutic sessions for remedial purposes. They used a psycho-educational model in which they shared models and methods with their clients, who can then apply the techniques themselves.

Sandra's workload

Sandra came to coaching sessions feeling thoroughly demotivated. Her company had restructured and made several of her colleagues redundant. Sandra missed her friends. She also had an increasing workload to compensate for her colleagues' absence. She struggled to get through her emails every day and fell behind in finishing her projects. Much of her conversation was in the past and focused on how things

had been rather than on solutions. She said things like 'It wasn't fair that they were made redundant,' 'This should never have happened,' and 'Things were so much better when they were here.' During the sessions, she began to accept what she could not change and instead focused on what she could do about her current situation in order to make it more manageable and enjoyable in the future.

The development of positive psychology

Until recently, psychology focused on repairing mental illness using a disease model of human functioning. Now the focus is on how to apply psychology to build on existing strengths in order to help people live happier and more productive lives. Dr Martin Seligman, a psychologist working at the University of Pennsylvania, termed this approach *positive psychology*. He applied cognitive behavioural methodology to develop resilience, hope, and optimism in clients, and was instrumental in creating a positive psychology unit at Harvard University. David Burns' book *Feeling Good*, which popularised CBT in the 1980s, also influenced therapists and coaches to apply psychology to people who were not necessarily suffering from disorders but wanted to experience personal growth. Psychologists Professor Stephen Palmer and Gladeana McMahon (who have also been change-makers in my own professional life), Windy Dryden, Michael Neenan, and Nick Edgerton have all been leaders in this evolution, lecturing, practising and writing on the application of CBC as a solutions-focused practice. This book represents what I have learnt from these founders, and reflects my own interpretation and experience of applying CBC methods with clients since 1993.

Focusing on Solutions

CBC focuses on the future, on solving problems, and on developing solutions to your client's challenges. Because of its speed and efficacy, many people use CBC in the workplace to enhance their performance by challenging limiting beliefs and behaviours and enabling them to move forward into situations they may not have dared to enter before.

CBC uses a time-limited three-stage process to help your client achieve her goals:

1. **Current situation:** What's happening?
2. **Goal-setting:** What do you want to happen?
3. **Strategies and action:** What do you need to do to achieve your goals?



CBC has a psycho-educative aspect: you share knowledge, models, and methods with your client, so eventually she becomes her own coach. In order to integrate new discoveries and habits, you give your client assignments to practise between sessions – homework, if you like. This home practice reinforces your client's new thoughts and behaviours and helps her take responsibility for her own change rather than relying on what takes place within the coaching session.

Thinking about Thinking

Thinking about thinking is an underlying principle of CBC. By considering the way she thinks, your client becomes an impartial observer of her own thoughts. Eventually, your client notices the impact of her thoughts. She learns to reflect on how her thoughts, beliefs, and expectations influence her feelings and in turn impact her behaviour, the decisions she makes, and the actions she takes. She also becomes aware of how her physiological responses differ depending on whether she thinks positively or negatively.



People behave differently according to their emotional mood. By using the principles of CBC, your client becomes a watcher or controller who mentally stands back from the situation and considers how her thoughts and feelings shape her actions and behaviours. For example, if your client is hassled by everyday concerns, she may question whether the events warrant the amount of emotional energy that she generates, or whether she exaggerates her problems. I give an example of how cognitions influence behaviours in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 **How Cognitions Influence Behaviours**

<i>Cognition</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>
I can't stand this.	Procrastination, giving up
I can't manage this.	Undermining ability to finish the job
I bet he thinks I'm unattractive.	Doesn't ask him out on a date



As a CB coach, you provide practical models and processes to enable your client to develop an internal dialogue of constructive thoughts and pragmatic approaches that support the achievement of her goals. Practising CBC is like learning another language. And just like learning another language, CBC can be hard work and needs daily repetition to achieve change.

Putting thoughts into perspective

CBC works on the principle that people develop twisted views of themselves, others, and situations as they go through life. CBC investigates whether a client's thoughts are based on evidence or are outdated or out of perspective.

As a CB coach, you help your client review how she approaches a situation. Your focus is to investigate your client's thoughts; in doing so, you help your client become aware of her views and how those views impact on her emotions and behaviours.

Although your client may be aware of some of the thoughts going on in her head, many of her thoughts are unconscious and go unnoticed. That is where you come in – helping your client to stop and to reflect on her thinking habits, including:

- ✓ **Developing healthy emotions to motivate actions:** Check whether feelings are appropriate to the situation at hand.
- ✓ **Developing perspective and reality:** Challenge where your client is catastrophising or maximising problems, or imagining outcomes for which no evidence exists in reality.
- ✓ **Identifying negative automatic thoughts:** Negative thoughts block or limit your client's actions.
- ✓ **Observing thinking errors:** Check twisted ways of thinking about herself, others, and the situation, which may be making the situation seem worse than it is.
- ✓ **Shifting thinking patterns:** This shift stimulates emotional and behavioural change.

Your main aim as a CB coach is to help your client develop the mental and emotional strategies to achieve her identified goals. Ask your client whether her thoughts are:

- ✓ **Rational:** Is there a law of the universe that says that she must think this way in this situation?
- ✓ **Empirical:** Must everyone respond in the way she is, or would other people respond differently?
- ✓ **Helpful:** Is her way of thinking and approaching the situation actually helping her to manage it successfully? If not, how else might she think?

CBC questioning methods



CBC is a process of questioning based on Socratic dialogue, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The questions are designed to help the client analyse her thoughts and opinions so as to clarify whether her approach is supporting her to achieve her goals. The premise is that the client is the best person to make her own decisions. A CB coach does not tell her client what to think or do. The client has the answers, provided she is asked the right questions – you provide those questions to take her from the position she is currently in towards the thoughts and actions that help her reach her goals.

The CBC process is collaborative rather than confrontational, but it may be challenging because Socratic questions aim to provoke insights that help the client move forward. This process encourages your client to look at the evidence for her unhelpful or limiting belief and to see where she holds back.

You help your client to become her own coach by sharing the questioning techniques with her. For example, if your client feels overburdened by her workload but feels unable to say no to her boss, you may ask her Socratic questions that open up options for her:



- ✓ Where is it written that you must. . . ?
- ✓ Who says that you must. . . ?
- ✓ Does it follow that. . . ?
- ✓ What is the evidence that. . . ?
- ✓ Is this belief logical?
- ✓ Where is the evidence for your belief about this?
- ✓ Might you be exaggerating the importance of this problem?
- ✓ Are you concentrating on the negatives and ignoring the positives?
- ✓ Are you taking things too personally?
- ✓ What's the worst that can happen?
- ✓ How important will this problem be in six months?
- ✓ Just because this situation has happened once, how does it follow that it must happen again?
- ✓ How might others approach this situation?
- ✓ How does failing (your exams, for example) make you a complete failure?
- ✓ Are you worrying about how you think things should be, rather than dealing with the situation as it is?
- ✓ Is your belief helping you achieve your goals?
- ✓ How else can you think about this situation?
- ✓ If you thought differently, how would that impact your outcome?

By answering these questions, your client reviews her approach and checks whether this approach is rational and helpful. You can then help her to develop more constructive self-talk and approaches based on evidence and reality. The ABCDE model developed by Albert Ellis provides a structure to identify and dispute old beliefs and exchange them, where relevant:

- ✓ Activating event
- ✓ Belief or expectation
- ✓ Consequence – emotion or behaviour
- ✓ Disputing the belief or expectation (B)
- ✓ Exchanging thoughts to be more rational and constructive

For more on the ABCDE model, check out Chapter 2.

Understanding the mind–body connection

In CBC, we apply what we know about neuroscience. Until the fairly recent advent of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), scientists could only research the brains of dead people. Through MRI scans, we can see the brain in action, which gives us far more information about how the brain functions. We can now watch how a thought leads not only to a feeling but also to a physiological change in the body. Scientists recognise that how we think can impact many aspects of our body, including:

- ✓ Immune system
- ✓ Blood flow
- ✓ Heart rate
- ✓ Breathing function



Stressful thoughts lead to the release of cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline in your body, suppressing the immune system. When you're fearful, your body becomes more rigid, you get butterflies in your stomach, and your hands sweat. Enthusiastic or supportive thoughts, on the other hand, cause the release of beta endorphins and human growth hormone, which make you feel physically lighter and full of energy. You can trick your brain into releasing immune-boosting endorphins by focusing your mind on a pleasant scene that relaxes your body.

Just as our thinking impacts our physiology, so our physiology impacts our thinking. When we are stressed, the brain is starved of blood and oxygen. You can show your client techniques to manage these physiological changes and enable her to develop thoughts that maintain her body's *homeostasis*, or equilibrium. Such techniques include the following:



- ✓ Breathing exercises to regulate oxygen and carbon dioxide levels
- ✓ Exercise such as walking and running
- ✓ Physical movement to relax the body, such as t'ai chi and yoga
- ✓ Meditation and progressive relaxation

See Chapters 13 and 21 for more information on keeping healthy and balanced.

CBC is based on your client's thoughts and views. Because the brain impacts every area of the body, CBC is a *holistic* approach to self-development, which means that it does not just address the mind but addresses the life, work, and health of your client. As she takes more control of her thoughts and viewpoints, she begins to manage her emotions and physiology. As she feels more balanced, this balance can have far-reaching benefits on her health, creativity, and relationships.

Accepting Our Common Humanity



One of the principles of CBC is that humans are unique and marvellous, and also make mistakes. We make, therefore, a thinking error if we expect ourselves or others to be perfect. Acceptance of human fallibility is a theme that runs through all CBC models. Accepting fallibility is not to accept failure. You can show your client that she can continue to develop herself and her performance by seeking excellence and not perfection.

Many people get into the habit of blaming themselves and others for not coming up to their own constructed standards of behaviour. When people condemn and label others as stupid or heartless, they're generally doing so from the point of view of their own needs and expectations, and frequently from the evidence of one or two specific occasions. Thus the statement can be an exaggeration. Although the person may have acted stupidly in one situation, it does not make her stupid in all situations.

Words such as should, must, and ought to denote personal rules of behaviour that your client has constructed about herself, others, and situations in general. You need to help your client to view behaviours objectively and learn to respect herself enough to be able to respect others even when they don't agree with her approach.

Here are a few examples of thoughts your client may have:

- ✔ 'I should have been able to get through all those emails last night' demonstrates that the client did not come up to her own standards. This thought can reduce confidence and self-esteem.
- ✔ 'He should have called me to tell me he was going to be late' demonstrates that the client has expectations of how other people should behave, even though she may not know whether the person had a phone on her. This expectation can lead to anger and relationship problems.
- ✔ 'I ought to have visited my mother this weekend' demonstrates that the client had beliefs about how she should treat her mother. This kind of belief can lead to guilt.



To develop more balanced viewpoints, you can challenge these statements with questions such as:

- ✔ Do all your colleagues get through their emails every day?
- ✔ Has there ever been a time when you couldn't call someone to tell her you were late?
- ✔ Is there a law that says you have to visit your mother every weekend?

Eventually, the client comes to see that every person struggles in her own way to make a success of her life, and that people have different methods of approaching situations. Like your client, other people try to do their best, even if that best does not match your client's view of best.

Developing self-acceptance

Self-acceptance is fundamental to self-esteem and self-confidence. Many clients are hard on themselves, criticising themselves for mistakes, and not appreciating their good points. You may need to explain that self-acceptance *does not* mean any of the following:

- ✔ Giving up on self-improvement
- ✔ Saying 'this is the way I am; live with it'
- ✔ Not learning from mistakes
- ✔ Not analysing what you can do differently



Self-acceptance *does* mean the following:

- ✓ Accepting that you're human and that all humans have strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Recognising that making a mistake does not mean that you're stupid or a failure, just that you happen to have made one mistake
- ✓ Recognising that you have your quirks and can be sensitive to their impact on others
- ✓ Taking responsibility for yourself and working on behaviours that you wish to adapt
- ✓ Understanding that you won't be loved and approved of by everyone – and nor will anyone else
- ✓ You can focus on your strengths and put your weaknesses in context

I cover many techniques that help you to develop your client's self-acceptance in Chapter 9.

Seeking excellence and not perfection

A principle of CBC is human fallibility. This signifies that CBC regards perfectionism as unattainable. It would be nice, of course, if life were the way we wanted it to be and if all our expectations were met – but that's in our dreams. And that's the problem. We inevitably want things to go our way and turn out the way we want them to, but it simply isn't a rational or realistic belief to expect this perfect outcome all the time. However, this belief causes a great deal of stress.

Ask your client to analyse her expectations of herself, others, and the world. You may unearth thoughts such as:

- ✓ 'I should be more efficient.'
- ✓ 'Others ought to treat me with more consideration.'
- ✓ 'Life should be easier than it is.'

The underlying assumption here is that a perfect standard exists, which has to be reached. Your job is to show your client that this standard is constructed in her own head and is generally not a scientific law of the universe.

Perfectionism is irrational: your perfect may not be the same as your colleague's. It also inspires a fear of failure, and this fear can lead to paralysis. Perfectionists can be driven, spending hours over a task that can be done to an excellent standard in less time. This kind of behaviour can play havoc with deadlines and have a knock-on effect on those with whom you are working, because it can lead to delay, especially when someone can't start her piece of work until the previous person has finished.

Excellence is a rational and achievable goal. You're endeavouring to do the best you can. This belief tends to remove fear and inspire an enthusiastic state rather than a fearful one.

In Table 1-2, I demonstrate some of the differences between perfectionism and the pursuit of excellence.

Table 1-2	
Differences Between Perfectionism and the Pursuit of Excellence	
<i>Perfectionism</i>	<i>Pursuit of Excellence</i>
You're driven by fear of failure.	You're motivated by enthusiasm.
You work out of a sense of duty.	You enjoy the challenge of new tasks.
You're nervous of change and taking risks.	You enjoy taking calculated risks and finding new ways of working.
None of your accomplishments are ever quite good enough.	You achieve a sense of satisfaction from your efforts even if they haven't worked out perfectly.
You judge others by your own perfectionist view, so no one else is ever quite good enough either.	You accept that others are doing the best they can and can develop.
Your self-esteem depends on external achievements at work.	You feel you have intrinsic value in yourself, outside your external achievements.
You seek to impress people with your knowledge.	You feel accepted without trying to impress people all the time.
If you don't achieve an important goal, you feel like a failure.	You realise that everyone makes mistakes occasionally, and, while you don't seek to fail, you accept that you can learn from experience.
You feel you must be strong and not share vulnerabilities.	You can be vulnerable and share doubts and feelings with others.
You expect others to work in your way.	You allow others to work in their own way.
You miss deadlines because you're still striving to get it just right.	You know when a piece of work is good enough.



These are very different ways of operating. The perfectionist will never be happy with her efforts. This results in low self-esteem and a fear-based approach to life and work. Enabling people to realise that it is more realistic to seek excellence enables them to free up their creativity and enjoy the process of working.