



Shift Care Hub



Irrational thinking and how the mind works

Workbook

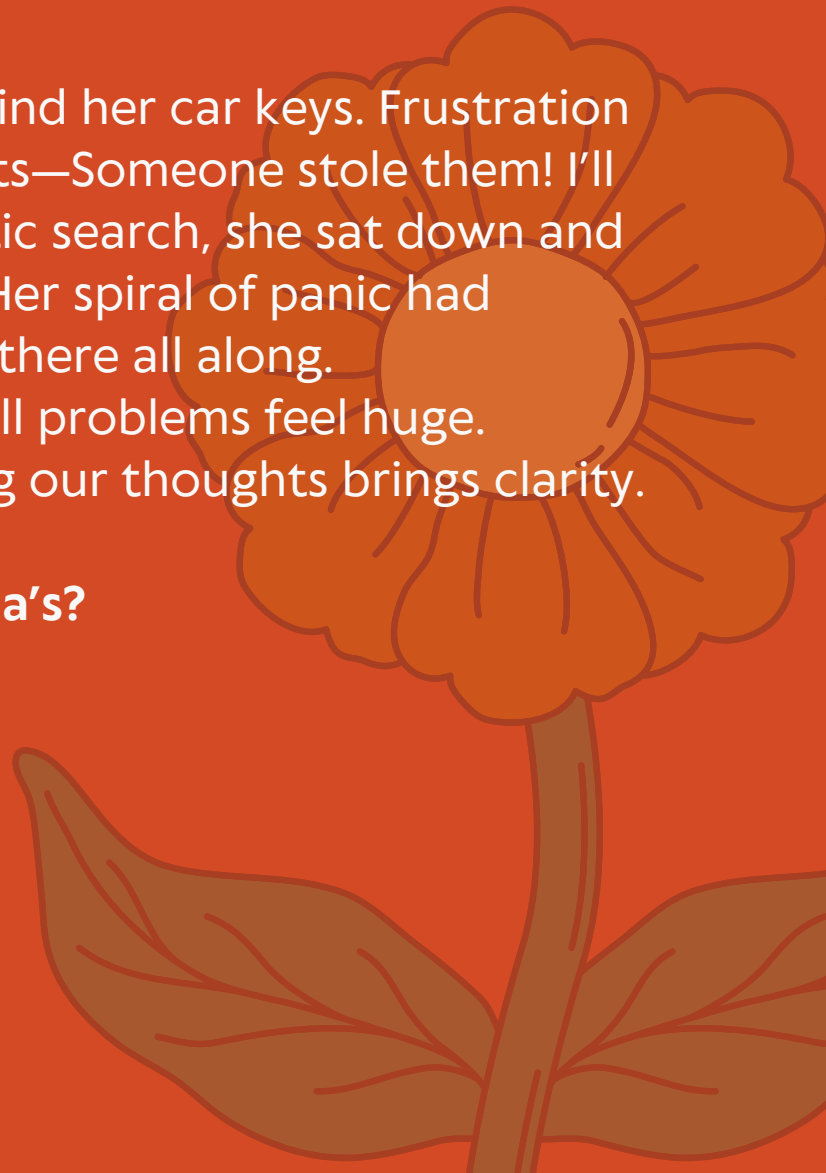
Emma's Panic Over Lost Keys

Emma was late and couldn't find her car keys. Frustration turned into irrational thoughts—Someone stole them! I'll never find them! After a frantic search, she sat down and saw them beside her coffee. Her spiral of panic had clouded the truth: they were there all along. Irrational thinking makes small problems feel huge. Slowing down and challenging our thoughts brings clarity.

Ever had a moment like Emma's?

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Irrational Thinking: How the Mind Works

As we've established, REBT is based on the premise that our thoughts create our emotions and influence our behavior. The 3 aspects—thoughts, emotions, behaviors—interplay and influence each other, however the area where we have the most power is our thoughts because they are almost always the foundation of our emotions and the behaviors we take because of them. The good news, which is why REBT is so powerful, is that because we can learn to have greater control over our thoughts, we can have greater control over our emotions and our behaviors.



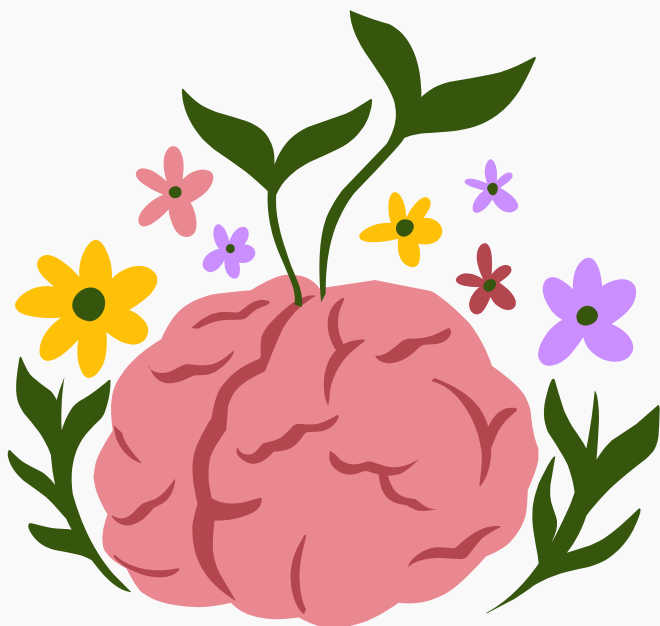
In every moment our brains are processing our experience taking in information through the 5 senses. When you experience anything in life, it is interpreted by your brain, which means in a split second your brain compares what it is taking in through your senses, which tells it what is going on in your experience, to everything else you've ever experienced. It's trying to make a snap judgment of:

1. What is going on
2. What does it mean
3. How should I feel about it
4. What should I do

The Brain



The brain has evolved to rapidly interpret everything you experience and it's so good at it that you don't even notice it's happening. That is, until something happens that causes your mind to interpret a situation as negative. It chooses a perspective or belief about the situation that creates an emotional reaction in your body. It's unpleasant, so it's noticeable. Your body reacts to this emotion, which is actually caused by the thought triggering your body to release any of a number of brain chemicals, often referred to as neurotransmitters or endorphins or hormones. Your brain is like a chemical factory and there is a different neurotransmitter that is responsible for every emotion you can feel.

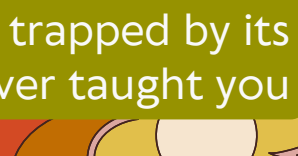


It all functions as it should. Something threatens you, your brain interprets, triggers the hormones that shoot throughout your body inspiring you spring into action. Someone tells you they adore you and you're flooded with feel-good chemicals. Our bodies and brain are amazing machines. But sometimes, these emotional reactions get out of whack with what's actually happening. You can feel anxious for no reason. Something small makes you furious. You're sad even when you're doing something that usually makes you happy.



Learned Pattern Thinking

What's happened is that your mind has learned a pattern of thinking that is faulty. Your brain is interpreting situations negatively, when they're not. Your mind is judging situations, or yourself. You have unconscious irrational beliefs impacting your perspective that you aren't aware of. Your brain was doing what it does best—trying to interpret your world in a way that protects you. Unfortunately, as you lived life, your brain got programmed by the world around you. Your thoughts were influenced by the actions of others. Your core beliefs were adopted from the beliefs of others. And because you weren't aware of any of this, your mind became trapped by its own faulty beliefs. Your thoughts run amok and you were never taught you to catch them.

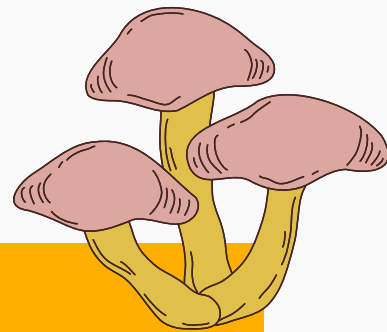




What can I do about it?

It happens to everyone. Humans bodies and brains don't come with an owners' manual! But the good news is that the solution is simple. You can become more aware of this process. You can change your thought patterns and beliefs. You can reprogram yourself. You can become conscious of your unconscious thoughts and behaviors. You can choose to experience more positive emotions, and less negative ones. You have this power to control your own mind—a power that has been withheld from you your entire life. And it's time to take your power back!





Lets Look At Emotions

The best place to start a discussion about how thinking works and impacts your life is to look at emotions. Let me ask you a question, should emotions be trusted?

Some people say, "You should always trust your emotions."

Other people say, "Feelings are irrational and can't be trusted."

So, which is it?

They're BOTH wrong.

Emotions and feelings are neither right nor wrong, accurate or not.

Emotions are simply your body's reaction to what you are THINKING.



Your Belief System

Your belief system and other unconscious thoughts are happening on autopilot all the time, and cause emotions. That's why sometimes you have NO IDEA why you feel the way you do.

So, here's an example of why emotions are never either right or wrong... because they're just reacting to your thoughts...

Think about something that you really, really wish you had, but that you don't have.

You may feel unhappy because you don't have it, but that's not true. You are unhappy because of the THOUGHT of not having it.

Let me prove it to you:

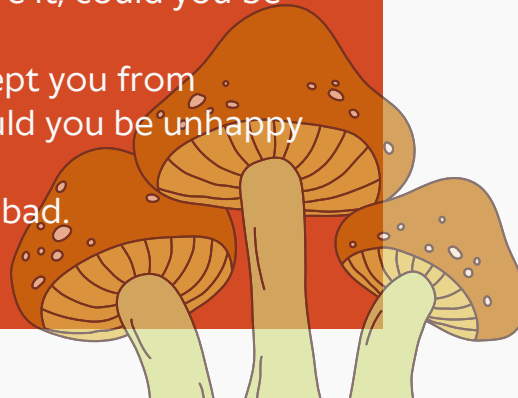
Have you ever been happy while not having this thing you want? __Yes __No

If you didn't have it but you didn't care that you didn't have it, could you be unhappy? __Yes __No

If you didn't have it but were doing something else that kept you from thinking about it, such as going down a roller coaster, would you be unhappy about it? No.

You see, not having what you want doesn't make you feel bad.

Thinking about it does.





Where Do Emotions Come From?

Sometimes our unconscious mind and senses are picking up cues from our environment that trigger emotions, such as reading a person's body language or facial expression and having an automatic physiological response or sensing danger and having an automatic fear response. (By the way, to learn more about the fight-or-flight response that causes you to feel fear and anxiety, check out the Situational vs Psychological Fear section in the Developing Awareness section.)

However, most of the time it is NOT the outside world or the situation that is happening that causes our emotional reaction—it's what we're thinking. It is the mental filter that the situation passes through—aka, our interpretation—that then causes our emotional reaction to the situation.

Situation --> Interpretation (Thought) --> Emotion



The key to understand here is that research over decades on CBT provides evidence that we can have control over our thoughts. And if we have control over our thoughts, we can control our emotions. It may be challenging to do this, but it is a skill that can be learned. Here's the process:

Recognize Emotion --> Identify Thought --> Change Thought --> Change Emotion

Changing the Thought

Once you notice that a thought is happening it becomes conscious. Since you're aware of it, you can then choose to change it. Your mind automatically interpreted the situation, but now that you're paying

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attention to it you can choose a different interpretation—a different perspective. This is great news because when you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. Even in the same situation or with the same facts, if you change your viewpoint, your experience of the situation will change. Here is an example: a man was visiting a friend's house and went into the kitchen to make some tea. He didn't find a tea kettle, and so poured water into a glass coffee carafe and placed it on the gas stove. He returned to the living room and minute later smelled something burning. He returned and found that the handle of the carafe had caught fire. He quickly put the fire out. He apologized to his friend and was feeling both embarrassed and guilty. His friend, however, was laughing and complemented him on his "fireman" skills. Same situation, different perspectives—and the result was completely different emotional responses.





Why This Matters!



So, this matters because, of course, you want to feel better. If you change your perspective of a situation, you will change your emotional reaction to it. But it's even better than that!


You see, your emotions are the driving force for your BEHAVIORS because the decisions you make are based on how you feel. As you get better at being aware of your emotions and thinking, you'll be able to make decisions from a place of control—you might feel a certain way, but you'll use your cognitive processes to choose to act from a place of rational thought.

But if you're like most people, you're not at that place yet—at least not all the time. So, here's where we are now:



Thought --> Emotion --> Decisions --> Action/Behaviors

The behaviors you exhibit and the actions you take are a direct result of your thoughts. So, if you are experiencing behaviors you don't like or have been doing things you aren't pleased with, your thoughts are to blame.





But I can't see if for myself!

If you can't yet see the behaviors or actions you're doing that aren't serving you, look around at your life at the results you're experiencing.

Have you been having any problems at work or in your relationships?

Have you experienced anything unpleasant?
Are there are things you want that you don't have?

On the positive side, what aspects of your life have you managed to create that you want, enjoy, or love?

The reason I ask is because I'm going to take this cause and effect train one more step.

Thought --> Emotion --> Decisions --> Action/Behaviors --> Results/Outcomes

That's right, your behaviors and actions are what determine the results and outcomes you experience in your life—both the wanted ones and the unwanted ones.

By changing your thoughts, you can literally transform your life. Literally!

So, let's dive into more about understanding how thinking works.

