

1

Understanding CBT for Goal Achievement

**‘People are not disturbed by events but by the
view they hold about them’.**

Epictetus, Stoic philosopher c. AD 75

This chapter will introduce you to some of the basic ideas and principles of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and how you can use it to help you achieve your goals. First, though, what does CBT actually mean?

Cognitive simply means our ‘thinking processes’: how we think, how we acquire information and knowledge, how we store it in our head, how we evaluate it and how we base some of our decisions on it.

Behaviour means our action or reaction to something. It’s the doing bit. Our behaviour can be conscious or unconscious (out of our conscious awareness). In CBT, the word ‘behaviour’ comes from a branch of psychology called ‘behaviourism’, which is concerned with what can be observed rather than what can be speculated or assumed. It is based on what you have learned and become accustomed to, how this affects your actions and feelings and how you can unlearn what you have learned in order to change.

Therapy means the treatment for a health problem, after a diagnosis or an assessment has been made.

CBT is one of the counselling therapies that examines how our thinking, attitudes, beliefs, opinions and behaviour are formed; how they affect our success, our lives and feelings and how changing them impacts on our performance. The ideas stem from both ancient and modern thinking in philosophy, science, psychology, common sense and humanity.

Here are some of the basic principles central to CBT. Many may be shared by other therapeutic approaches but the combination of these principles goes some way towards understanding CBT.

THE EMOTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY PRINCIPLE

**‘People are not disturbed by events but by the
view they hold about them’.**

This principle is at the heart of nearly all emotional and behavioural change. It can be challenging because you may believe that it’s what has happened to you that ‘makes’ you feel how you feel and do what you do in the here and now.

I hope that by questioning this you will learn that what you believe may be stopping you from empowering yourself to move forward with your life. This in turn may help you in the pursuit of your desired goals.

Is it true that events, situations or people make us feel what we feel?

First, let's look at the popular notion that your feelings are 'caused' by events, situations or other people.

Think of a past event that you think 'made' you feel and do something. By this logic the only way you can change your feelings now is to wish the event had not happened in the first place.

Maybe you think there's someone else who has 'made' you feel and act in a certain manner. In which case, the only way you can change your feelings now is to get that person from the past to undo what they did or said. And if that person is now deceased, how can this be done?

Believing that the past, or a particular situation or person, causes our feelings today means that no one would ever be able to move forward or to change. We would all be totally stuck without any possibility or hope of ever changing anything. We would be slaves to the things that had happened to us or the people we had been involved with.

Can you imagine what it would be like if everyone felt hurt every time they experienced a rejection of some sort?

Rejection = Hurt

10 people rejected = 10 people feeling hurt

100 people rejected = 100 people feeling hurt

1,000 people rejected = 1,000 people feeling hurt

As an example, when you experience rejection you *might* feel hurt. However, if you believe that your feelings are caused by others, you may then believe that being rejected by someone is the cause of your hurt feelings. But don't some of us experience different emotions if rejected by someone we like? Maybe anger, sadness, depression or relief?

In fact, different people may feel different emotions when they experience the same event:

- Some people feel hurt.
- Some people feel angry.
- Some people feel depressed.
- Some people couldn't care less.

Why do different people feel different things and what is at the heart of their feelings?

Is it true that events or people make us do what we do?

Let's think about what we do and assume that situations or people make us behave as we do.

A colleague criticizes you = You start avoiding them

If it is true that a colleague's criticism 'made' you avoid them, this means that every criticism made by your colleague would have the same effect on everyone. It means that avoidance is the only possibility whenever your colleague criticizes you, or anyone else for that matter.

- A colleague criticizes 10 people = 10 people avoid them
- A colleague criticizes 100 people = 100 people avoid them
- A colleague criticizes 1,000 people = 1,000 people avoid them

Does this make sense?

The problem is that people say, ‘he made me do it’ or ‘she made me lose my temper’. It is as if they have absolutely no control over their behaviour. Once again, if we do not have a part to play in how we behave, then we would be completely stuck, unable to move forward, learn or do anything useful. Is this what you see happening to everyone around you?

So, what provokes your feelings and behaviour? Most of the time the simple answer is that *you* do. You provoke your feelings and actions by the way you think, the attitudes you’ve formed, the habits you no longer question and the beliefs you hold.

This is the principle of Emotional Responsibility: You are largely responsible for the way you feel and act.

The principle of emotional responsibility can be challenging, particularly if you are going through a difficult time or have experienced trauma or personal tragedy. It’s natural to feel angry, sad, depressed or hurt in response to accidents, illness and other challenges in life, but if you get stuck in these feelings then you can change them.

The thought manifests as the word; The word manifests as the deed; The deed develops into habit;

And habit hardens into character;

So watch the thought and its ways with care. (Buddha)

The way you think about something affects how you feel and how you behave. Here are some examples:

- If you think that your partner's late arrival for dinner proves that you are not lovable, then you might feel hurt and sulk.
- If you think that your partner was nasty and selfish because they arrived late for dinner, then you might feel angry and shout.
- If you think that your partner's late arrival for dinner is no big deal, then you can feel calm about it and ask what happened.

This shows that it is not the situation or what happens to us that provokes our feelings and behaviour. It is the way we think about the situation. The way we think about something can then influence how we behave.

THE BEHAVIOURAL PRINCIPLE

CBT considers behaviour as significant in maintaining or in changing psychological states. If, for example, you avoid some event, such as giving a presentation to your team, then you will deny yourself the opportunity to disconfirm your negative thoughts about yourself or your capabilities. Furthermore, avoidance only sabotages what you want to achieve. Changing what you do is often a powerful way of helping you change your thoughts and emotions, and ultimately what you can achieve.

THE 'HERE AND NOW' PRINCIPLE

Traditional therapies take the view that looking at problems in the here and now is superficial. They consider that successful treatment must uncover the childhood developmental issues, hidden motivations and unconscious conflicts that are

supposed to lie at the root of the problem. These approaches argue that treating the current problem rather than the supposed hidden ‘root’ causes would result in symptom substitution, that is, the problem would resurface in another form later on. There is little evidence to support this idea. Behaviour therapy also showed that such an outcome, although possible, was very rare.

CBT offers theories about how current problems are being maintained and kept alive and how they can be changed.

THE SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLE

CBT offers scientific theories. Scientific theories are designed in a way so that they can be tested. CBT has been evaluated rigorously using evidence rather than just clinical anecdote. This is important for a couple of reasons:

- The treatment can be founded on sound and well-established theories.
- Ethically, CBT therapists can have confidence in the therapy they are advocating.

Exercise

List five things that people manage to change about themselves despite doing it badly at first (for example, learning to drive).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- 4.
- 5.

List five positive things that you have learned in your life despite experiencing difficulties (for example, moving on from a failed relationship).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Think of an inspirational person who has overcome enormous obstacles by having a powerful and constructive attitude and positive behaviour.

Truth

In CBT we examine our thoughts and behaviours to check if they are realistic. This means we judge and evaluate an event based on facts rather than perception, which can be flawed. Why do you think that, when an accident occurs, the police take statements from a number of people instead of asking just one person what happened?

Truth is about being consistent with reality whilst striving for the goals that are important to you. It's about acknowledging and accepting the existence of the possibilities you dislike while persisting in your efforts to reach your goals.

Exercise

How many 'F's can you count in the following statement?

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RESULTS OF YEARS OF
SCIENTIFIC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE EXPERIENCE
OF MANY YEARS.

Did you see 2 or 3 'F's?

There are 6.

I will leave you to find the rest but simply draw your attention to the word 'of'.

The above is a popular example used to highlight the fact that we don't necessarily see the whole truth. We interpret what we see and experience. What you have learnt from this simple but effective exercise is that your version of the truth can be faulty. It is important to question the truth that you hold about yourself and your ability just in case you are seeing only a few of the good things and missing many others. Sometimes we only see a few 'F's, when in reality there are more. If the 'F's represent your positive abilities and qualities, how many of the good qualities are you seeing?

This is just one of the reasons why in CBT we question the validity or reality of our thoughts.

Common sense

In CBT we suggest taking a logical and common-sense approach to thinking.

This does not mean that you become totally unfeeling and emotionless.

Logic or common sense is about the purity of our reasoning skills, whether a conclusion correctly follows a premise or assumption.

For example, which one of these two statements makes sense?

A. Some men shave their heads . . . therefore anyone with a shaved head is a man.

B. Some men shave their heads . . . but it doesn't mean everyone with a shaved head is a man.

Clearly statement B makes sense. In statement A, the fact that some men shave their heads does not connect logically to the assumption that anyone with a shaved head is a man. Some women, children and teenagers also have shaved heads.

Logical thinking is useful because we all have the ability to think and use common sense. In CBT, using your common sense well can lead you to form better conclusions about yourself.

Some people think like this about certain goals:

*I failed at achieving
my goal*

*therefore, I am a total
failure as a person*

Others think like this:

<i>I failed at achieving my goal</i>	<i>but that doesn't mean I am a total failure. I am fallible but worthwhile nevertheless. I will learn from my failure and improve.</i>
--	---

Which of the above two statements makes sense?

Helpfulness

Finally, in CBT we look at how helpful your thoughts are to you and in the pursuit of your goals. Your thoughts are responsible for how you feel about yourself and your abilities, so it is more helpful for you to have constructive and goal-oriented thoughts than not.

Exercise

Reflect on some thoughts you often have about yourself and your abilities. See if they are helpful to you. For example, you might think 'I'm not very good at talking in front of people'.

How can you make your thoughts more realistic, logical and helpful? For example, 'I could improve by facing my fears slowly and gradually'.

TYPES OF THOUGHTS

In CBT we draw a distinction between different types of thoughts. Not all of our thoughts are involved with our

feelings and behaviours. The thoughts that are involved in our feelings tend to have some sort of an assumption or judgement about ourselves, others or the world.

There are two particular types of thought that are involved in our emotions or feelings.

1. Inferences

Inferences are assumptions you make about the things that matter to you, which can be about yourself, others or about the world. For example, if your boss contradicted you during a meeting that was important to you, you might think, 'he is undermining me'. Then you would be making an inference. This means that in that moment you have gone beyond the facts and made an assumption about what happened because it was significant to you. In this example you would have an emotional response: you may feel annoyed, concerned, anxious, angry or some other negative emotion.

The issue is whether your boss was undermining you or simply expressing a different opinion. In order to find out you would need to gather more information and evidence. Some of our inferences are accurate and some are not. In this example your inference has not been tested in reality.

If you had thought 'he has a different opinion, he is not undermining me', then your emotional response would be different.

Which of the following thoughts will lead to an emotion?

1. *I saw a woman getting on a bus.*
2. *My workmates are ignoring me.*
3. *I'm a failure.*

Thoughts 2 and 3 will lead to an emotional reaction. The second thought is an inference. It may or may not be true. Your colleagues have been ignoring you – they may just have been very busy with work. You need more information to assess the accuracy of the conclusion. But if you conclude that you were being ignored, then you would have an emotional reaction. Inferences influence our emotions but do not fully provoke them.

The third thought also leads to an emotional response but it is more profound in its conclusion. ‘I’m a failure’ is an evaluative thought.

2. Evaluations or beliefs

Inferences play a crucial role in shaping the emotions we experience; however, they do not fully provoke them. For instance, the inferences made during states of anger differ from those experienced during feelings of anxiety, guilt or depression. By increasing awareness of your inferences, you can better understand the types of emotions you are experiencing. Evaluations, on the other hand, are thoughts that are fully involved in provoking emotions and feelings. When you have an evaluative thought, you are making a judgement about yourself, about others or about the world. For simplicity, let’s call evaluative thoughts ‘beliefs’. These are fundamental in provoking either constructive feelings and helpful behaviours or destructive feelings and sabotaging behaviours.

If you judge yourself as ‘useless’ when you are thinking about applying for a job, this may provoke additional thoughts such as ‘I won’t get the job’. When you hold such a belief, you will probably feel anxious when you go for the interview.

In a state of anxiety, you will probably not perform as well as you are capable of doing and the likelihood of you getting the job decreases dramatically.

THEORY MADE SIMPLE

Putting these principles and philosophies into a theoretical model helps you to see more easily how feelings, different thoughts, behaviours and events all interact with one another.

The easiest is the ‘ABC’ model of emotional response.



A = Activating Event (or incident)

B = Belief

C = Consequences

The ‘A’ can be:

1. *Real or imaginary*

The incident can be an actual event, such as losing someone or something important to you, or an imaginary one. It could also be an inference – a hunch – like imagining that someone is going to reject you before any rejection has taken place.

2. *External or internal*

External events are things that happen outside of your body, for example: someone’s death, being rejected, failing at something or experiencing an accident.

Internal events start inside your body, for example: your thoughts, images, emotions, fantasies, memories and bodily sensations.

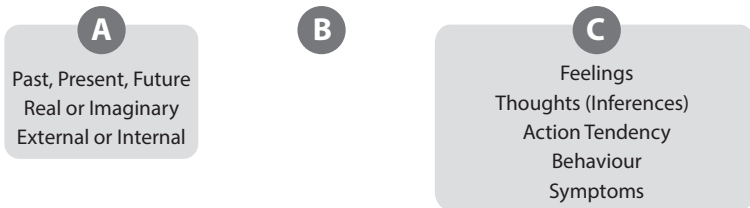
Understanding CBT for Goal Achievement

3. *About the past, present or future*

The event could be something that has happened in the past, something that is happening now or something that could happen in the future.

Key points to remember:

- ‘A’ can be an internal past event that was real. For example, losing someone you loved. All past events are internal because they exist in our memories.
- ‘A’ can be real, future and external. For example, making a speech at your friend’s wedding next week.
- It is not the event itself that provokes your emotions but what you tell yourself or what you infer about it *now* that provokes your feeling.
- It’s easy to assume that A causes C but that would not be accurate.



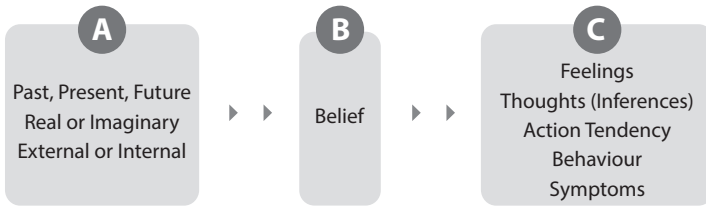
When an event starts at ‘A’, you will feel, behave, think and experience symptoms. Because this happens quickly, you think ‘A’ causes ‘C’ (Consequences). So you may use expressions like ‘he *made* me feel angry’ or ‘my job *makes* me depressed’. It is as if we are not responsible for our own emotions.

Remember the 100 and 1,000 people example earlier?

What is at the heart of your feelings is the ‘B’ (Belief) between ‘A’ and ‘C’. So it is your belief (evaluation) about the activating

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

event that provokes your emotions, thoughts, action tendencies, behaviours and symptoms.



Beliefs

According to the ABC model we can have two types of beliefs – rational and irrational or healthy and unhealthy.

1. *Healthy beliefs:*

- Are flexible
- Are based on the things that you want, like, desire and prefer
- Tend to make sense – they are logical and consistent with reality
- Mean accepting that sometimes you may not get what you want
- Detach human worth from success or failure
- Lead to emotional well-being and set you up for goal achievement.

2. *Unhealthy beliefs:*

- Are unrealistic
- Can be self-critical
- Are not based on acceptance or acknowledgement of reality
- Do not acknowledge or accept other possibilities (even though reality shows that other possibilities exist)

Understanding CBT for Goal Achievement

- Cause a mismatch between internal and external realities
- Lead to emotional disturbance and set you up for failure and goal sabotage.

Compare the following statements:

‘I would like it to be nice and sunny every day when I wake up but I accept there is a chance that it might not be’.

‘The day **MUST** be nice and sunny when I wake up’.

The second example is unhealthy and irrational because it is unrealistic. Unhealthy beliefs do not make logical sense. What makes sense is to have a more healthy belief, such as: ‘I would like the day to be nice and sunny when I wake up, but it doesn’t mean that it **HAS** to be’.

Healthy negative emotions and self-helping behaviours

It is easy to understand that if you hold a healthy belief about yourself or about certain things in your life, this would increase your chances of success. However, success is never guaranteed, so if you don’t succeed you might feel upset and sad. Having healthy beliefs means that, while you might feel sad or upset if you failed, you would lick your wounds, dust yourself off and focus back on your goal. Instead of feeling guilty, you might feel regret and look at ways of improving. Instead of feeling unhealthy anger or rage, you might feel annoyed. You would behave assertively without lashing out in a destructive way or giving up. You would believe that you are not a failure as a human being but rather that you are a fallible human being who is able to learn and improve.

Unhealthy negative emotions and self-destructive behaviours

It is not difficult to understand that if you have unhealthy beliefs about yourself and about certain things in your life, your feelings and behaviours are not going to be healthy.

According to the ABC model, unhealthy beliefs provoke unhealthy negative emotions and self-damaging or destructive behaviours. Depression, anxiety, guilt and rage are examples of unhealthy negative emotions.

ANXIETY VERSUS CONCERN

Unhealthy Negative Emotion	What the belief is about	Healthy Negative Emotion
Anxiety	A threat or danger	Concern
How you think		How you think
You exaggerate the overall effect of the threat.		You keep the effect of the danger in perspective.
You think that you won't be able to deal with the danger.		You have a balanced view about your ability to deal with the threat.
You see the glass as half empty.		You see the whole glass and focus on the full part.
Your thoughts are not constructive.		Your thoughts are solution-focused and constructive.
What you do or what you feel like doing		What you do or what you feel like doing
You run away physically.		You face the threat.

Understanding CBT for Goal Achievement

You run away mentally.

You deal with the potential danger.

You do superstitious things to get rid of the threat.

You medicate and numb your feelings (e.g., with alcohol).

You seek assurances from others.

DEPRESSION VERSUS SADNESS

Unhealthy Negative Emotion

What the belief is about

Healthy Negative Emotion

Depression

Loss or failure

Sadness

How you think

You only focus on negatives since the loss or failure.

How you think

You think of both the negatives and positives of the loss or failure.

You think of all the other past losses and failures.

You do not dwell on past losses and failures.

You think you are a failure, helpless.

You do not see yourself as a failure or as helpless. You think that you can help yourself to move forward.

You think the future is hopeless, bleak and full of misery.

You have hope for the future.

What you do or what you feel like doing

You pull away from other people.

You withdraw into your head.

You stop looking after yourself and your environment.

You get rid of your emotions in destructive ways (e.g., alcohol or overeating).

What you do or what you feel like doing

You express how you feel about your loss or failure.

You look after yourself and your environment.

You engage in healthy behaviours.

ANGER/RAGE VERSUS ANNOYANCE

Unhealthy Negative Emotion

What the belief is about

Healthy Negative Emotion

Anger or rage

Loss or failure

Sadness

How you think

You exaggerate the actions of the person who has broken your personal rule.

You think the other person's intentions were malicious.

You are right and the other person is definitely wrong.

You can't see the other person's point of view.

You think of how you can get your revenge.

How you think

You are balanced about the intention behind the thing that was done.

You don't see malice.

You are open to being wrong.

You can listen to the other person's point of view.

You do not think of seeking revenge.

Understanding CBT for Goal Achievement

What you do or what you feel like doing

You physically attack.

You verbally attack.

You pay them back somehow (e.g., by ignoring them or staying silent).

You recruit allies against the other person.

What you do or what you feel like doing

You talk and behave in an assertive manner but with the right intent.

You ask the other person to make changes but you don't demand it.

HURT VERSUS SORROW

Unhealthy Negative Emotion

What the belief is about

Healthy Negative Emotion

Hurt

Someone has treated you badly. You think you deserve to be treated better.

Sorrow

How you think

You exaggerate the unfairness of your treatment.

You think the other person does not care about you.

How you think

You think in a balanced way about the unfairness.

You do not think the other person does not care about you.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

You think of yourself as unlovable or misunderstood.

You remember the other times when you felt hurt.

The other person must understand and make amends first.

What you do or what you feel like doing

You sulk and shut down.

You pick on the other person without telling them why.

You do not think of yourself as unlovable or misunderstood.

You don't think about the other times when you felt hurt.

You don't insist the other person has to make the first move.

What you do or what you feel like doing

You talk about how you feel in order to persuade the other person to behave more fairly.

GUILT VERSUS REMORSE

Unhealthy Negative Emotion

Guilt

How you think

You have definitely committed a sin.

What the belief is about

You have broken a moral code or the feelings of a significant person were hurt.

Healthy Negative Emotion

Remorse

How you think

You think about what you did and put it in context before you make a judgement.

Understanding CBT for Goal Achievement

You think you are more responsible than another.

You forget about how things were.

You deserve punishment.

What you do or what you feel like doing

You escape from your feeling in destructive ways.

You plead for forgiveness and/or punish yourself by physical deprivation.

You make unrealistic promises never to do it again.

You deny that you did anything bad.

You are balanced about your responsibility and the other person's.

You acknowledged the situation and the circumstances before you did what you did.

You don't think about retribution.

What you do or what you feel like doing

You face up to the healthy pain.

You ask for forgiveness but you do not physically punish yourself.

You make appropriate amends.

You accept your poor behaviour without making excuses.

SHAME VERSUS REGRET

Unhealthy Negative Emotion

Shame or embarrassment

What the belief is about

Something shameful has been revealed about you. Other people judge you or shun you.

Healthy Negative Emotion

Regret

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

How you think

You exaggerate the shameful information revealed.

You exaggerate the likelihood of negative judgement.

You think the negative judgement will last a long time.

You exaggerate the degree of negative judgement.

What you do or what you feel like doing

You avoid eye contact with others.

You avoid others.

You attack others who have shamed you.

You defend your ego in self-defeating ways.

You ignore others who attempt to help restore balance.

How you think

You remain compassionate about yourself. You accept yourself.

You are realistic about the likelihood of negative judgement.

You are realistic about the length of negative judgement.

You are realistic about the degree of negative judgement.

What you do or what you feel like doing

You continue participating in social events.

You accept others' intervention to restore social harmony.

UNHEALTHY ENVY VERSUS HEALTHY ENVY

Unhealthy Negative Emotion	What the belief is about	Healthy Negative Emotion
Unhealthy envy	Another person has something you find desirable	Healthy envy
How you think		How you think
You devalue the desired object.		You admit to yourself that you too desire it.
You tell yourself that you don't want it, even if you do.		You admit that you'd also want it and accept that you do.
You try to attain it, even if it is not useful to you.		You find ways to attain it only because you want it.
You put other people down and attempt to deprive them of the desired object.		You do not put other people down and you allow them to enjoy it.
What you do or what you feel like doing		What you do or what you feel like doing
You belittle the desired object verbally.		You do not belittle the desired possession.
You belittle the other person verbally.		You attempt to attain it but only if you want it.
You attempt to remove or deprive the other person from the desired possession.		
You spoil or destroy the desired object or possession.		

UNHEALTHY JEALOUSY VERSUS HEALTHY JEALOUSY

Unhealthy Negative Emotion	What the belief is about	Healthy Negative Emotion
Unhealthy jealousy	There is a potential threat to a relationship from another person	Healthy jealousy
How you think You see threat to your relationship when none exists. You think infidelity will definitely happen. You misinterpret your partner's conversation with and actions towards another as having sexual or romantic feelings.		How you think You do not see threat where none exists. You do not think infidelity will definitely happen. You do not misinterpret your partner's conversation with another as having sexual meaning.
What you do or feel like doing You have visual images of infidelity. If your partner admits to finding someone attractive, you see yourself as less attractive. You want your partner to only ever think of you.		What you do or feel like doing You do not create sexual images of your partner with another. You accept that your partner can find another attractive without thinking that you are less attractive. You accept that your partner can see others as attractive just as you can.

You will notice the heading in both the unhealthy negative emotion and the healthy negative emotion ‘What you do or what you feel like doing’. The action that we take is called ‘behaviour’ and what we feel like doing is called ‘action tendency’. To understand and check whether your emotions are unhealthily or healthily negative, it is more accurate to reflect on your action tendency. Ask yourself, ‘What did I feel like doing?’ If your answer is ‘I felt like running away’, then your emotion was anxiety. Sometimes, we behave differently to what we feel like doing and this can give the wrong assessment of emotions. For example, you agree to give a presentation at work but what you really feel like doing is avoiding and making up an excuse to get out of doing it. It’s what you feel like when you are experiencing a negative emotion that gives you an accurate way of understanding your emotions. This is significant because many people behave in accordance with their action tendencies or in accordance with their unhealthy negative emotions such as anxiety. For example, you may feel like avoiding and then you act in accordance with that feeling and choose to avoid. Unfortunately, this would leave you emotionally stuck. Whether you act on the tendency is a matter of choice. Just because you may have a tendency to act in a particular way does not mean that you have to. You can choose to act against what you feel like doing, that is, against your unhelpful action tendencies. In order to overcome emotional problems, you need to think in a healthy way and act in accordance with the helpful action tendencies. Understanding why you should act against your action tendencies during unhealthy negative emotions is crucial.

What influences the development of unhealthy or irrational beliefs?

Some clients inquire about the origins and development of their unhealthy beliefs. CBT does not propose a detailed theory on how psychological disturbance is acquired; rather, it concentrates on the factors that maintain and perpetuate the disturbance. CBT suggests that powerful biological and social forces predispose people to irrationality. It's not our fault. Everyone has an innate capacity for both rational and irrational thinking, influenced by biology and environmental factors. Albert Ellis said: 'While I have acknowledged that there are social influences operating here, I have also noted that even if everybody had had the most rational (healthy) upbringing, virtually all people would often irrationally escalate their individual and social desires into absolutist demands on (a) themselves, (b) other people and (c) the universe around them'.

CBT hypothesizes that humans have an inborn tendency towards psychological disturbance, but environmental factors also play a role. Parents, caregivers, groups and society teach children rules, values, rituals and prejudices, but do not cause their basic inclination towards these disturbances. Numerous factors influence the development of unhealthy beliefs, including traumatic events; a multiplicity of origins. This does not imply that traumatic childhood incidents are disregarded; rather, the emphasis is placed on addressing the present suffering provoked by the unhealthy beliefs about such events kept alive in the here and now.

The core principle of CBT posits that disturbances are not caused by events themselves, but by an individual's belief system. The question arises as to how individuals develop their belief systems and why disparities in attitudes can occur

between siblings who have received consistent, supportive parenting. The formation and maintenance of belief systems and personality traits are influenced by a myriad of factors, both environmental and biological. These factors encompass a variety of sources, including:

- Relationships with others
- Teachings and influences from others
- Literature and media
- Social groups and communities
- Monetary influence, social approval, accolades and compliments
- Disapproval, failures and threats
- Self-criticism
- Self-monitoring
- Modelling behaviour after others
- Conforming to the behaviours and beliefs of certain individuals or groups
- Personal goals, aspirations, ideals and the pursuit thereof
- Spiritual, religious, ideological or mystical beliefs
- Susceptibility to others' teachings
- Urges favouring freedom and individuality
- Cultural demands and expectations
- An inherent tendency to seek love, pleasure and self-actualization
- Societal values, ethics, customs and traditions defining what is good and bad.

These diverse elements contribute to the complex development of belief systems and personality in individuals.

Individuals also vary in their susceptibility to disturbance. Some people remain relatively unaffected emotionally despite being raised by uncaring or overprotective parents, while others may experience emotional damage even when raised in a 'healthy' child-rearing environment. Thus, some individuals are inherently more predisposed to disturbance than others. It is important to recognize that people's

disturbances are not solely the result of their experiences, but rather their tendency to distress themselves about those experiences. This understanding is particularly empowering, as it implies that we have the capacity to mitigate our own disturbances regarding negative experiences. As adults, we possess a remarkable capability – the power of choice and the ability to work towards altering unhealthy, irrational beliefs. We have free will!

Exercise

Identify the different emotions in the example below and work out if they are healthy or unhealthy.

Sam is a 40-year-old man and has been married for three years. He is studying towards some professional qualifications and has to sit for his final exams in a couple of months. He is finding it difficult to concentrate when he sits down to revise. He keeps thinking that he will fail and, whenever he tries to revise, he ends up doing other work. When his wife tells him to sit down and get on with it, he slams his books shut and shouts at her. After his outburst he ends up begging for forgiveness and thinks that he is a bad person.

** Answer at end of chapter*

The following diagram illustrates key points in this chapter.

Understanding CBT for Goal Achievement



* Answer to identifying emotions exercise: Anxiety – unhealthy negative emotion; Anger – unhealthy negative emotion; Guilt – unhealthy negative emotion.

