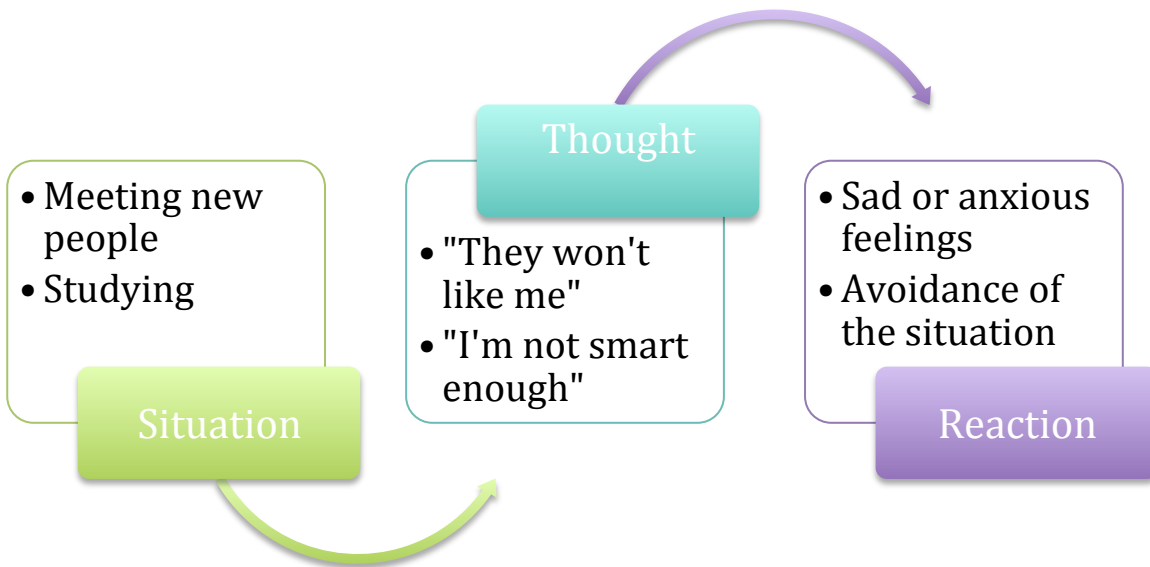


The Cognitive Model



The cognitive model (Beck, 1995) tells us that how we think affects how we feel. In turn, how we feel affects how we behave. When a person is anxious, it's natural to try to avoid the situation that is making him or her feel that way. This doesn't always work out very well. For example, a person might start worrying about the possibility of failing an exam whenever he or she sits down to study. That person might find ways to avoid studying in order to feel anxious, and then end up failing the exam. So, by avoiding something that made him or her anxious, this person ended up experiencing the outcome that he or she was worried about in the first place. We can change the way we feel and how we behave if we can control how we think about a situation. In cognitive behavioral therapy, the client and therapist work together to identify and challenge thoughts that are contributing to avoidance or other problematic behaviors. A person can also work on this on his or her own or with self-help resources. However, it is often helpful to get an outside perspective when we are trying to change how we think.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

- You believe that the situation can only be in one of two categories.
- "If I don't get an A in every class, I'm a failure."

Catastrophic Thinking

- You predict the worst case scenario
- "If this relationship doesn't work out, I'm going to be alone forever."

Discounting the Positive

- You find a way to make it so that your accomplishments and positive qualities don't count.
- "I got an A on that test, but it was only because the professor felt sorry for me."

Emotional Reasoning

- You see something as true because you feel it strongly.
- "I know I did well in my classes, but I feel stupid"

Labeling

- You label yourself or someone else in a general way without considering all of the evidence.
- "I'm a failure"

Magnification/minimization

- You minimize the positive or magnify the negative
- "My friends spending time with me doesn't mean that they like me. Not being invited to that party proves that no one likes me."

Mental Filter

- You focus on negative details rather than seeing the "big picture" of a situation.
- "Even though I passed my class, failing that one exam means that I'm dumb."

Mind Reading

- You assume that you know what others are thinking.
- "I can tell she's thinking that I don't know what I'm talking about."

Overgeneralization

- You come to a general conclusion based on a current situation.
- "I didn't meet anyone I liked in class. There's no one I can be friends with on this campus."

Personalization

- When others behave in a negative way, you assume it's because of you or something you did.
- "He wasn't smiling this morning. I must have done something to make him mad."

Shoulds & Musts

- Shoulds and musts are rigid expectations we have for ourselves and other people.
- "It should be easy for me to catch on in class. It's awful that I'm having a hard time."

Managing Your Thoughts

Once we've seen that our thoughts are inaccurate or unrealistic, we can start to challenge or change them into thoughts that are more useful to us. You can do this by asking yourself a few questions when a thought seems distorted or unrealistic – here are a few examples:

- What evidence do I have that this thought is true?
- Do I have any evidence that it isn't true?
- Is it true all the time, or just some of the time?
- If this is true, does that mean that it will be true forever?

Many times, we need help from other sources in order to identify the thoughts that are contributing to feeling sad or anxious. It is also sometimes difficult to challenge thoughts on our own. Help is available through counseling or self-help resources such as the following:

- The Feeling Good Handbook by David Burns
- When Panic Attacks by David Burns
- [The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Edmund Bourne](#)

References

Beck, J.S. (1995). *Cognitive therapy: Basics and beyond*. New York: Guilford Press.

Burns, D. (1999). *The feeling good handbook* (revised edition). New York: Penguin Group.