

AVY JOSEPH & MAGGIE CHAPMAN

CONFIDENCE
— AND —
SUCCESS
— WITH —
CBT

**SMALL STEPS TO ACHIEVE YOUR BIG GOALS
WITH COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY**

'An incredibly helpful book for anyone who is feeling stuck or who wants to make positive changes in their life. Highly recommended!'

Corinne Mills, MD of Personal Career Management

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To our families, friends and colleagues, who support us so brilliantly.

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Confidence and Success

“We are what we think; all that we are arises with our thoughts; with our thoughts we make our world.”

Buddha

Confidence gives you the power to be able to fully focus on your goals without being anxious. This means you do not dwell on potential negative consequences but remain focused on the task at hand. You are not anxious about failure or the disapproval of others, and nor are you disturbed when you fail.

The mindset that creates confidence increases the probability of enjoyment and success. Belief in your ability to achieve a task is influenced by successful experiences that reinforce a more general sense of self-confidence. When we feel confident, we focus on achieving what we set out to do, in the present moment and in a constructive way. If we lack confidence, we may hear ourselves say, “If only I could feel more confident”, “I can’t do this” or “I’m not good enough”, “I have never succeeded at anything”, “I don’t think I can do it”, “I don’t know how I did this” or “That was a fluke.”

Confidence arises from experience and a healthy mindset. A good example of this is when we learn to drive a car. Initially, we have little confidence in our ability, and rightly so, but as we learn and practise the new skills we become more confident in our ability to perform

them. We feel uncomfortable when we start learning how to drive but with determination, a focus on the goal and repeated practice we develop a growing sense of confidence in our ability to drive.

Success is felt when we achieve the goals we set for ourselves. Success is a personal experience and it depends on what each of us wants. It is the conscious awareness that we are doing what we want to do in a self-determined way that denotes success. For some, success may be:

- A garden that produces enough not to require a visit to the supermarket.
- Living life fully enjoying each day with a sense of contentment and well-being.
- Buying a house/car.
- Being in a healthy relationship.
- £x millions in the bank account.
- An Olympic gold medal.
- Reaching a target weight.
- Securing a promotion at work.

Developing confidence and success involves identifying what you want and setting about achieving it while overcoming the obstacles as and when they occur. We have identified six key steps to help you realise your goal, whatever it may be. They are:

- Step 1: Identify what you want.
- Step 2: Gather information.
- Step 3: Set achievable goals.
- Step 4: Create a plan.
- Step 5: Take action.
- Step 6: Keep focus on the goal with feedback.

We have seen, over the years, in both our corporate and private practices many individuals who struggle with self-confidence, failure and a perception of failure, as well as a host of other issues. At the heart of the problem with confidence and success is anxiety. Anxieties can

be about discomfort, failure, disapproval, uncertainty, perfectionism and so forth. Confidence and success are sabotaged by holding unhealthy beliefs.

The aim of this book is to use the cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) model to help you understand:

- The mindset required to achieve your bigger goal.
- The mindset that creates obstacles to success.
- How to overcome the obstacles by changing your beliefs.
- How to develop confidence.

First though, it is necessary to explain in more detail the basic principles of CBT and the central role that beliefs play in this model.

“It is not enough to take steps which may some day lead to a goal; each step must be itself a goal and a step likewise.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Using CBT

CBT Theory

“It is not the event but the view we take of it that disturbs us.”

Epictetus

Epictetus eloquently sums up Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT looks at how we think and what we do. It takes the view that emotions, like anxiety, arise from faulty thinking. That is to say, essentially, we are largely responsible for our emotions, thoughts and behaviours.

We tend to speak in a way that suggests events, people, situations or objects can make us feel or do things. Someone could say, “Presentations make me panic.” This is clearly not the case. If this were true, everyone who did a presentation would panic. There has to be something else that provokes panic. It is called a “belief”. Therefore, it is the belief about presentations that provokes those feelings of panic and not the presentations themselves.

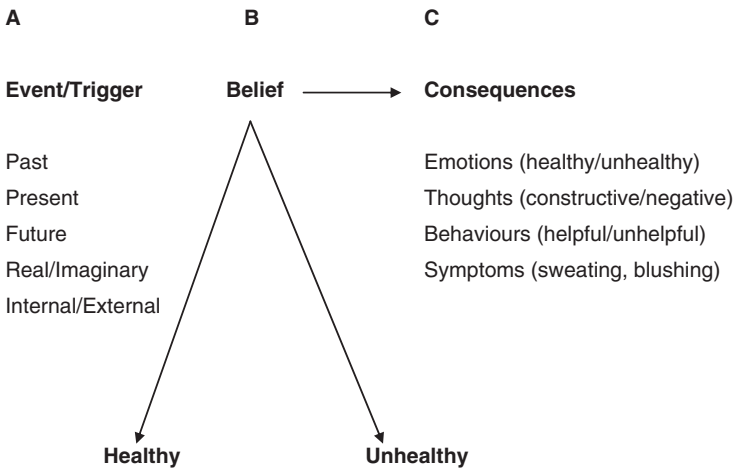
In the following steps, we are going to look at specific types of unhealthy beliefs that provoke unhealthy feelings, thoughts and behaviours. For example, a belief such as “I must succeed at all costs because failure would be like the end of the world for me” would

provoke emotional disturbance, such as anxiety, and may lead to avoidant behaviour.

Consider the following illustration to understand this concept.

The Simple ABC Model

This simple model illustrates the basic theoretical principles of CBT and the effect our beliefs have on our feelings and behaviours. It also illustrates the principles of emotional responsibility. It reminds us that it is not the event but the belief or view we hold about the event that provokes our feelings and behaviours.



The ABC model

- The event at A can be something that has happened in the past or it may be happening now, or it could be something that might happen in the future. A can also be real or imagined and internal (in the form of memories or images, physical sensations or emotions) or it can be an external event.

- The B is the healthy or unhealthy belief you hold about the event at A.
- The C is the consequential responses that are provoked by the belief at B. These can take the form of emotions, thoughts, behaviours or physical symptoms.

A particular CBT psychotherapeutic model known as REBT (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) teaches us to recognise unhealthy thinking and develop new beliefs and attitudes that lead to confidence and success. Ellis (see box) believed that we have little choice about being human so it is preferable not to put ourselves down but to remember that we have choices and alternatives. We can develop healthy beliefs to aid us in the pursuit of our goals. We can experiment, experience, learn and change what doesn't work. We can develop resilience rather than anxiety about disappointment and failures.

REBT is both evidence-based and philosophical. The theory was developed by psychologist Albert Ellis, PhD, who first articulated the principles of REBT in 1955. Albert Ellis was born in 1913 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but moved to New York at age four. He was hospitalised numerous times during childhood, and suffered renal glycosuria at age 19 and diabetes at age 40. Because Ellis suffered from these ailments for most of his life, his problems inspired him over the years to find effective means of coping.

Understanding Unhealthy and Healthy Beliefs

We tend to transform desires, wants and preferences into rigid, dogmatic and absolute beliefs. The word “belief” means a conviction in

the truth or validity of something. When beliefs are unrealistic, non-sensical and unhelpful to us, they are irrational or unhealthy. Such beliefs are at the heart of our problems with confidence.

Unhealthy Beliefs

Unhealthy or irrational beliefs are rigid, nonsensical, inconsistent with reality and unhelpful in the pursuit of your goals. Healthy or rational beliefs are flexible, make sense, are consistent with reality and helpful in the pursuit of your goals.

Unhealthy beliefs are based on absolutist shoulds, musts, have tos and need tos (e.g. “I absolutely should be able to do this”). This is not the kind of should as in “I should go shopping” but rather an absolutist should with a capital “S”, a demand.

Flowing from these demands are three irrational derivative beliefs:

- **Awfulising** – a belief about an irrational assessment of badness. It views the bad event not just as bad but as 100% bad (i.e. end-of-the-world bad; nothing else is worse in that moment). It is often expressed as: “It is a disaster”, “It is horrible/awful/terrible”, “It is a catastrophe” or “It is the end of the world.”
- **Low frustration tolerance (LFT)** – a belief that underestimates your ability to cope with an adverse event and is often expressed as: “It is intolerable”, “I can’t cope”, “I can’t stand it” or “It is too hard.”
- **Self-damning** – a belief where you judge yourself in a globally dismissive, totally negative way. It is expressed as: “I am a loser”, “I am a failure”, “I am weak”, “I am stupid”, “I am worthless”, “I am useless” or “I am an idiot.”

Healthy Beliefs

Alternatively, healthy beliefs are based on preferences, wants, wishes and desires without the dogmatic demand. They help us remain focused on what we want with an acceptance of the possibility that it may not happen. Accepting that something may not go our way does not mean we like or approve of it. Acceptance means that we are not disturbed by disappointments and failures.

Flowing from these preferences are three rational derivative beliefs, the helpful alternatives to the irrational derivative beliefs we discussed earlier:

- **Anti-awfulising** – a belief that views negative events as bad with the badness placed on a continuum of 0–99.9% bad, where 100% bad does not exist, as one can usually think of something worse, e.g. “It would be bad but not the end of the world if I didn’t achieve my goal.”
- **High frustration tolerance (HFT)** – a belief that does not underestimate your ability to tolerate frustration or discomfort despite having your goals blocked, e.g. “It would be very difficult not to achieve my goal but I can tolerate it: it won’t kill me.”
- **Self-acceptance** – a belief that you are a worthwhile but fallible human being regardless of anyone or anything. It is based on unconditional self-acceptance, where you judge your performance, behaviour or success but not your worth, e.g. “I don’t like the fact that I failed but that does not make me a failure as a human being. I remain worthwhile but fallible.”

Wanting to achieve and succeed, to receive approval and comfort, is true for most of us. But liking or wanting something does not make it a universal law of Nature that we must have it. If it were, all of us would always achieve, always succeed, always have approval and always have comfort. This is not what we see in real life. Healthy beliefs enable us to focus on our goals in a positive way by freeing us

from anxiety, because we recognise that the end of the world is not nigh, that we are able to tolerate difficulties and that we are worthwhile and fallible despite failures and disappointments. This is the attitude that builds confidence and increases the likelihood of success.

Emotions, Thoughts, Behaviours and Physical Symptoms

You will notice from the ABC diagram that beliefs provoke consequences. These are emotions, thoughts, behaviours and physical symptoms. Since beliefs can be healthy or unhealthy, so too can their consequences.

Emotions

REBT identifies eight unhealthy negative emotions and eight healthy counterparts.

- Unhealthy negative emotions are: anxiety, depression, anger/rage, hurt, shame/embarrassment, guilt, unhealthy envy and jealousy.
- Healthy negative emotions are: concern, sadness, annoyance, disappointment, remorse, regret, healthy envy and concern for one's relationships.

Thoughts

Unhealthy beliefs provoke unhelpful thoughts and assumptions. The mind is preoccupied with “what ifs” rather than focusing on the task at hand. For example, in a state of anxiety, you would overestimate the negative consequences of a future threat or risk and underestimate

your ability to cope. Healthy beliefs provoke more realistic thoughts and assumptions that are constructive and solution-focused. For example, you would be realistic in your assessment of risk and your ability to cope.

Behaviours

Unhealthy beliefs provoke a tendency to behave in an unhelpful manner.

Behaviour is usually an expression of these tendencies. People usually, but not always, act in accordance with what they feel like doing. In a state of anxiety, it is common for people to feel like withdrawing from the task in hand, and in most cases they will also act in accordance with those feelings (i.e. avoid). Healthy beliefs tend to provoke constructive action tendencies and behaviours. This means you will take action to achieve your goal.

Physical Symptoms

Unhealthy beliefs provoke physical symptoms such as blushing, sweating, irritable bowel syndrome, physical tension and many other symptoms.

Healthy beliefs also provoke physical symptoms, such as discomfort and tension. This happens because even though healthy beliefs are based on what we want there is an acceptance of the negative possibility of not succeeding. The tension is a response to this potentially negative event.

These can be intense, but if the belief is healthy, the mindset will still be constructive and solution-focused – despite the tension in the body.

It is important to realise that tension in itself is not an indication that there is something wrong. If the mindset is negative then the tension felt is provoked by the unhealthy belief. If the mindset is constructive then the tension is provoked by the healthy belief. By having a healthy mindset and a focus on the goal, tension is more easily tolerated.

Three Major Themes of Disturbance

Albert Ellis noted that we tend to disturb ourselves about three major themes:

- The demand to perform well or outstandingly at all times.
- The demand for others to treat us nicely, considerately or fairly at all times.
- The demand for life to be comfortable and hassle-free.

When these demands are not met, we tend to disturb ourselves. This means we feel stuck, anxious, depressed and act in self-defeating ways. Throughout this book, we will refer to these three major themes that give rise to the specific obstacles in each step. The purpose of doing this is to help you remember that essentially all of your specific unhealthy beliefs stem from these three roots.

How to Use This Book

Now that you have had an overview of CBT, it is helpful for you to understand how to use this book to get the most out of it. CBT is about changing unhealthy beliefs to healthy ones. To do this takes time, just as it takes time to learn a skill (like driving). It requires the repeated practice of new healthy beliefs stated with conviction, often while still experiencing negative emotions and discomfort until, as with all learning, it begins to feel more comfortable. The emotional change happens last and requires changes in behaviour as you deter-

minedly apply the new healthy beliefs. Understanding alone will not create a change.

The steps that follow will take you through the six consecutive stages to identify and attain your goal, to achieve the success and confidence you desire. Each step is one small step towards your overall goal. Achieving each step is a smaller goal in its own right. With the achievement of each step, your confidence will most probably increase.

In each step, we have identified common obstacles in the form of unhealthy beliefs that sabotage the achievement of that step. There may be other obstacles that we have not discussed, of course, so there is an exercise at the end of each chapter that will help you identify any unhealthy beliefs and how to challenge them. You may find that some chapters are more relevant to your experience. For example, if you know how to set goals, maybe moving on to one of the later chapters will be more helpful to you.

Three arguments are deliberately repeated throughout the book to help you develop the habit of thinking in a helpful and progressive manner:



Reality check: Is there any evidence to say it is true?



Common sense: Is it logical to state this?



Helpfulness: No amount of unhelpful thinking will bring a solution.

The way in which we change our beliefs is through repetition, in a consistent and forceful manner. Identifying your unhealthy beliefs and challenging them with these three main arguments is a key strategy in changing them. It initially feels awkward but with repetition and consistency will, eventually, become a habit and feel effortless. You will learn that the solution to changing your unhealthy belief lies in adopting a healthy belief and behaving in accordance with that healthy belief.

The last chapter will then look at what you do once you have achieved your goal and how to move forward.

The case studies we have used are fictional but informed by actual cases. We have chosen quotes to inspire and sometimes to remind you that whatever difficulties you may be experiencing others have encountered the same issues. Finally, at the end of each chapter, there are some tips to summarise what has been said, just in case you forget!

“In order to succeed, your desire for success should be greater than your fear of failure.”

Bill Cosby

Step 1

Identify What You Want

“To accomplish great things, we must not only act,
but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.”

Anatole France