

## Taking Responsibility For Your Moods

**You may not always choose what happens to you** (criticism, hardship, betrayal, injustice, crime, violence, accidents/injury/trauma or loss) And you may not always choose emotions (fear, anger, guilt, grief, loneliness, inferiority, unworthiness) **but you may \*choose your response to emotions & events.**

**“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”** Viktor Emil Frankl, M.D., Ph.D. (1905 –1997) Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, Holocaust survivor and author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*,

### Stimulus

Acknowledge what is happening inside of you and around you.

#### Stimulus:

Everything inside or outside of your body that triggers your response.

*Internal = Everything inside of your body. Your own feelings & thoughts and physical health.*

*External = Everything outside of your body: other people & events*

#### Examples of internal stimulus:

Fatigue/ hunger/illness  
Anxiety/worry/fear  
Depression/loss/grief  
Anger/resentment/blame  
Guilt/shame/loneliness  
Inferiority/insecurity/jealousy  
Boredom/stagnation

#### Examples of external stimulus:

Change/challenges  
Responsibility/Schedules  
Stress: family/school/work  
Dating/marriage/parenting  
Conflict/arguments  
Injustice/unfairness/betrayal  
Bullying/intimidation  
Accidents /Injury/Illness  
Divorce  
Crime/Violence  
Death

### \*Choice

**You  
have  
A  
Choice**

**What  
is  
your  
intention?**

**“Responsible”  
means:  
You are ABLE  
to  
CHOOSE  
Your  
Response.**

**\*Brain damage,  
injury and disease  
are not choices.**

Choice requires a healthy enough brain with intact executive function. When disease, damage or substance abuse is present, medical evaluation, diagnosis and treatment is necessary before use of CBT Tools.

### Response

Breathing calms the mind.  
A calm mind is a wise mind

#### Response

You did not get to choose the stimulus, but you can choose what happens next. ..

You choose your response.

**Now what? What is your intention?**

- Fight: Stuck in Blame/Anger/Rage**  
Remaining stuck in blame, anger, and resentment. “They are the problem!” waiting for the “stimulus” to change.
- Flight: Avoid/Deny/Escape with bad habits and self-defeating behaviors;**  
Quick fixes/denial & avoidance  
**Excessive** social media, working, eating, cleaning, spending, clutter, gambling, porn, **unhealthy relationships**— (obsessing about other people) gossip, affairs, domestic violence, addiction.
- Freeze: Wounded/Victim/Martyr**  
Remaining stuck, helpless, inferior, worried and afraid. Waiting to be rescued, helped or saved.
- Choose Dignity & Self-Respect:**  
*Be the best version of yourself by Aligning thoughts & actions with your values— be the role model.*
  - **Breathe** (Fear holds your breath)
  - **Reframe** (Challenge distorted thoughts)
  - **Embrace emotions** (Feelings aren’t facts)
  - **Accept yourself with compassion**
  - **Talk to yourself as you would a beloved**
  - **Heal by coping and problem-solving**
  - **Every challenge brings opportunities**

## Stimulus → \*Choice → Response

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** teaches you to **become aware of** and **take responsibility for** the thoughts, emotions and actions *that are within your control*.

**You do not always have control over what happens to you** hardship, accidents/injury, injustice, violence, trauma, loss, pandemic... those events are outside of your control, referred to as your **external stimulus**.

**And you do not control your brain's automatic emotions and physical responses** inside of your body...fight, flight freeze...referred to as your **internal stimulus**.

**but when you take a moment to pause, breathe, calm yourself, then you may choose your response to your life events and to your emotions.**

**\*Choice— Decisions are made from the logic and reasoning part of your brain.** This logic region allows you to gain perspective, problem-solve, and make choices. Making choices requires a healthy, calm mind. You might "*FEEL*" like you do not have control of your choices.. but is that a FACT?"

### The ability to make a choice requires brain health

**1. Brain maturity.** The human brain continues to develop and mature into the mid-twenties. Immature brains are more reactive, more impulsive, less analytical. Understanding brain development is crucial in understanding difference in choices over the lifespan.



**2. Substances, chemicals, drugs:** The brain's ability to remain in reality and to make logical choices is also impaired by alcohol, cannabis, opioids and other mood-altering medications and illegal drugs. Whether the impairment is due to denial or to more severe damage to the brain, use of mood-altering substances may have long lasting effects on the brain's ability to function normally. Consider the impairment when a brain is under the age of 25 AND using mood altering chemicals!

**3. Mental health is brain health:** The brain's job is to sort out reality from fantasy, fact from fiction, and rational thought from irrational thought. When the brain is not functioning properly, it is not able to do its job effectively. Psychiatric disorders in the brain such as anxiety, panic, depression, bipolar, obsessive-compulsive, and post-traumatic stress disorders, as well as personality disorders may create distorted, irrational thoughts and block logic. Brain injury, dementia, stroke, cognitive impairments, and other neurological disorders may also impact the brain's ability to function rationally.

**If you believe that your ability to make choices is impaired by mental illness or substance abuse, help is available!** Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline, [SAMHSA's National Helpline 1-800-662-HELP \(4357\)](https://www.samhsa.gov) is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

## Stimulus → Choice → Response

### What does “stimulus/choice/response” actually mean and how does it apply to you?

Let’s take a few moments to process the information on the previous page.

*Have you worried about what other people will think?*

*Ever felt too afraid to address conflict—or regret that you “lost control”?*

*Do you get stuck in thoughts that you “are not good enough”?*

*Are you proud of how you cope with feelings of anger, jealousy or betrayal?*

*Will you trust and love again after a broken heart?*

*If you feel it, do you think it must be true?*

*If you have always thought this way, how do you choose differently now?*

There is a difference between your *stimulus* (automatic, biological, physical and emotional limbic system responses which are not your choice), and your intentional, or chosen *response* gained through emotional intelligence, executive function, logic and values.

**Stimulus:** Review the left column depicted on the previous page. **Stimulus refers to everything inside and outside of your body.** The stimulus is what triggers your response. **Internal stimulus** refers to everything happening inside your body **automatically**: thoughts, emotions and physical bodily sensations. **Everything listed in the stimulus column is out of your control.** You don’t get to choose the automatic thoughts, emotions and physical sensations that pop into your awareness—those are controlled by the brain’s limbic system. The limbic system functions without your consent. The hair will stand up on the back of your neck whether you want it to or not. Your pulse rate increases without consulting you. You have no control over the irrational, emotional, biased or judgmental thoughts that spontaneously pop into your head. **Just because a thought pops in, doesn’t mean your thought is true.**

**External stimulus** refers to everything outside of your body including other people’s thoughts, emotions and actions, and literally everything else. **You have no control over how other people think, act or feel.** When an external stimulus such as a rude person, a challenging task or stressful event triggers your uncomfortable thoughts and emotions, it is easy to believe that those thoughts and feelings are facts. If you *feel* like a failure, then in your mind, it must be true. But the truth is that someone’s rudeness represents his or her social skills, it is not about you. Everyone faces life-challenging events. Just because you “*feel*” inferior, defeated or alone, does not mean that it is true.

### Thoughts are not truths. Feelings are not facts.

Now review the “**Response**” depicted in the right column of the previous page. **Becoming aware of your automatic thoughts and emotions creates choices about how to respond next.** A calm brain allows logic and reason to transform emotions into insight with proactive rather than reactive responses. **Without calming first, your brain may get stuck in reactive stress responses such as fight (anger, blame, resentment), flight (avoid, escape and denial) and freeze (learned helplessness, wounded victim).** A healthy coping response to the emotional triggers of stress, also known as *emotional self-regulation*, requires that you pause long enough to calm your brain before you react. **Once you focus on taking responsibility for how to respond to your own emotions and thoughts, you may choose to align your response with your values.** Sound interesting? Change starts with curiosity. Let’s practice on the worksheet!