

Thoughts, Emotions, and Beliefs (Steps 8–10)

12 Steps for Recovery from Adversity, Trauma, and Abuse (Part 3) Pursuing Podcast Episode 7

April 15, 2019

Notes	
12 Steps for Recovery from Adversity, Trauma, and Abuse	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>We admit that we are powerless over another's choices, behaviors, and commitment to healing, while recognizing and claiming the power we have over our own choices, behaviors, and healing.</i>2. <i>We come to believe that there is within us an innate ability to heal and an inner knowing that can guide us on our healing journey.</i>3. <i>We make a decision to trust in the process of healing.</i>4. <i>We make a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves.</i>5. <i>We acknowledge and admit the truth of the experience, our role in that experience, and the role of others involved.</i>6. <i>We forgive ourselves for our role in this experience and make amends with ourselves as necessary. We forgive others for their role in this experience and release them to their own healing.</i>7. <i>We fully commit to doing the work that is necessary for healing.</i>8. <i>We honor our emotions by acknowledging them, allowing them, and accessing the information they hold.</i>

9. *We identify core beliefs that have led us to this place, challenge them, and change those that hinder our growth and healing.*

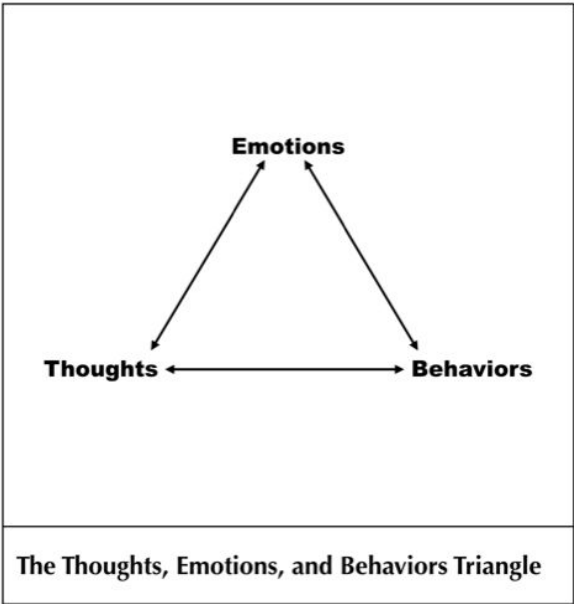
10. *We identify and restructure distorted thought patterns.*

11. *We commit to behaviors that are consistent with our healthier emotions, thoughts, and beliefs.*

12. *In our pursuit of progression, we continue to do our own work and bring awareness and support to others on their healing journey.*

Introduction

- Part of the approach and processes in these steps stem from both Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).
- Our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interconnected and influence each other. This relationship is best illustrated by the Thoughts, Emotions, and Behaviors Triangle:



Step 8:

We honor our emotions by acknowledging them, allowing them, and accessing the information they hold.

Main Points:

1. Understanding what emotions are and checking our beliefs about emotions enables us to process them in a way that supports and facilitates our healing.

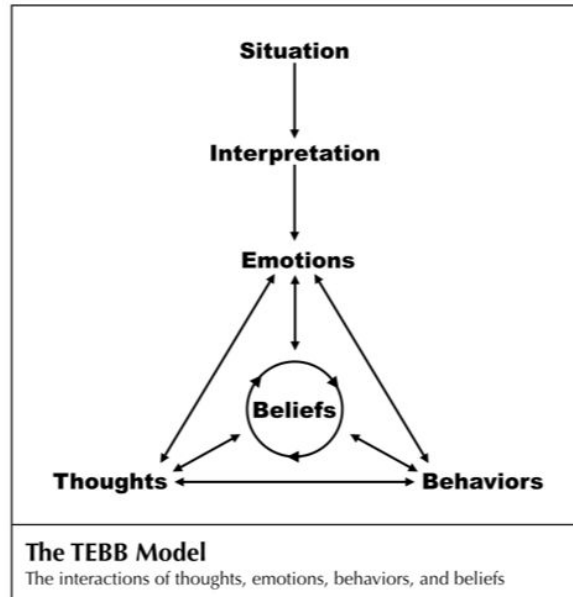
2. Emotions are comprised of more than just feelings—emotions include physiological reactions, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings.
3. Avoiding feelings does not mean they are gone, they are simply no longer in our awareness, which means they are affecting our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects unchecked. Our willingness to process our emotions makes sure we are in control rather than being controlled by them.

Details:

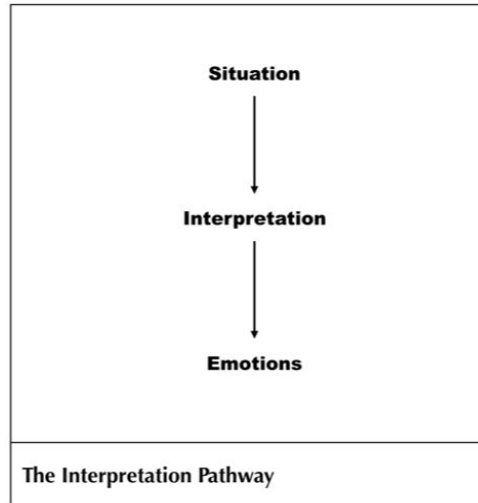
- Myths about emotions:
 - There is a right way and a wrong way to feel in every situation.
 - It's not good or healthy to feel angry.
 - Happy or emotionally healthy people don't experience painful emotions.
 - Feeling sad (or another emotion) is weak.
 - Painful emotions are destructive.
 - If other's don't approve of how you feel, you shouldn't feel this way.
 - Painful emotions are bad and need to be fixed.
 - Being emotional means being out of control.
 - It's not healthy to express your emotions.
- Marsha Linehan (1993) has referred to emotions as “full-system responses because they include physiological reactions (changes in both body chemistry and body language) and thoughts (triggering images, memories, and action urges), as well as the actual feeling we're experiencing (such as the feeling of sadness, anger, anxiety, or whatever)” (Dijk, 2012, pp. 51-52).
- Emotions release chemical messengers that hook up with specific receptors on cells throughout our body and dramatically impact our physiological functioning at the cellular and systemic levels.
- “Psychological stress usually comes from fear and anger and their associated negative emotions: anxiety, guilt, doubt, frustration, hatred, depression, hostility. Emotional stress has a variety of influences throughout the body. All of the thousands of automatic functions (heartbeat, digestion, kidney function, hormone and enzyme production, etc.), which are coordinated by the autonomic nervous system are regulated by the hypothalamus, the master control system in the brain which is completely surrounded by that part of the brain which manages emotions.” (Marilyn Beecher Thaxton)
- “One reason for this difficulty in describing our feelings is that our emotions and thoughts happen so quickly and so automatically that we don't usually stop to think about them before we act. But separating your emotions,

thoughts, and behaviors is an important step in managing your emotions effectively” (Dijk, 2012, p. 63).

- It is important to understand that our beliefs will affect our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors as well. This is best illustrated by the Thoughts, Emotions, Behaviors, and Beliefs Model (TEBB Model):



- Feelings are non-permanent sensations that we can ride like a wave. We don't have to drown in them or be crushed by them.
- Feelings are feedback, not facts.
- You take your emotions as evidence for truth. Your logic: “I feel like a dud, therefore I *am* a dud.” This kind of reasoning is misleading because your feelings reflect your thoughts and beliefs. If they are distorted—as is quite often the case—your emotions will have no validity” (Burns, 1980).
- Emotions have information for us, but we must check our interpretation of the situation to make sure the feeling is accurate and is not distorted from distorted thoughts or beliefs. This is best represented by the Interpretation Pathway:



- Emotions help us understand and process an experience, connect to important memories, and provide us with information to learn from and sometimes act on. Before we act, we need to make sure it is coming from our wise self.
- “It is important to be aware that your wise self might feel somewhat like your emotional self, because both have emotions connected to them. But keep in mind that when you’re in your emotional self, you’re reacting from your emotions rather than choosing how to act. You can also tell you’re in your emotional self when the emotions are intense and you feel like you’re caught up in them. When you’re in your wise self, by contrast, you still feel the emotions, but you don’t feel controlled by them” (Dijk, 2012, p. 35).
- “If you want to find the secrets of the universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration.” (Nicola Tesla) Emotions and thoughts are energy and have a vibrational frequency.
- Noam Shpancer, Ph.D., is the author of the novel *The Good Psychologist*, talked about how while we may think avoiding negative emotions, there are several reasons why emotional avoidance is harmful:
 - First, important goals and pursuits in your life may inherently involve going through some challenging times and situations, and an unwillingness to ‘pay the toll’ for the trip may narrow your life horizons needlessly.
 - Second, attempts at avoiding negative emotions are usually futile. Telling yourself that a certain emotion is intolerable or dangerous traps you in constant vigilance regarding the very thing you’re trying to avoid (what we resist, persists).
 - Third, emotional avoidance often involves denying the truth--not a good foundation for a healthy life.

- Fourth, avoidance lengthens the period of anticipation, and anticipatory anxiety is usually a much more noxious condition than the actual situation being anticipated.
- The five behavior options are from Dale Halaway are:
 - 1) Stuff them (food, gambling, sex, drugs—anything to get an immediate change to a pleasurable feeling)
 - 2) Project them (blame circumstances or people—make it about the other person and in doing so we go into victim energy)
 - 3) Avoid them (get quiet, withdraw, run away)
 - 4) React to them (power them up by giving them more energy—drama)
 - 5) Clear them (Become conscious of them, feel them and process them)
- When we use a conscious filter, we can choose our behaviors and change our thoughts and emotions:
- **Steps to move through emotions:**
 1. Name the feeling.
 2. Feel it, don't fear it (it is just a feeling).
 3. What is happening in my body?
 - a. Observe without judgment or fear
 - b. Deep, mindful breathing is the fastest way to move from the sympathetic nervous system to the parasympathetic nervous system where you are in a state of rest and can process the emotions.
 4. What is it trying to tell me? What does it need?
 - a. Does it require action? (validate, feel it, sometimes take action)
 - b. Check with your wise mind before action (check facts, bias, and past experience and apply reframing as needed).
 5. Give it what it needs and take action from your wise self when needed.
- Because the aspects are all connected—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual—it is important to be mindful that our lifestyle, physical factors can feed into our emotional state. Looking at these areas and making positive changes can help us be less emotionally reactive (more in our wise self).
 - Improve our sleep habits (too much or too little can contribute to being emotionally reactive)
 - Eating healthy (blood sugar, cravings)
 - Exercise
 - Meditation (Episode 9)

Step 10

We identify and restructure distorted thought patterns.

Main Points:

1. It has been identified that our moods or emotions are created by our “cognitions” or thoughts. A cognition involves our perceptions, mental attitudes, and beliefs. Recognizing and acting within this relationship between our thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors is critical for our healing.
2. Negative emotions are tied to negative, distorted thought patterns. Identifying and challenging these distorted thought patterns with a rational response allows us to change our thoughts to those that are more positive, which has a healthier effect on our emotions, beliefs and behaviors.

Details:

- The first principle of cognitive therapy is that all of our moods or emotions are created by our “cognitions” or thoughts. A cognition involves our perceptions, mental attitudes, and beliefs.
- Your emotions result entirely from the way you *look* at things. It is an obvious neurological fact that before you can experience any event, you must process it with your mind and give it meaning. You must *understand* what is happening to you before you can *feel* it” (Burns, 1980).
- The second principle discovered in research is that when we are feeling horrible, our thoughts are dominated by pervasive negativity.
- The third principle is that those negative thoughts which cause emotional turmoil nearly always contain gross distortions.
- If our perception or interpretation of an event is distorted based on negative thoughts and/or beliefs, then our emotional response may be a distorted as well.
- “These abnormal (distorted) emotions feel just as valid and realistic as the genuine feelings created by undistorted thoughts, so you automatically attribute truth to them” (Burns, 1980, p. 45). Emotions are really most of the time just a mirror of our thoughts/beliefs.
- Cognitive Distortions identified and used in CBT:
 - **Filtering:** You take the negative details and magnify them while filtering out all the positive aspects of a situation.
 - **Polarized Thinking:** Things are black or white, good or bad. You have to be perfect or you’re a failure. There is no middle ground.
 - **Overgeneralization:** You come to a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence. If something bad happens once you expect it to happen over and over again.

- **Mind Reading:** Without their saying so, you know what people are feeling and why they act the way they do. In particular, you are able to divine how people are feeling toward you.
- **Catastrophizing:** You expect a disaster. You notice or hear about a problem and start “what ifs”: What if a tragedy strikes? What if it happens to you?
- **Personalization:** Thinking that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to you. You also compare yourself to others, trying to determine who’s smarter, better looking, etc.
- **Control Fallacies:** If you feel externally controlled, you see yourself as helpless, a victim of fate. The fallacy of internal control has you responsible for the pain and happiness of everyone around you.
- **Fallacy of Fairness:** You feel resentful because you think you know what’s fair but other people won’t agree with you.
- **Blaming:** You hold other people responsible for your pain, or take the other stance and blame yourself for every problem.
- **Shoulds:** You have a list of ironclad rules about how you and other people should act. People who break the rules anger you and you feel guilty if you violate the rules.
- **Emotional Reasoning:** You believe that what you feel must be true automatically: If you feel stupid and boring, then you must be stupid and boring. (We will discuss this more in the next post.)
- **Fallacy of Change:** You expect that other people will change to suit you if you just pressure or cajole them enough. You need to change people because your hopes for happiness seem to depend entirely on them.
- **Global labeling:** You generalize one or two qualities into a negative global statement.
- **Being Right:** You are continually on trial to prove that your opinions and actions are correct. Being wrong is unthinkable and you will go to any length to demonstrate your rightness.
- **Heaven’s Reward Fallacy:** You expect all your sacrifice and self-denial to pay off as if someone were keeping score. You feel bitter when the reward doesn’t come.
- Step one in changing these distorted thinking patterns is to be aware of them (having a name for them to process is powerful).
- Process for changing distorted thought patterns:
 - Begin observing and recording your thoughts that prompt a feeling. (When recording thoughts begin with, “I notice I am having/had these thoughts with this feeling....”)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Become aware of the types of distorted thinking. Read and study about each one and practice identifying them when looking at your own thought patterns. ○ Challenge your thoughts and distortions and come to your own defense. Offer a rational response that is more in truth and comes from an optimistic explanatory style (reframing). ● “Something I’ve worked diligently to implement in my life that has had a monumental effect on my progressive healing is positive self-talk. If you’re not careful it truly becomes a liability instead of an asset. I’m working hard on this behavior, and I’m here to tell you, ‘Get off your back!’ It feels so good! I promise you will accomplish even more, be a whole lot happier, and your mental health will most certainly improve. Changing your self-talk takes courage, discipline, persistence, and determination, but you can do it. If you’re running the negative stuff the price is too high. It’s not worth it.” (Marilyn Beecher Thaxton) ● When we move through these processes for our emotions and thoughts, we are able to apply a conscious filter that allows us to change negative thoughts and emotions and choose healthier behaviors: <div style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p>Using Conscious Filtering to influence Emotions, Thoughts, and Behaviors</p> </div>
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Action Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begin to apply the steps to process your emotions. ● Become aware of your thoughts and challenge and change distorted thought patterns. ● Be aware of and start to apply your conscious filter to the Thoughts, Emotions, and Behaviors Triangle.
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Sources	Burns, D. (1980). <i>Feeling Good</i> . New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.
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Dijk, S.V. (2012). *Calming the emotional storm*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Halaway, D. (2014, October). Transform Your Life. *Seminars That Inspire*. Seminar conducted from Las Vegas, Nevada.

Worksheets for

Episode 7: Thoughts, Emotions, and Beliefs (Steps 8-10)

Worksheet A

Emotions

Label the Feeling/Emotion	Identify the Physiological Response	Identify your Comfort Level (1-5) 5 = Very comfortable 4 = Comfortable 3 = Neutral 2 = Uncomfortable 1 = Very uncomfortable	Identify any Thoughts and/or Behaviors	Determine the Validity of Feeling (Is the feeling based on truth or distorted thinking?)
<p>Example:</p> <p>anger</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>My chest is tight and my face feels hot.</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>2</p> <p>I'm not comfortable with this feeling.</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>Thought: This driver is rude and inconsiderate.</p> <p>Behavior: I blamed the driver that cut me off for making me feel angry.</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>I'm assuming the driver did this on purpose. That could be mind-reading or personalization.</p>

Worksheet B

Thoughts and Responses

Thought (feeling) (self-criticism)	Type of Thinking (cognitive distortion)	Rational Response (self-defense)
<p>Example:</p> <p>"I'm completely self-centered and thoughtless. I'm just no good."</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>All-or-nothing thinking</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>"I'm thoughtless at times, and at times I can be quite thoughtful. I probably do act overly self-centered at times. I can work on this. I may be imperfect but I'm not "no good!"</p>

Worksheet C:

Observing and Identifying Thoughts

Thought (feeling)	Outer/Inner Talk	Type of Thinking	Rational Response (self-defense)
<p>Example:</p> <p>I feel like a failure. I can't get anything right. (I notice I feel sad and ashamed.)</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>You never do anything right. No wonder you aren't successful and no one likes you.</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>Overgeneralization and Polarized Thinking</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>Just because I feel like a failure, it doesn't mean I am a failure. I may make mistakes, but that doesn't make me a failure. I am successful at some things and what others think of me is a reflection of them, not of me. I can process the feelings of sadness and shame and move forward in feelings of hope and love for myself.</p>