

## **How to apply CBT to everyday problems**

When you feel troubled by something, you take out a pad of paper and write down what it is you think is troubling you. You remain brutally honest with yourself, even though it may appear obvious why you are troubled and feeling this way, and a useless exercise to write it down in the first place. Yet this is the first step. Honesty. And it is harder to do, and to actually pinpoint than we think.

EX:

I am feeling <sad/troubled/despaired/angry/upset/afraid> about <issue X>.

Next step is to write down all the reasons why you feel this way.

EX:

I am feeling <angry and upset> about <the injustice of my sibling freeloading off my family>.

You list your rationale for the above:

EX:

- It is unfair that he gets a free ride while others work hard.
- It is a burden to my elder parent with him leaching off them and I don't like to see him doing that.
- etc.

Now you ask yourself what physical evidence do I have that the above suppositions are true, and (b) how beneficial are these assertions in my life?

EX:

- My sister works hard at her job to support two kids while my brother has no kids, no job and a free ride. It makes me feel angry.
- My mother is being drained of energy and spends more energy catering to him than he does caring for her.
- etc.

Now comes the more difficult part where you challenge your assertions and ask yourself how accurate are these statements? You beat down your arguments and find counterexamples and refutations, if possible, of your responses above.

EX:

→ Oddly I notice my mother benefits somewhat from the company of my brother, even it is extra work for her because it gives her a purpose during her day. It is actually better for her to be with a family member than to be alone at her age.

→ It is easier for my sister to find a full-time job than it is my brother, so maybe it's not so easy to compare the two. There are many people who are unemployed in this world or don't work and it's not my station to judge everyone's position in life that they should be working in the way that I think they should.

→ etc.

You can go a step further by challenging your rationale for why you feel justified in feeling the emotion.

EX:

→ Is it my job to play policeman and make my sibling step up to the plate and for me to play the social justice warrior?

→ How much does it benefit me to do so? Is it worth all this emotional energy I am expending or am I just spitting out useless frustrated energy?

You keep asking yourself these questions and more questions about your 'rightness' in nursing this emotion. Honesty pays. The more brutally honest you can be, the better. You play devil's advocate and challenge the deepest layers of your emotion.

EX:

→ Does it make me feel like a better person to judge others? How so?

→ If people do something that I don't agree with, I have to step up and change them.

→ How is this benefiting me? How is it benefiting them?

→ How is it benefiting me to be angry about others not doing what I think they should be doing?

Maybe your ultimate conclusion after some thought is:

→ It's not really my role in life to play policeman in other people's lives. I don't really feel moved to do that.

→ It makes more sense to let my mother make her own decisions about who she wants to live with. It's not my duty to impose my own ideal upon her. If that's the case, why should I feel angry emotions about my sibling day in day out?

→ etc.

To recap, you go through each your reasons/assertions above and challenge them. If you find refutations you commit them to memory; you revise as necessary. You review them each day and use them as tools to defuse the seed that is driving the unwanted emotion. Over time, the emotion will tend to dissipate; it is not as troublesome any more, or at all, because you realize that the emotion is founded on ghosts: things that are not serving you.

Here is an analogy: when a relationship no longer serves you, that you no longer love the person in the same way, it is time to call it and be on your own or find a new partner. In the same way you give up unproductive emotions and adopt new, positive ways of thinking and feeling. This is not a catch-all healing trope of 'positive thinking'. The power in CBT lies in the fact that you've put in efforts to hack out your own personal reasons for something new and truthful in your life that drives a whole new path of being and makes it impossible to continue on the same path of dysfunction. This is the holistic way of healing: when you better your life by refuting flawed thinking, replacing it with more beneficial ideas that bring in more light, energy and constructive patterns and emotions.

This is a fun exercise to do with friends: sit down with your buddies and have them poke holes in your logic, and vice versa. CBT shared sessions can help expedite the healing process and overcome hitches in life. The refutation process is difficult to do on

one's own, granted, because it's harder to remain unbiased and objective when we're too close to the problem. An unbiased and perceptive observer, particularly someone who understands us, is ideal for helping challenge flawed thinking and asking the key questions. Once we've found the refutations, we have the tools necessary to change the pattern of thinking causing the troubling emotions. You simply apply this new insight whenever the emotion arises. Slowly, with patience, the behavioral pattern changes and you can feel liberated from a specific negative emotion. This method requires no expensive shrinks, no drugs, no dramas, no over-the-top therapies. It is completely natural, it is simple to understand and relies only on honesty, diligence and a desire to be free of an unproductive emotion.