
PART A

Self

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

SESSION ONE

Thinking Our Thoughts

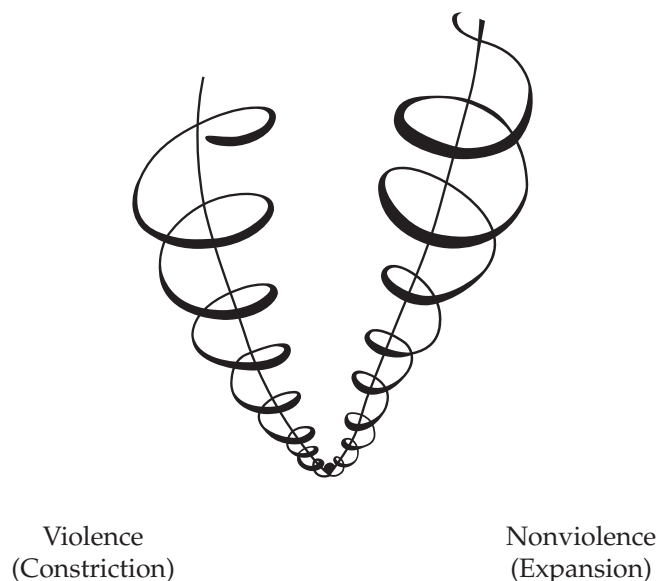
In this program, you will explore four different levels of your life, starting with the individual level, the self. Your risk for becoming a victim or victimizer (perpetrator of violence) is influenced by your personal history, including your family background, level of education, race, socioeconomic status, how you behave, and how others behave toward you. Things that contribute to risk are being abused in childhood or adulthood, mental health issues, alcohol and substance abuse, and a history of behaving aggressively (World Health Organization, 2004).

In Part A, you will be examining how your individual thoughts and feelings influence your behaviors. This will provide you with an opportunity to get to know yourself better. The goals for Session One are:

- To examine typical habits in thinking and
- To understand how our thoughts influence our feelings and behaviors.

Spirals of Violence and Nonviolence

(Transformation)



The Spirals of Violence and Nonviolence

These spirals illustrate violence and nonviolence. The downward one on the left is the spiral of violence. The line in the middle represents aggression, violence, or use of force. As violence becomes more a part of your life, it constricts and limits your life. For victims, it may mean being shut off from contact with family members, friends, and social services—feeling isolated and alone. A victim also may be afraid to go to places and people who can help. For perpetrators or victimizers, it may mean trying to keep the violence a secret and hiding from law enforcement agencies. For both, the inner self (thoughts, feelings, and values) becomes more limited and hidden, and the outer self (behavior and relationships) becomes more isolated.

The upward spiral on the right is the spiral of nonviolence. The center line still represents violence, because, even if you are in the process of recovery or healing, the experience of violence does not go away. However, in the upward spiral, there is increasing room for growth and healing and many other life experiences. As you stop participating in aggressive or violent behavior and you begin to heal from the violence, the possibility of experiencing meaningful change in your life is created. The goal is to become whole: to have your inner self connected to your outer self. Then there can be truth and integrity in your life.

Cognitive Distortion

When your mind convinces you of something that isn't really true, it is called a "cognitive distortion." Such thoughts are also called "thinking errors," "negative self-talk," "twisted thinking," and "distorted information processing." Such distortions or inaccurate thoughts usually are used to reinforce negative thinking or emotions. Here are some examples of this type of thinking:

- *Overgeneralizing*: You tend to speak in terms of something "always" or "never" happening. For example, if you fail to do something, you may say, "I never remember things I'm supposed to." You may also interpret events in this way and say things like, "Why does this stuff always happen to me?"
- *All-or-nothing thinking*: Things are either right or wrong, black or white, great or horrible. There are only either/or categories; there is no middle ground or gray area. For example, if something doesn't live up to your expectations in some area, you may see it as a total failure.
- *Mental filtering*: You can let one fact or situation or event color your view of things so that you see everything through a darkened lens. For example, if you have been abused by a male, you may think that all men are rotten or dangerous.
- *Disqualifying the positive*: You may ignore or explain away any positive facts or experiences. If you can rationalize that something good "doesn't count" for some reason, you can maintain a negative belief system.
- *Personalizing*: You may take responsibility or blame for something bad that you had no control over. You may tell yourself, "It must be my fault somehow."
- *Mind reading*: You may decide that someone doesn't like you or thinks she is better than you without getting to know the person or checking your assumptions if you do. When you interpret someone's facial expressions or nonverbal communication with no other input, you are projecting what is in your mind, not the other person's.
- *Magnifying or minimizing*: You may give something more credit or more importance than it deserves or you may do the opposite and give it less credit or less importance than is actually called for. Sometimes this is called "making a mountain out of a molehill" or the reverse.
- *Jumping to conclusions*: You may decide early on that something is bad or will turn out badly, even without evidence to support that belief. You may make assumptions about things without waiting for more information. For example, if something is

missing, you may assume that a particular person has stolen it before you have looked for it thoroughly.

- *Fortune telling:* When you assume that you know how things will turn out before they even happen, you are fortune telling. If you are looking at things through a darkened lens, you probably will predict a doom-and-gloom scenario.
- *Emotional reasoning:* You may let your feelings direct your interpretation of things. For example, if you are down, you may interpret things people do or say in a negative way. If you are feeling “up,” you may see things through “rose-colored glasses.” In short, “I feel it; therefore, it must be true.”
- *Using “should” and “must” statements:* Your expectations may be directed by a rigid list of rules about how you and others should behave. If you think that you “should” or “should not” be a certain way, you may feel guilt when you don’t think you live up to that expectation. Similarly, you may frequently be disappointed when others do not live up to the rules. If you use “should,” “must,” and “ought” often in your thinking or conversation, you may be setting yourself up for feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment.
- *Labeling and mislabeling:* This is a mental and verbal way of doing the above types of thinking. Instead of seeing a person or a behavior or an event as it is, you give it a label that allows you to dismiss or degrade it, in order to reinforce your negative outlook or interpretation. For example, if a person makes a mistake, you may label that person as “stupid.”

What are the three types of cognitive distortion that you have used most often?

My Typical Distorted Thinking

When we have thoughts about a situation, we usually have feelings about it, too. Thoughts and feelings both affect our behaviors. The table shows some examples.

Situation <i>What happened?</i>	Thoughts <i>What did you think?</i>	Feelings <i>How did you feel?</i>	Behavior <i>What did you do?</i>
A relationship ended.	No one will ever love me again. <i>(All-or-nothing thinking)</i>	Sad, lonely	Isolated myself so I didn't meet anyone new.
I started drinking or using again.	I will never be sober. <i>(Magnifying)</i>	Guilty, discouraged	Kept drinking/using.
My boss told me to do something a certain way.	He thinks he knows it all. <i>(Jumping to conclusions)</i>	Angry and frustrated with myself	I didn't listen to him.
	He thinks I am stupid. <i>(Mind reading)</i>	Threatened	Started to cry.
	He's an overcontrolling jerk. <i>(Labeling and mislabeling)</i>	Angry with the boss, resentful	Did it my way.

In the empty boxes, write in some typical situations and behaviors in your own life. Fill in all the columns for each of the examples you provide. These can be situations in prison or out of prison.

Situation <i>What happened?</i>	Thoughts <i>What did you think?</i>	Feelings <i>How did you feel?</i>	Behavior <i>What did you do?</i>

Feelings Inside and Outside

Sometimes we don't show on the outside how we are feeling on the inside. For example, you may smile at others when you are really feeling sad or scared. Or you may act angry when you are actually feeling vulnerable or scared. Getting your outside self to match your inside self is one way to feel more whole.

Can you recall a time when you felt one way inside but looked different to those around you? Draw or write about your experience below.

Feelings inside:



What you show others:

The DVD of *What I Want My Words To Do To You*

This film was made at the Bedford Hills Prison in the State of New York. A famous writer named Eve Ensler, who wrote the play called *The Vagina Monologues*, ran a writing group for women at Bedford. Your group will watch parts of the film in various sessions. By the time you complete this program, you will have seen the entire film.

Understanding Keila

In the session, the group used some of the ideas about the inner and outer selves, and how thoughts and feelings can affect behavior, and applied them to Keila's situation. What are your answers to the following questions?

- What were Keila's thoughts that day?

- What was she feeling?

- What did she do?

- We know that values and beliefs, as well as thoughts and feelings, create the inner self. Do we know any more about these in Keila's life?
- How did her inner self—her thoughts, feelings values, and beliefs—affect her behavior?
- What might have been different if she had had a “container” for her feelings?
- How could she have handled the situation differently?

Understanding Me

As you think about the event that brought you here, you will realize that your ways of thinking, your assumptions, your values, and your feelings all influenced your behavior. Please take a few moments to think about the crime that brought you into the criminal justice system and then begin to fill in the answers.

- What were your thoughts that day?

- What were some of your beliefs?

- What were you feeling?

- What were your actions?

- How could you have handled the situation differently?

Assignment

1. As you go through the week, focus your awareness on your thinking to see if any of the cognitive distortions or “twisted thinking” we have discussed occur for you. Keep a record of them here. Try to find one, two, or three occurrences to add to the examples you gave on page 30. Record what you think and how you feel.
2. Think about ways in which you might use the container exercise.

3. Finish writing the information about your feelings, beliefs, and actions on pages 34 and 35.
4. What is one thing you will leave this group with? What have you learned or realized?

