

Improving your Thinking and Mood

“Men are disturbed not by things but by the views that they take of them.”

Epictetus 50 A.D. – 125 A.D.

“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

Shakespeare’s Hamlet

No matter what happens you can always make matters worse.

How you think is important.

Let’s focus on the role of thinking in depression. No matter what the other causes of depression may contribute, thinking always plays some role and can always make matters worse.

- If you are depressed because of a biochemical imbalance you will still be thinking about your life experiences.
- If you have too much stress you will certainly think about the stressful events.
- If you learned to be depressed then your usual pattern of thinking will maintain it.

Thinking is always occurring, and therefore plays a fundamental role in creating not only depression, but all of our other emotions as well.

Understanding how our thinking creates our moods and behaviour is an area of cognitive psychology. Trying to improve our thinking to improve our moods and behaviour is cognitive therapy. Cognitive therapy provides a good model for self-help.

Cognitive Therapy: Rational Emotive Therapy (RET)

One of the easiest cognitive therapy approaches to understand is that of Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) as developed by Albert Ellis.

Rational Emotive Therapy tells us about the ABC’s of emotional life. It is practical and easy to apply.

- "A" stands for "Actual Event" and represents what happens to you in life.
- "B" stands for a "Belief" about what happened.
- "C" stand for the "Consequence" of the event on mood and behaviour.

In life it appears to us that events happen and that the events cause our moods and behaviour. It appears that A (an event) causes C (a consequence). So, if a friend breaks your trust you may be hurt and depressed. You may later tell someone that your friend has ruined your life and has made you miserable.

However, in order to be hurt and depressed you have to have a belief about what happened. You must be thinking in a certain way. It is your belief or thinking that is creating your reaction. You might be thinking, "It is horrible. It is terrible. I have been betrayed. I’ll never trust again."

A	B	C
Actual Event	Belief	Consequence
Broken Trust	It is horrible and terrible.	Hurt and Depressed

It is your belief that is creating the consequence. Change the belief and the result will change. What else could you be telling yourself? What might be a more realistic assessment of the event?

You could be thinking, "This is tough and I don't like it but I am glad that I found out now rather than later. I made a mistake, but I can learn from it. I can get through it." Your reaction might be one of hurt and disappointment which is a more realistic response. You would not fall into a state of depression and misery.

A	B	C
Actual Event	Belief	Consequence
Broken Trust	It is tough but at least I found out now. I can get through it.	Hurt and disappointed

Changing your belief changes the result.

Your belief will show up in the inner dialogue that you have with yourself. It is in the "Voice of Conscience" that talks to you about life.

This is the "Voice" that often speaks up when you look in the mirror or get on the scales. It can talk you into a lot of trouble. Learn to pay attention to this inner voice and be sure that it is realistic. Don't fall into a negative pattern of worry or self-criticism which can only make matters worse. Realistic thinking will lead to realistic consequences over which you have a sense of control.

When you do find a negative belief then you must challenge it. You do this with steps D and E of the ABC model.

A	B	C	D	E
Event	Belief	Consequence	Dispute	New Effect
Broken Trust	It is horrible and terrible. I will never get over it.	Hurt and depressed, and feeling helpless.	It is tough but I found out now. I can get through it.	Hurt and disappointed, but still in control

"D" stand for dispute. Dispute means that once you have identified a negative or irrational belief you challenge it. You dispute it. You create a more realistic view and a more supportive inner dialogue.

A new dialogue leads to "E" which stands for "Effect" – a new effect. The result of a different belief is a different response. The same event now leads to different emotions and behaviours. With a new dialogue you regain control of your life.

Remember the ABC's of emotional life. Always evaluate your "self-talk" and don't talk yourself into more trouble than you need. Remembering your ABC's will help you to make life go better.

Resources for Cognitive Therapy

[Albert Ellis Institute](#)

Home page for the originator of Rational Emotive Therapy

<http://www.rebt.org>

[Depression.com](#)

Good general resource for depression with an informative section on cognitive therapy.

Mood gym

Excellent Australian site for self help modification of thinking and behaviour patterns that contribute to depression.

<http://moodgym.anu.edu.au>

Depressionet

Australia's most visited health website. Features a chat room - potentially very useful for some patients.

<http://www.depressionet.com.au/>

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