

◀ CHAPTER FOUR ▶

Thoughts, feelings and what you do

Hassles and problems are part of everyday life. Parents, friends, boy- or girlfriends, school, work – in fact almost everything – create problems at some time or another. Luckily, we are quite good at coping with many of these problems and they are quickly and successfully sorted out.

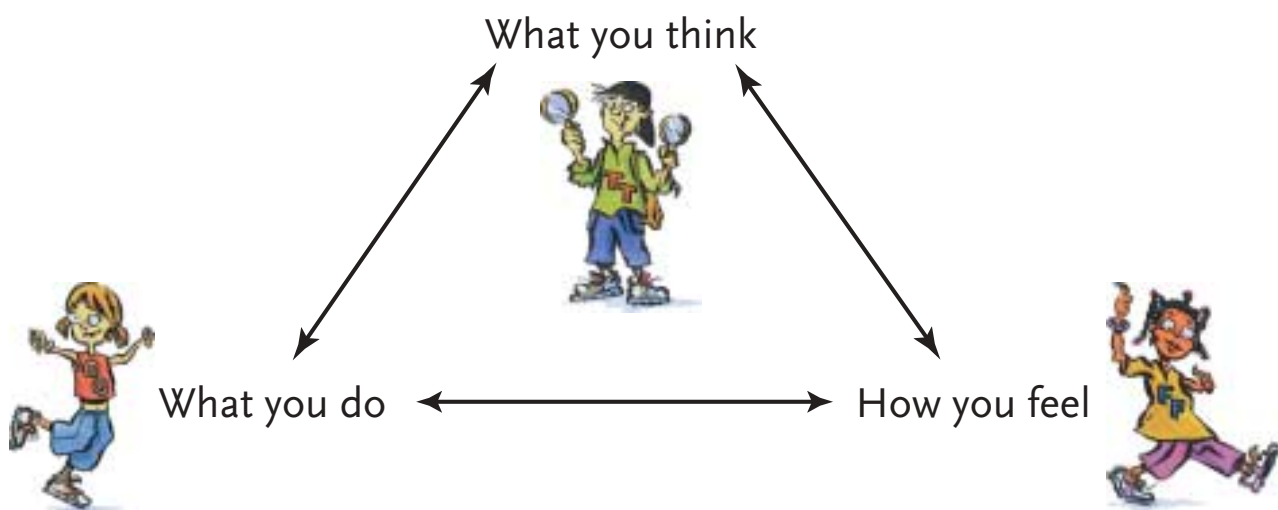
Other problems seem more difficult. This may be because:

- ▶ they happen fairly often
- ▶ they have been around for some time
- ▶ they feel totally overwhelming
- ▶ they seem to affect everything you do.

Sometimes these problems take over and life becomes one big unhappy worry.

The magic circle

Think Good – Feel Good aims to help you discover helpful ways of dealing with your problems. It is based on a way of helping called **cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)**. This is an effective way of helping people to deal with their problems, and it explores the important link between:



We shall find out more about this link, although the following examples may help you understand how it works.

- ▶ **Thinking** that you are not very good at talking with people may make you **feel** very worried or anxious when you are out with your friends. You may **go quiet** and not talk very much.
- ▶ **Thinking** that no one likes you may make you **feel** sad. You may **stay at home** on your own.
- ▶ **Thinking** that you never get things right may make you **feel** angry. You may **give up trying** because ‘it will be wrong’.



Often, as in these examples, our thoughts magically seem to come true.

But is this really the case? Is our future so clearly set out that we are able to predict correctly what is going to happen?

Think Good – Feel Good will help you to explore this question and help you to realize that sometimes you may not see the whole picture. You may focus on only one side of the story – usually that bit which has gone wrong or isn’t quite right.

Often you may not even realize what you are doing. It has become part of everyday life and it can be very difficult to see any way out or to think about how things could be different. Because of this you will probably need the help of the **Think Good – Feel Good** Team.



The **Thought Tracker** will help you look at the way you think.



The **Feeling Finder** will help you discover the way you feel.



The **Go Getter** will help you find ways to change what you do.



Think Good – Feel Good will help you learn that the way you think and approach problems will affect what happens. Perhaps you can gain greater control over what happens in your life than you really think!



What you think

Our minds are always busy. As soon as one thought passes through, another arrives to take its place. We are constantly thinking about all sorts of things. Many of our thoughts are describing what is going on around us. Others will be about ourselves.

These might be about **the way we see ourselves**.



- ▶ I'm fat.
- ▶ I have lots of friends.
- ▶ I've got a bad temper.



They might be about **how we judge what we do**.

- ▶ I'm hopeless at organizing myself.
- ▶ I'm good at sports.
- ▶ I'm pretty good at making friends.

They might describe **our view of the future**.



- ▶ No one will ever want to go out with me.
- ▶ I'll never get to university.
- ▶ I'll be a millionaire by the time I'm thirty.

Core beliefs

The way we think about ourselves, judge what we do and view our future develops over time into strong patterns of thinking. These patterns of thinking are fairly fixed and become our **core beliefs**. These often appear as very short statements such as:

- ▶ I am kind
- ▶ I work hard
- ▶ I am successful.

Beliefs and assumptions

Core beliefs are helpful. They help us to predict and make sense of what happens in our lives. They lead us to assume that certain things will happen. This is the **'IF/THEN'** link.

- ▶ **IF** I am kind (core belief), **THEN** other people will like me (assumption).
- ▶ **IF** I work hard (core belief), **THEN** I will get a good job (assumption).
- ▶ **IF** I am successful (core belief), **THEN** I will be happy (assumption).

▶ Unhelpful beliefs and assumptions

Many of our core beliefs are useful, but others are less helpful. They prevent us from making real choices and decisions, and can lead us to make false assumptions about our life. Examples of unhelpful core beliefs might be:



- ▶ Everything I do must be perfect
- ▶ I always get things wrong
- ▶ No one will ever love me.

Core beliefs such as these often set you up to **fail**, make you **feel bad**, and **limit what you do**. They lead you to assume that negative things will happen.

- ▶ The **belief** that 'everything I do must be perfect' may lead you to **assume** that your work is never good enough. This may result in you feeling stressed and unhappy as each piece of work is repeated again and again.
- ▶ The **belief** that 'I always get things wrong' may lead you to **assume** that there is no point in working hard. You may feel sad and become unmotivated or lose interest in your work.
- ▶ The **belief** that 'no one will ever love me' may lead you to **assume** that people are out to make fun of you. You may feel angry and become very rude and aggressive.

▶ Core beliefs and assumptions are fairly fixed

Core beliefs and assumptions are usually very strong and become fairly fixed. They are often very resistant to any alternative challenge. Any evidence that would question them is often ignored or dismissed as unimportant.

- ▶ The girl who believes that ‘no one will ever love me’ may reject any signs of affection from her parents as ‘they don’t really care – they are just trying to get round me’.
- ▶ Anything, no matter how small, that supports these beliefs is seized upon as proof. The parent who has had a busy day and has not had time to wash that special item of clothing may be seen as evidence that ‘I knew you didn’t care about me’.

Important events

These core beliefs and assumptions come to the front of our thinking at certain times and are often triggered by **important events** or **experiences**.

- ▶ Being asked to complete your GCSE course work may trigger the core belief that ‘everything I do must be perfect’ and the assumption that ‘I never get it quite right’.
- ▶ Failing your driving test may trigger the core belief that ‘I always get things wrong’ and the assumption that ‘there is no point in trying again’.
- ▶ Being dropped by your boyfriend or girlfriend could trigger the core belief that ‘no one will ever love me’ and the assumption that ‘people are out to hurt me’.

Automatic thoughts

Once triggered, core beliefs and assumptions produce **automatic thoughts**.

These thoughts flood into our heads and provide us with a running commentary about what is going on.

Many of these thoughts are about ourselves, and a number of them will be negative and critical.

- ▶ Being asked to complete your course work may trigger automatic thoughts like ‘I don’t know what to do’, ‘This isn’t good enough’ or ‘I’m sure that they want more than this’.
- ▶ Failing your driving test may result in automatic thoughts like ‘I really screwed this up’, ‘I’ll never be able to drive’ or ‘I knew I wouldn’t be able to do it’.
- ▶ A relationship ending may result in automatic thoughts like ‘I knew this wouldn’t last, it never does’, ‘He/she was just making fun of me’ or ‘I’ll never get another boyfriend/girlfriend’.

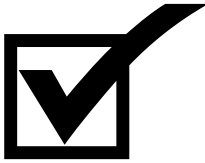




How you feel

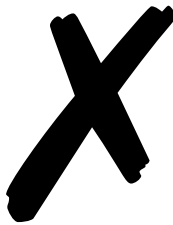
As we have begun to see, the way in which we think affects how we feel. Our thoughts will result in many different **feelings**.

Positive or nice thoughts often produce **pleasant feelings**.



- ▶ The thought ‘I’m really looking forward to that party’ may make you feel happy.
- ▶ The thought ‘Although we lost I played really well’ may make you feel pleased.
- ▶ The thought ‘I look quite nice in these clothes’ may make you feel relaxed.

At other times we may have more **negative** thoughts, and these often produce **unpleasant feelings**.



- ▶ The thought ‘I bet no one will turn up to my party’ may make you feel anxious.
- ▶ The thought ‘We lost again – we will never win’ may make you feel angry or sad.
- ▶ The thought ‘I don’t like these clothes’ may make you feel worried and unhappy.

Many of these feelings will not be strong and will not last for very long. You may not even notice them.

At other times, these unpleasant feelings take over. They become very strong and seem to last.

The unpleasant feelings people notice most often are those of stress, unhappiness and anger.



What you do

If these feelings last or become very strong, they start to have an effect on what you do. We like to feel good, so we usually try to do more of those things that make us feel good and less of those things that make us feel unpleasant.

- ▶ If you feel anxious when talking with other people, you may avoid going out or turn down invitations to meet up and do things with your friends. When you stay on your own you may feel more relaxed.
- ▶ If you feel sad or unhappy at school, you may stop going. You may feel happier when you stay at home.
- ▶ If you feel angry when people criticize your work, you may give up trying so hard.

There are lots of ways in which your thoughts and feelings can affect what you do. You may notice that you:

- ▶ **give up** and stop doing things
- ▶ **avoid** situations that might be difficult
- ▶ become **reluctant to try** new things.



It would seem that these changes prove that our thoughts were right all along!

- ▶ Difficulty in concentrating would prove the thought that 'I will never pass these exams'.
- ▶ Staying at home would prove the thought that 'no one likes me – I haven't any friends'.
- ▶ Finding it difficult to sleep or putting on weight would prove the thoughts that 'I look a wreck' and 'no one would want to go out with me'.



STOP – can we look at this again?

You may be caught in a trap.

You may **ONLY** be looking for evidence to support your negative thoughts.

- ▶ You may have found it difficult to concentrate today – you didn't sleep very well last night. Usually you sleep better, and when you have had a good night's sleep you are able to concentrate.
- ▶ You may have stayed at home last night, but you have arranged to go out with your friends tomorrow.
- ▶ You may have gained 2 kg but does that really make such a big difference to how you look? Your favourite clothes still fit well.

Thoughts may magically come true because you are only looking for evidence that supports them. Is it possible that you are only seeing one side of the story?

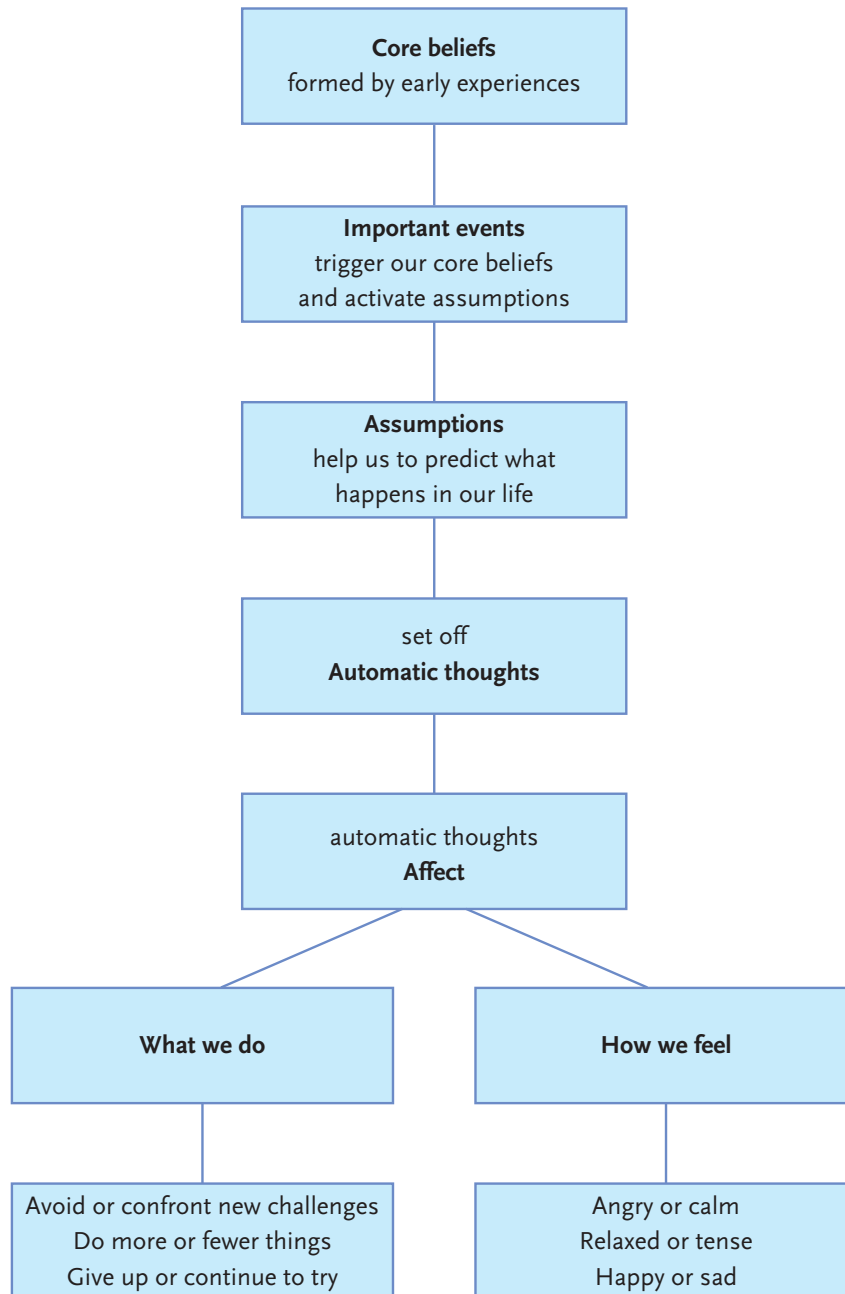


We need to break out of this unhelpful cycle.

We need to learn to identify, question and test some of our negative thoughts.

Learning to develop a more balanced way of thinking will make you feel better and will enable you to make real choices about the important things in your life.

Thoughts, feelings and what you do: putting it all together





The magic circle



Think about something you have done recently which you **really enjoyed**. Write or draw in the circles below:

- ▶ what you **DID**
- ▶ how you **FELT**
- ▶ what you were **THINKING**.

What were you **THINKING**?

What were you **DOING**?
(place, people, activity)

How did you **FEEL**?



The negative trap



Think about one of your **most difficult situations** and write/draw:

- ▶ what **HAPPENS**
- ▶ how you **FEEL**
- ▶ what you **THINK** about when you are in that situation.

What I **THINK**:



What I **DO**:



How I **FEEL**:





The IF/THEN quiz



Try the IF/THEN Quiz. What do you think will happen?

IF I am good **THEN**

IF I get into trouble **THEN**

IF I get things wrong **THEN**

IF I work hard **THEN**

IF I have no friends **THEN**

IF People like me **THEN**

IF I make people happy **THEN**

IF I let my parents down **THEN**

IF I am not kind **THEN**

IF I am successful **THEN**



What I think, what I do or how I feel



Are these THOUGHTS, FEELINGS or what you DO?

I am going to get this wrong

Angry

Sad

Going to school

Playing with my friends

This is really good

I'm good at making people laugh

Cross

Being on my own

People don't like me

Having a bath

Happy

Eating tea

No one will ever want to be my friend

Stressed

Frightened

I will never pass my exams

Shopping

