



third edition

# COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

Your route out of perfectionism, self-sabotage  
and other everyday habits with CBT

**AVY JOSEPH**

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# **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy**

THIRD EDITION

**Your Route Out of Perfectionism, Self-Sabotage and Other Everyday Habits  
with CBT**

AVY JOSEPH



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A Wiley Brand

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*I wish to dedicate this book to the memory of my father.*



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## Introduction to the Third Edition

CBT is recognised as one of the leading, evidence-based talking therapies. CBT places much emphasis on currently held beliefs and attitudes, painful emotions, and problematic behaviours that can sabotage a fuller experience of life. CBT teaches us a philosophy of life that can be learned by everyone in order to be happier.

The ideas and philosophies in CBT stem from ancient and modern philosophers, science, psychology, common sense and humanity. CBT is supported by a wealth of research, is used extensively by the NHS and recommended by NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence), for many emotional and psychological problems.

There are many types of CBT. Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is one of the cognitive behaviour therapies under the CBT umbrella. It is an evidence-based, psycho-educational and philosophical model developed by Albert Ellis. Since the first edition, REBT has continued to grow. Research in REBT has demonstrated both its effectiveness and efficacy for both clinical and non-clinical problems.

REBT is grounded in acceptance: acceptance of the past, present, future and of the self, other and life. Acceptance does not mean approval. Sometimes people ask 'but if I accept failure then doesn't it mean that I'm okay with it or that I didn't mind failing?' The answer is an absolute no. Failure does matter to most people, and most of us don't like it, but it does happen. Acceptance means acknowledgement of this reality, in this particular example. When we overcome this misunderstanding, self-confidence, emotional health, well-being and life goals become much easier to achieve.

The third edition maintains its concise nature but introduces the concept of action tendency. When you experience a negative emotion, you will have a tendency to act or behave in a certain way. Action tendency means what you feel like doing when experiencing a negative emotion. It explains why it is important to act against the action tendency when one is stuck emotionally. Some concepts are repeated in different ways. This is deliberate. Repetition helps us internalize the learning in order for it become habitual and effortless.

The ideas in this book are heavily influenced by REBT theory, but some concepts stem from other CBT models and self-image psychology and hence I am using the term CBT as a general rule. In this book I will show you how using CBT can help you set yourself up for success and overcome those beliefs and habits that sabotage your life.

**Avy Joseph**

# 1

## Understanding CBT for Goal Achievement

**‘People are not disturbed by events but by the view they hold about them.’**

**Epictetus, Stoic philosopher c. AD 75**

This chapter will introduce you to some of the basic ideas and principles of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and how you can use it to help you achieve your goals. First, though, what does Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) actually mean?

**Cognitive** simply means our ‘thinking processes’: how we think, how we acquire information and knowledge, how we store it in our head, how we evaluate it and how we base some of our decisions on it.

**Behaviour** means our action or reaction to something. It's the doing bit. Our behaviour can be conscious or unconscious (out of our conscious awareness). In CBT, the word ‘behaviour’ comes from a branch of psychology called ‘behaviourism’, which is concerned with what can be observed rather than what can be speculated or assumed. It is based on what you have learned and become accustomed to, how this affects your actions and feelings, and how you can unlearn what you have learned in order to change.

**Therapy** means the treatment for a health problem, after a diagnosis or an assessment has been made.

CBT is one of the counselling therapies that examines how our thinking, attitudes, beliefs, opinions and behaviour are

formed, how they affect our success, our lives and feelings, and how changing them impacts on our performance. The ideas stem from both ancient and modern thinking in philosophy, science, psychology, common sense and humanity.

Here are some of basic principles central to CBT. Many may be shared by other therapeutic approaches but the combination of these principles goes some way towards understanding CBT.

## **THE EMOTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY PRINCIPLE**

**‘People are not disturbed by events but by the view they hold about them.’**

This principle is at the heart of nearly all emotional and behavioural change. It can be challenging because you may believe that it's what has happened to you that ‘makes’ you feel how you feel and do what you do in the here and now.

I hope that by questioning this you will learn that what you believe may be stopping you from empowering yourself to move forward with your life. This in turn may help you in the pursuit of your desired goals.

***Is it true that events, situations or people make us feel what we feel?***

First, let's look at the popular notion that your feelings are ‘caused’ by events, situations or other people.

Think of a past event that you think ‘made’ you feel and do something. By this logic the only way you can change your feelings now is to wish the event had not happened in the first place.

Maybe you think there's someone else who has 'made' you feel and act in a certain manner. In which case, the only way you can change your feelings now is to get that person from the past to undo what they did or said. And if that person is now deceased, how can this be done?

Believing that the past, or a particular situation or person, causes our feelings today, means that no one would ever be able to move forward or to change. We would all be totally stuck without any possibility or hope of ever changing anything. We would be slaves to the things that had happened to us or the people we had been involved with.

Can you imagine what it would be like if everyone felt hurt every time they experienced a rejection of some sort?

*Rejection = Hurt*

*10 people rejected = 10 people feeling hurt*

*100 people rejected = 100 people feeling hurt*

*1000 people rejected = 1000 people feeling hurt*

As an example, when you experience rejection you *might* feel hurt. However, if you believe that your feelings are caused by others, you may then believe that being rejected by someone is the cause of your hurt feelings. But don't some of us experience different emotions if rejected by someone we like? Maybe anger, sadness, depression or relief?

In fact, different people may feel different emotions when they experience the same event:

Some people feel hurt.

Some people feel angry.

Some people feel depressed.

Some people couldn't care less.

Why do different people feel different things and what is at the heart of their feelings?

***Is it true that events or people make us do what we do?***

Let's think about what we do and assume that situations or people make us behave as we do.

*A colleague criticizes you = You start avoiding them*

If it is true that a colleague's criticism 'made' you avoid them, this means that every criticism made by your colleague would have the same effect on everyone. It means that avoidance is the only possibility whenever your colleague criticizes you, or anyone else for that matter.

*A colleague criticizes 10 people = 10 people avoid them*

*A colleague criticizes 100 people = 100 people avoid them*

*A colleague criticizes 1000 people = 1000 people avoid them*

Does this make sense?

The problem is that people say, 'he made me do it' or 'she made me lose my temper'. It is as if they have absolutely no control over their behaviour. Once again, if we do not have a part to play in how we behave, then we would be completely stuck, unable to move forward, learn or do anything useful. Is this what you see happening to everyone around you?

So what provokes your feelings and behaviour? Most of the time the simple answer is that *you* do. You provoke your feelings and actions by the way you think, the attitudes you've formed, the habits you no longer question and the beliefs you hold.

This is the principle of Emotional Responsibility: **You are largely responsible for the way you feel and act.**

The principle of emotional responsibility can be challenging, particularly if you are going through a difficult time or have experienced trauma or personal tragedy. It's natural to feel angry, sad, depressed or hurt in response to accidents, illness and other challenges in life, but if you get stuck in these feelings then you can change them.

The thought manifests as the word; The word manifests as the deed; The deed develops into habit;  
And habit hardens into character;  
So watch the thought and its ways with care. (Buddha)

The way you think about something affects how you feel and how you behave. Here are some examples:

- If you think that your partner's late arrival for dinner proves that you are not lovable then you might feel hurt and sulk.
- If you think that your partner was nasty and selfish because they arrived late for dinner then you might feel angry and shout.
- If you think that your partner's late arrival for dinner is no big deal then you can feel calm about it and ask what happened.



This shows that it is not the situation or what happens to us that provokes our feelings and behaviour. It is the way we think about the situation. The way we think about something can then influence how we behave.

## **THE BEHAVIOURAL PRINCIPLE**

CBT considers behaviour as significant in maintaining or in changing psychological states. If, for example, you avoid some event such as giving a presentation to your team, then you will deny yourself the opportunity to disconfirm your negative thoughts about yourself or capabilities. Furthermore, avoidance only sabotages what you want to achieve. Changing what you do is often a powerful way of helping you change thoughts and emotions and ultimately what you can achieve.

## **THE 'HERE AND NOW' PRINCIPLE**

Traditional therapies take the view that looking at problems in the here and now is superficial. They consider successful treatment must uncover the childhood developmental issues, hidden motivations and unconscious conflicts that are supposed to lie at the root of the problem. These approaches argue that treating the current problem rather than the supposed hidden 'root' causes would result in symptom substitution, that is, the problem would re-surface in another form later on. There is little evidence to support this idea. Behaviour therapy also showed that such an outcome, although possible, was very rare.

CBT offers theories about how current problems are being maintained and kept alive and how they can be changed.

## **THE SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLE**

CBT offers scientific theories. Scientific theories are designed in a way so they can be tested. CBT has been evaluated rigorously using evidence rather than just clinical anecdote. This is important for a couple of reasons:

- The treatment can be founded on sound and well-established theories.
- Ethically, CBT therapists can have confidence in the therapy they are advocating.

## **Exercise**

List five things that people manage to change about themselves despite doing it badly at first (for example, learning to drive).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

List five positive things that you have learned in your life despite experiencing difficulties (for example, moving on from a failed relationship).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Think of an inspirational person who has overcome enormous obstacles by having a powerful and constructive attitude and positive behaviour.

***Truth***

In CBT we examine our thoughts and behaviours to check if they are realistic. This means we judge and evaluate an event based on facts rather than perception, which can be flawed. Why do you think that, when an accident occurs, the police take statements from a number of people instead of asking just one person what happened?

Truth is about being consistent with reality whilst striving for the goals that are important to you. It's about acknowledging and accepting the existence of the possibilities you dislike while persisting in your efforts to reach your goals.

## Exercise

How many 'F's can you count in the following statement?

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RESULTS OF YEARS  
OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE  
EXPERIENCE OF MANY YEARS.

Did you see 2 or 3 'F's?

There are 6.

I will leave you to find the rest but simply draw your attention to the word 'of'.

The above is a popular example used to highlight the fact that we don't necessarily see the whole truth. We interpret what we see and experience. What you have learnt from this simple but effective exercise is that your version of the truth can be faulty. It is important to question the truth that

you hold about yourself and your ability just in case you are seeing only a few of the good things and missing many others. Sometimes we only see a few 'F's, when in reality there are more. If the 'F's represent your positive abilities and qualities, how many of the good qualities are you seeing?

This is just one of the reasons why in CBT we question the validity or reality of our thoughts.

### ***Common sense***

In CBT we suggest taking a logical and common-sense approach to thinking.

This does not mean that you become totally unfeeling and emotionless.

Logic or common sense is about the purity of our reasoning skills, whether a conclusion correctly follows a premise or assumption.

For example, which one of these two statements makes sense?

A. Some men shave their heads ... therefore anyone with a shaved head is a man.

B. Some men shave their heads ... but it doesn't mean everyone with a shaved head is a man.

Clearly statement B makes sense. In statement A, the fact that some men shave their heads does not connect logically to the assumption that anyone with a shaved head is a man. Some women, children and teenagers also have shaved heads.

Logical thinking is useful because we all have the ability to think and use common sense. In CBT, using your common

sense well can lead you to form better conclusions about yourself.

Some people think like this about certain goals:

<i>I failed at achieving my goal</i>	<i>therefore, I am a total failure as a person</i>
--------------------------------------	--

Others think like this:

<i>I failed at achieving my goal</i>	<i>but that doesn't mean I am a total failure. I am fallible but worthwhile nevertheless. I will learn from my failure and improve.</i>
--------------------------------------	---

Which of the above two statements makes sense?

## ***Helpfulness***

Finally, in CBT we look at how helpful your thoughts are to you and in the pursuit of your goals. Your thoughts are responsible for how you feel about yourself and your abilities, so it is more helpful for you to have constructive and goal-oriented thoughts than not.

### **Exercise**

Reflect on some thoughts you often have about yourself and your abilities. See if they are helpful to you. For example, you might think 'I'm not very good at talking in front of people'.

How can you make your thoughts more realistic, logical and helpful? For example, 'I could improve by facing my fears slowly and gradually'.

## **TYPES OF THOUGHTS**

In CBT we draw a distinction between different types of thoughts. Not all of our thoughts are involved with our feelings and behaviours. The thoughts that are involved in our feelings tend to have some sort of an assumption or judgement about ourselves, others or the world.

There are two particular types of thought that are involved in our emotions or feelings.

## ***1. Inferences***

Inferences are assumptions you make about the things that matter to you, which can be about yourself, others or about the world. For example, if your boss contradicted you during a meeting that was important to you, you might think, 'he is undermining me'. Then you would be making an inference. This means that in that moment you have gone beyond the facts and made an assumption about what happened because it was significant to you. In this example you would have an emotional response: you may feel annoyed, concerned, anxious, angry or some other negative emotion.

The issue is whether your boss was undermining you or simply expressing a different opinion. In order to find out you would need to gather more information and evidence. Some of our inferences are accurate and some are not. In this example your inference has not been tested in reality.

If you had thought 'he has a different opinion, he is not undermining me' then your emotional response would be different.

Which of the following thoughts will lead to an emotion?

1. *I saw a woman getting on a bus.*
2. *My workmates are ignoring me.*
3. *I'm a failure.*

Thoughts 2 and 3 will lead to an emotional reaction. The second thought is an inference. It may or may not be true. Your colleagues have been ignoring you – they may just have been very busy with work. You need more information to assess the accuracy of conclusion. But if you conclude that you were being ignored, then you would have an emotional reaction.

The third thought also leads to an emotional response but it is more profound in its conclusion. 'I'm a failure' is an evaluative thought.

## ***2. Evaluations or beliefs***

Inferences influence our emotions but do not fully provoke them. Evaluations, on the other hand, are thoughts that are fully involved in provoking emotions and feelings. When you have an evaluative thought you are making a judgement about yourself, about others, or about the world. For simplicity let's call evaluative thoughts 'beliefs'. These are fundamental in provoking either constructive feelings and helpful behaviours or destructive feelings and sabotaging behaviours.

If you judge yourself as 'useless' when you are thinking about applying for a job, this may trigger additional thoughts such as 'I won't get the job'. When you hold such a belief, you will probably feel anxious when you go for the interview. In a state of anxiety, you will probably not perform as well as you are capable of doing and the likelihood of you getting the job decreases dramatically.

## **THEORY MADE SIMPLE**

Putting these principles and philosophies into a theoretical model helps you to see more easily how feelings, different



thoughts, behaviours and events all interact with one another.

The easiest is the 'ABC' model of emotional response.



A = Activating Event (or trigger)

B = Belief

C = Consequences

The 'A' can be:

### 1. **Real or imaginary**

The trigger can be an actual event, such as losing someone or something important to you, or an imaginary one. It could also be an inference – a hunch – like imagining that someone is going to reject you before any rejection has taken place.

### 2. **External or internal**

External events are things that happen outside of your body, for example: someone's death, being rejected, failing at something or experiencing an accident.

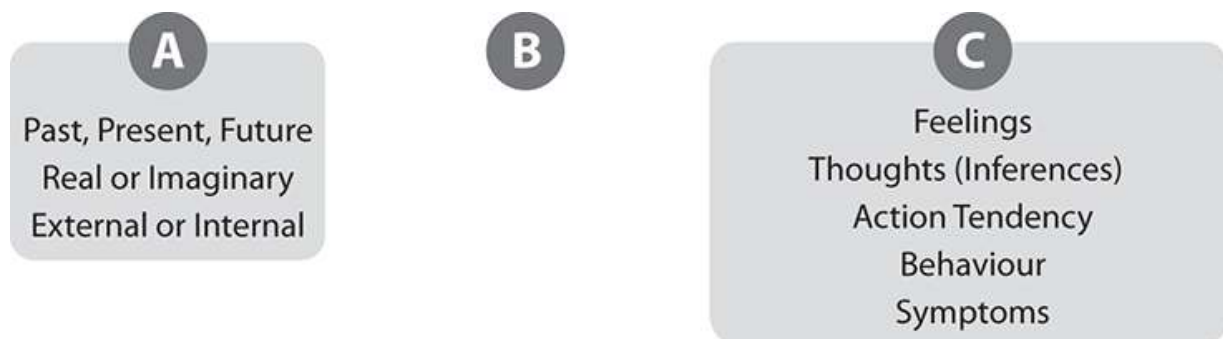
Internal events are triggers that happen inside your body, for example: your thoughts, images, emotions, fantasies, memories and bodily sensations.

### 3. **About the past, present or future**

The event could be something that has happened in the past, something that is happening now or something that could happen in the future.

Key points to remember:

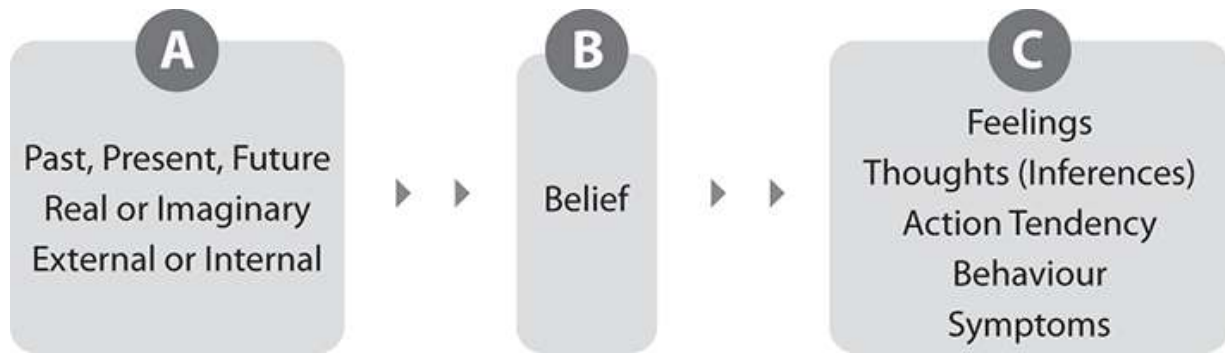
- 'A' can be an internal past event that was real. For example, losing someone you loved. All past events are internal because they exist in our memories.
- 'A' can be real, future and external. For example, making a speech at your friend's wedding next week.
- It is not the event itself that provokes your emotions but what you tell yourself or what you infer about it *now* that provokes your feeling.
- It's easy to assume that A causes C but that would not be accurate.



When a trigger happens at 'A', you feel, behave, think and experience symptoms. Because this happens quickly, you think 'A' causes 'C' (the consequences). So you may use expressions like 'he **made** me feel angry', or 'my job **makes** me depressed'. It is as if we are not responsible for our own emotions.

Remember the 100 and 1000 people example earlier?

What is at the heart of your feelings is the 'B' (Belief) between 'A' and 'C'. So it is your belief (evaluation) about the activating event that provokes your emotions, thoughts, action tendencies, behaviours and symptoms.



## ***Beliefs***

According to the ABC model we can have two types of beliefs – rational and irrational or healthy and unhealthy.

### **1. Healthy beliefs:**

- Are flexible
- Are based on the things that you want, like, desire and prefer
- Tend to make sense – they are logical and consistent with reality
- Means accepting that sometimes you may not get what you want
- Detach human worth from success or failure
- Lead to emotional well-being and set you up for goal achievement.

### **2. Unhealthy beliefs:**

- Are unrealistic
- Can be self-critical
- Are not based on acceptance or acknowledgement of reality
- Do not acknowledge or accept other possibilities (even though reality shows that other possibilities exist)

- Cause a mismatch between internal and external realities
- Lead to emotional disturbance and set you up for failure and goal sabotage.

Compare the following statements:

‘I would like it to be nice and sunny every day when I wake up but I accept there is a chance that it might not be.’

‘The day **MUST** be nice and sunny when I wake up’

The second example is unhealthy and irrational because it is unrealistic. Unhealthy beliefs do not make logical sense. What makes sense is to have a more healthy belief, such as ‘I would like the day to be nice and sunny when I wake up, but it doesn't mean that it **HAS** to be.’

### ***Healthy negative emotions and self-helping behaviours***

It is easy to understand that if you hold a healthy belief about yourself or about certain things in your life, this would increase your chances of success. However, success is never guaranteed, so if you don't succeed you might feel upset and sad. Having healthy beliefs means that, while you might feel sad or upset if you failed you would lick your wounds, dust yourself off and focus back on your goal. Instead of feeling guilty you might feel regret and look at ways of improving. Instead of feeling unhealthy anger or rage, you might feel annoyed. You would behave assertively without lashing out in a destructive way or giving up. You would believe that you are not a failure as a human being but rather that you are a fallible human being who is able to learn and improve.

### ***Unhealthy negative emotions and self-destructive behaviours***

It is not difficult to understand that if you have unhealthy beliefs about yourself and about certain things in your life, your feelings and behaviours are not going to be healthy.

According to the ABC model, unhealthy beliefs provoke unhealthy negative emotions and self-damaging or destructive behaviours. Depression, anxiety, guilt and rage are examples of unhealthy negative emotions.

## **ANXIETY VERSUS CONCERN**

<b>Unhealthy Negative Emotion</b>	<b>What the belief is about</b>	<b>Healthy Negative Emotion</b>
<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>A threat or danger</b>	<b>Concern</b>
<b>How you think</b>		<b>How you think</b>
You exaggerate the overall effect of the threat.		You keep the effect of the danger in perspective.
You think that you won't be able to deal with the danger.		You have a balanced view about your ability to deal with the threat.
You see the glass as half empty.		You see the whole glass and focus on the full part.
Your thoughts are not constructive.		Your thoughts are solution-focused and constructive.
<b>What you do or what you feel like doing</b>		<b>What you do or what you feel like doing</b>
Run away physically.		Face the threat.