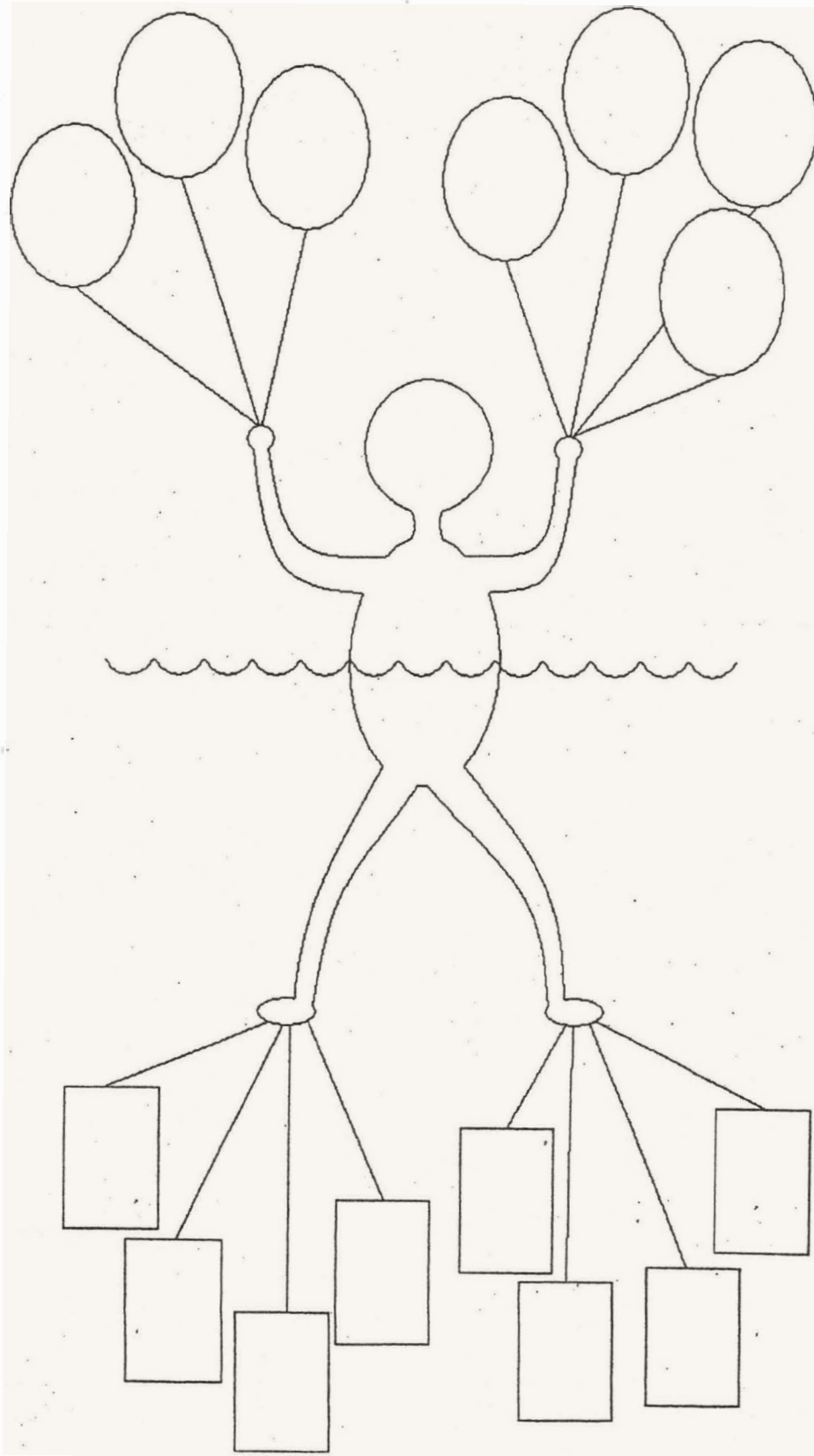


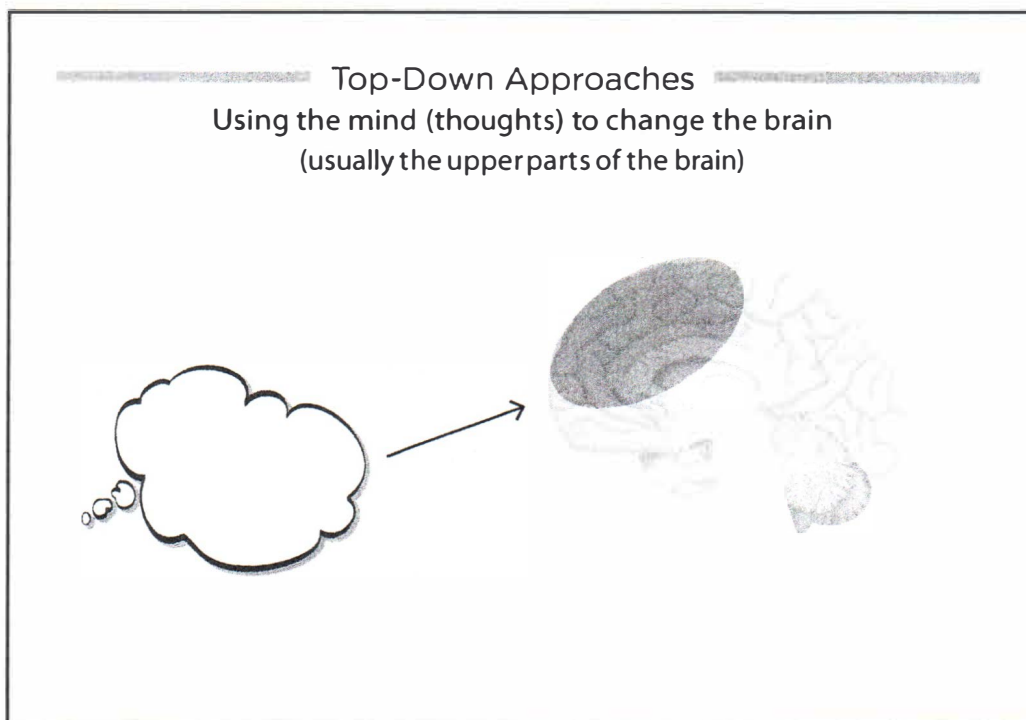
Staying Afloat



What kinds of things drag you down? And what gives you a lift? Is there enough to keep your head above water?

Change the Brain Top-Down

While the brain is responsible for producing thoughts, thoughts also produce brain change. Techniques that use thoughts, or the mind, to change the brain are referred to as "top-down" approaches. Whenever we try to focus on something, change our thinking, or redirect our thoughts, we are practicing changing our brain from the top down. Therapy techniques that work with thoughts are often utilized to change the upper, cortical parts of the brain, including the thinking and emotion regulation centers of the brain.



Your Brain on Top-Down Techniques

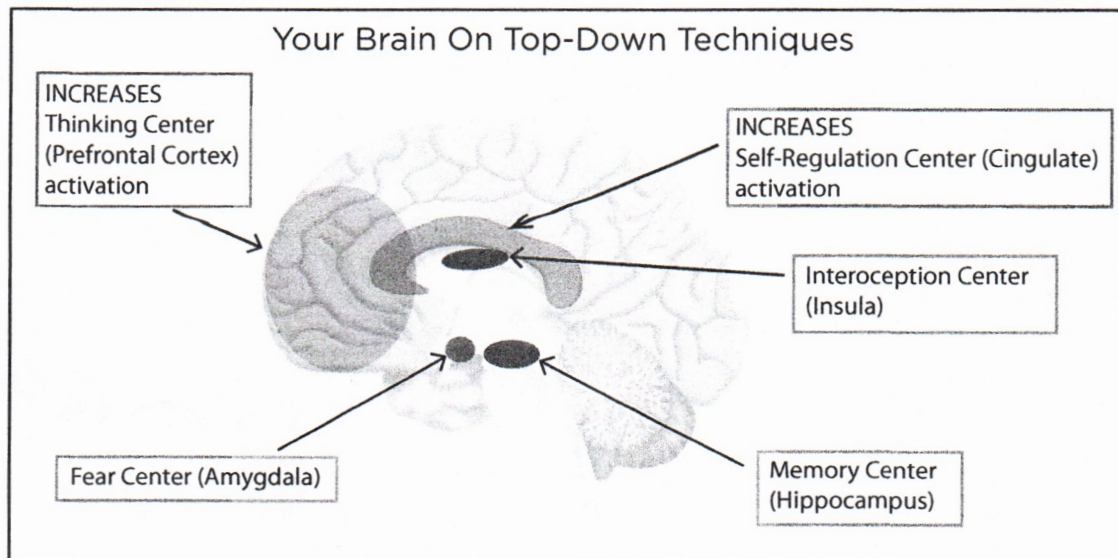
Top-down techniques change the brain in **two** ways:

1. More activation in the thinking center (prefrontal cortex) of the brain:

- Increases your ability to think clearly when stressed
- Increases self-awareness
- Increases emotional intelligence ("EQ") and allows you to attune better to others
- Increases your ability to problem-solve and concentrate

2. More activation in the self-regulation center (cingulate) of the brain:

- Increases your ability to regulate emotions
- Increases your ability to regulate or change distressing thoughts
- Increases your ability to process and solve "mixed emotions" or competing thoughts



Your Brain on Top-Down Techniques

Top-down techniques tend to change the upper regions of the brain, including cortical structures. When treating trauma, relevant structures that can be altered using top-down techniques include the prefrontal cortex and the cingulate. Specifically, top-down techniques may alter these brain areas in the following ways.

1. **Prefrontal Cortex (Thinking Center):** Increased activation of the thinking center. In PTSD, the prefrontal cortex is often under-activated. Activation of this area helps improve focus and concentration, problem-solving, decision-making, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and connection to others.
2. **Cingulate Cortex (Emotion Regulation Center):** Increased activation of the emotion regulation center. In PTSD, the cingulate is often under-activated. Activation of this area helps improve conflict monitoring, emotion regulation, thought regulation and, more broadly, self-regulation.

CHECKLIST OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

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| 1. | All or nothing thinking: You look at things in absolute, black and white categories. |
| 2. | Overgeneralization: You view a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. |
| 3. | Mental Filter: You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives. |
| 4. | Discounting the positives: You insist that your accomplishments or positive qualities "don't count." |
| 5. | Jumping to conclusions: (A) Mind reading – you assume that people are reacting negatively to you when there's no definite evidence for this; (B) Fortune Telling – you arbitrarily predict things will turn out badly. |
| 6. | Magnification or Minimization: You blow things way out of proportion or you shrink their importance inappropriately. |
| 7. | Emotional Reasoning: You reason from how you feel: "I feel like an idiot, so I really must be one." Or "I don't feel like doing this, so I'll put it off." |
| 8. | "Should Statements": You criticize yourself or other people with "Shoulds" or "Shouldn'ts." "Musts," "Oughts," "Have tos" are similar offenders. |
| 9. | Labeling: You identify with your shortcomings. Instead of saying, "I made a mistake," you tell yourself, "I'm a jerk," or "a fool," or "a loser." |
| 10. | Personalization and Blame: You blame yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for, or you blame other people and overlook ways that your own attitudes and behavior might contribute to a problem. |

YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

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| 1. | Sadness or Depression | Loss, a romantic rejection, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or the failure to achieve an important personal goal. |
| 2. | Guilt or Shame | You believe that you've hurt someone or that you've failed to live up to your own moral standards. Guilt results from self-condemnation, where as shame involves fear that you'll lose face when others find out about who you really are. |
| 3. | Anger, Irritation, Annoyance, or Resentment | You feel that someone is treating you unfairly or trying to take advantage of you. |
| 4. | Frustration | Life falls short of your expectations. You insist that things should be different. It might be your own performance ("I shouldn't have made that mistake"), what someone else does ("He should've been on time!"), or an event ("Why does the traffic always slow down when I'm in a hurry?"). |
| 5. | Anxiety, Worry, Fear, Nervousness or Panic | You believe you're in danger because you think something bad is about to happen. "What if the plane crashes? What if my mind goes blank when I give my talk in front of all those people? What if this chest pain is the start of a heart attack?" |
| 6. | Inferiority or Inadequacy | You compare yourself to others and conclude that you're not as good as they are because you're not as talented, attractive, charming, successful, intelligent. "She's really got what it takes. She's so cute. All the men are chasing her. I'm just average. There's nothing very special about me." |
| 7. | Loneliness | You tell yourself that you're bound to feel unhappy because you're alone and you aren't getting enough love and attention from others. |
| 8. | Hopelessness or Discouragement | You feel convinced that your problems will go on forever and that things will never improve. "I'll never get over this depression," or "I just can't lose weight and keep it off," or "I'll never find a good job," or "I'll be alone forever." |

TEN WAYS TO UNTWIST YOUR THINKING

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| 1. | Identify the Distortion | Write down your negative thoughts so you can see which of the ten cognitive distortions you're involved in. This will make it easier to think about the problem in a more positive and realistic way. |
| 2. | Examine the Evidence | Instead of assuming that your negative thought is true, examine the actual evidence for it. For example, if you feel that you never do anything right, you could list several things you have done successfully. |
| 3. | The Double-Standard Method | Instead of putting yourself down in a harsh, condemning way, talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you would talk to a friend with a similar problem. |
| 4. | The Experimental Technique | Do an experiment to test the validity of your negative thought. For example, if, during the episode of panic, you become terrified that you're about to die of a heart attack, you could jog or run up and down several flights of stairs. This will prove that your heart is healthy and strong. |
| 5. | Thinking in Shades of Grey | Although this method might sound drab, the effects can be illuminating. Instead of thinking about your problems in all-or-nothing extremes, evaluate things on a range of 0 to 100. When things don't work out as well as you hoped, think about the experience as a partial success rather than a complete failure. See what you can learn from the situation. |
| 6. | The Survey Method | Ask people questions to find out if your thoughts and attitudes are realistic. For example, if you believe that public speaking anxiety is abnormal and shameful, ask several friends if they ever felt nervous before they gave a talk. |
| 7. | Define Terms | When you label yourself "inferior" or "a fool" or "a loser," ask, "What is the definition of a 'fool'?" You will feel better when you see that there is no such thing as a "fool" or a "loser." |
| 8. | The Semantic Method | Simply substitute language that is less colorful and emotionally loaded. This method is helpful for "should statements." Instead of telling yourself "I shouldn't have made that mistake," you can say, "It would be better if I hadn't made that mistake." |
| 9. | Re-attribution | Instead of automatically assuming that you are "bad" and blaming yourself entirely for a problem, think about the many factors that may have contributed to it. Focus on solving the problem instead of using up all your energy blaming yourself and feeling guilty. |
| 10. | Cost-Benefit Analysis | List the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling (like getting angry when your plane is late), a negative thought (like "No matter how hard I try, I always screw up"), or a behavior pattern (like overeating and lying around in bed when you're depressed). You can also use the Cost-Benefit Analysis to modify a self-defeating belief such as, "I must always try to be perfect." |

Bill of Rights for Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents

1. The Right to Set Limits

I have the right to set limits on your hurtful or exploitative behavior.

I have the right to break off any interaction in which I feel pressured or coerced. I have the right to stop anything long before I feel exhausted.

I have the right to call a halt to any interaction I don't find enjoyable. I have the right to say no to anything without a good reason.

2. The Right Not to be Emotionally Coerced

I have the right to not be your rescuer.

I have the right to ask you to get help from someone else. I have the right to not fix your problems.

I have the right to let you manage your own self-esteem without my input. I have the right to let you manage your own distress.

I have the right to refuse to feel guilty.

3. The Right to Emotional Autonomy and Mental Freedom

I have the right to feel or think anything.

I have the right to no ridicule or mockery of my values, ideas, or interests.

4. The Right to Know How I Feel

I have the right to know whether I love you or not. I am not obligated to love you because you feel bad or I am related to you.

I have the right not to disconnect from myself to make things easier on others.

I have the right to be bothered by how I'm treated.

5. The Right to Clear Communications

I have the right to say anything as long as I do it in a non-violent, non-abusive way.

I have the right to ask to be listened to.

I have the right to speak up and tell you if my feelings are hurt.

I have the right to be told what you want from me without assuming I should know

6. The Right to Choose What's Best for Me

I have the right to leave whenever I want.

I have the right not to visit if it's not a good time for me.

I have the right to opt out of any activity or get-togethers I don't find enjoyable.

I have the right to make my own decisions, without self-doubt.

7. The Right to Live Life My Own Way

I have the right to take action even if you don't think it's a good idea.

I have the right to spend my energy and time on what I find important.

I have the right to trust my inner experiences, and take my aspirations seriously.

I have the right to take all the time I need, and not be rushed.

I have the right to refuse to feel shame.

8. The Right to Equal Importance and Respect

I have the right to be considered just as important as you.

I have the right to live my life, and not be shamed by anyone.

I have the right to be treated respectfully as an independent adult.

9. The Right to Put My Own Health and Well-Being First

I have the right to thrive, not just survive.

I have the right to take time for myself to do things I really enjoy.

I have the right to decide how much energy and attention I give to other people.

I have the right to take time to think things over.

10. The Right to Love and Protect Myself

I have the right to self-compassion when I make mistakes.

I have the right to change my self-concept when it no longer fits.

I have the right to preserve the time and space necessary to nourish and protect my inner world.

I have the right to treat myself nicely and with loving-kindness.

I have the right to be free of self-criticism, and to fully accept my individuality.

I have the right to be me.