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Think Outside The Box

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Changing Our Thoughts

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There is no doubt that what we think affects how we feel. Our everyday thoughts are those which help us navigate through our daily lives.

We also have core beliefs which act like an internal rulebook. For example, a core belief could be: If I'm not perfect, I will be rejected. In accordance to this belief, this person probably tries to be perfect in every area of their life.

Even though this core belief is unrealistic, we can come to believe it over time. Often core beliefs are based around the ideas that other people must think poorly of us, and that we need the validation of others to be worthy.

However, what we think is not necessarily true. We need to address our more superficial and deeper thoughts in order to help our self-esteem.

The banner features the Explorable logo and the text "Quiz Time!". Below this, there are three quiz cards:

- Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2 (Image: Red roller skates on a wooden deck)
- Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2 (Image: A fan of colorful pencils)
- Quiz: Flags in Europe (Image: A Ferris wheel at sunset)

[See all quizzes =>](#)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

We can change these negative thought patterns using some techniques from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). This type of therapy focuses on the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behavior, as shown in the diagram above.

One of the key ideas behind CBT is that thoughts create feelings, which create behaviors, and

these behaviors reinforce the thoughts. Once you understand this cycle, you can begin to understand how someone with low self-esteem gets stuck in a cycle of negative thinking and feeling low.

Identify Your Feelings

Have you ever considered all the feelings that may be causing or resulting from your self-esteem? Read through the following and write down any that you feel regularly: jealousy, paranoia, self-hate, indecisiveness, isolation, hopelessness, inferiority, sad, anxious, scared, shame, annoyed, or stressed.

Next to the general feeling, see if you can remember the specific feeling and behavior that accompanied the thought. For example:

Thought	Feeling	Behavior
She doesn't like me	Worthless	Isolate myself
It is my fault	Useless	Give up
I should exercise, but I don't want to	Lazy	Comfort eating

An Example

Let's take our earlier example of Susie, who had some negative thoughts about her appearance. Susie is always thinking, 'I look ugly.' This has led her to feelings of insecurity, like 'I am unlovable and worthless.' Your behavior reflects your feelings. You might start avoiding certain activities where you feel your appearance will be judged, or you might start dieting in the hope to change the way you look.

Break the Vicious Cycle

Recognizing how your thoughts, feelings and behavior interact is a crucial step in breaking negative patterns. These patterns of thought are called schemas, and willingly or not they influence everything we do.

To break this cycle, we need to think of alternatives to our thoughts and feelings. On a big piece of paper, or on your computer, jot down these headings (or you can download one [here](#) [1].)

Every day of next week, you need to write in your table. With practice, it does become easier, and you will be able to think of more alternative thoughts the more you do it.

The idea behind doing this exercise is to train ourselves to think of realistic and positive thoughts, which lead to happier feelings and more productive behaviors.

If you can continue this exercise for a month, you're going to be far more aware of how your thoughts and feelings influence each other, and how you can create a more positive reality for yourself, every single day.

Situation	Feelings	Negative thought	Evidence "for"	Evidence "against"	Alternative thoughts
Sitting alone at lunch time	Worthless and unlovable	She doesn't like me	Sitting by myself	She has never done or said anything that explicitly says she doesn't like it. Plus, she is doing a lunch-time club.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe she's busy. • I don't need others' approval to show I'm worthy • I enjoy people watching and my solitude • I have the choice to ask if she would like to have lunch one day.

Change Your Perspective

Another technique we can use to re-frame our thoughts and feelings is called the Nevertheless Technique. From the exercise above, you may have noticed that a thought may lead to a negative feeling e.g 'She didn't have lunch with me, so I am unworthy.' By using one simple little word, nevertheless, we can change our perspective so that we don't blame events and other people for how we feel. For example:

Although she didn't have lunch with me, nevertheless I'm still a worthy and likeable person.

Try writing your own sentences using some of the scenarios from your chart.

Key Points

- Our thoughts, feelings and behaviors all influence each other.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy is a way of addressing negative patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavior.
- By breaking unhelpful patterns of thought, we change our core beliefs.
- We can use strategies such as charting and the nevertheless technique to alter our cognition.

- Changing how we think takes practice, but it is possible over time.
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Source URL: <https://explorable.com/e/changing-our-thoughts>

Links

[1] <http://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/Services/Documents/CBT%20Simple%20Thought%20Record.pdf>