



**Thoughts cause feelings & behaviours** This is the core theory of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. All of the methods and techniques developed over the past decades – built from melding best practice (ie best results) from different styles and practitioners– flow out of that one simple premise.

So - Events *influence* feelings and resultant behaviours, they don't *cause* them. Our thoughts cause them. So it follows that if we can change *unhealthy* thinking to *healthy* thinking, we will feel and act in a way that's more constructive and doesn't cause us unhappiness or pain or anger or self-sabotage or whatever...

*Which brings the dilemma of how to **identify** and challenge the **thoughts** that cause your upsetting emotional disturbances and self-defeating behaviours... it's trickier than you may think!*

### **Example of unhealthy thinking and consequential behaviour:**

**Event:** Your colleague snaps at you when you say good morning.

**Thought:** You think “Oh God, Tom really doesn't like me, and he certainly doesn't respect me. I'm so embarrassed. What did I do to make him treat me this way? It must have been that thing last week. Or maybe that other thing last month. Does everyone in the office feel this way about me? Of course they do! And I deserve it. I'm a xxxxxx (insert whatever negative you attach to yourself generally... you know who you are!)”.

**Feeling:** You experience emotions that reflect this thinking – eg shame, embarrassment, stress, anxiety, hurt... take your pick. And your body reacts by jumping into 'fight or flight' mode (more on this later).

**Behaviour:** Your irrational unhealthy kneejerk thinking and resultant feelings cause self-defeating / self-limiting behaviour all that day and night, and most likely into the next day and perhaps the next... – often 'avoidance' – where you withdraw and stay away from people and interactions, feel tongue tied so become quiet, can't focus so procrastinate on work so you can endlessly 'worry' and 'awfulise' this 'horrible' thing that's happened that's 'unbearable', so you can re-run it as a movie in your head, perhaps changing the script ('I should have said xxx, and then he'd say xxx') etc. – alternatively it can manifest as angry aggressive behaviour (“you *must* not treat me that way, you *should* behave appropriately and with respect, you deserve my wrath – actually everybody's going to get it because the world is '*awful*' and '*unfair*'...”).

### **CHANGE THE THINKING AND CHANGE YOUR FEELING AND BEHAVIOUR!**

Alternative healthy example:

**Event:** Your colleague snaps at you when you say good morning.

**Thought:** You think ‘Gosh, Tom is in a horrible mood! I hope it’s not me personally he’s annoyed at. Maybe he’s feeling a bit low...’.

**Feeling:** You experience emotions that reflect this thinking – eg confusion, disappointment, concern, curiosity... but you don’t assume you ‘know’ why he did what he did, or that it means you’re a bad person or a loser, or that it has anything in particular to do with *your value* at all –you even wonder if you may have misinterpreted it.

**Behaviour:** Your rational balanced thinking and resultant feelings cause you to react in positive ‘healthy’ ways.

- You immediately tell Tom you feel he just snapped at you – maybe using humour - you ask if you’ve upset him in any way, or if he’s just ‘in the horrors’ – you ask if he’s OK.
- Alternatively you say nothing and ‘let it go’ and don’t let it affect your self-esteem – you don’t carry it around with you or use it as a stick to hit yourself with all day. You don’t feel Tom’s behaviour or attitude defines who you are and your value. And you don’t feel the need to badmouth Tom to everybody else and obsess and plot to punish him for his behaviour.

Do you see how the same event can cause different feelings and behaviour depending on your ‘perception’ of the event and of yourself? If your core belief is that you are an inadequate person, you’ll be more prone to the first scenario – whereas if you have a healthy acceptance of yourself, and a belief that you’re a worthy individual, the second scenario is more likely.

**We can make it so that the second scenario is natural for us – just takes a little work! With CBT... we can identify and change...**

*Task: review the following basic CBT exercise to prove the premise...*

First: **think of an occasion when you were very emotionally upset**, when you were not happy with the way you felt or acted... then ask yourself the following questions (later on we’ll do this on paper as an exercise, for now, just think about it...):

- **What thoughts were you thinking?** (exact ‘statement’ thoughts not vague descriptions)
- **What emotions were you feeling** (eg stressed, anxious, jealous, angry etc. Can have several)
- **What was your body doing?** (were there any physiological reactions to your emotions?)
- **What did you do?** (what was your behaviour, how did you act? in a way that made the situation better or worse?)

Second: **think of an occasion when you were *delighted* with yourself** – when you were thinking positively and behaved in a way that made you proud to be you... and then apply the above list of questions to this situation!

**See the difference?** Can you make useful observations? Do you agree that your negative/positive thinking and perception and attitude caused your feelings and behaviour? This simple exercise can be done as often as you like, and will serve to help with rational evidence to dispute automatic negative thoughts in the *ABC* exercise.

**THINK ABOUT THINKING WITH CBT!**