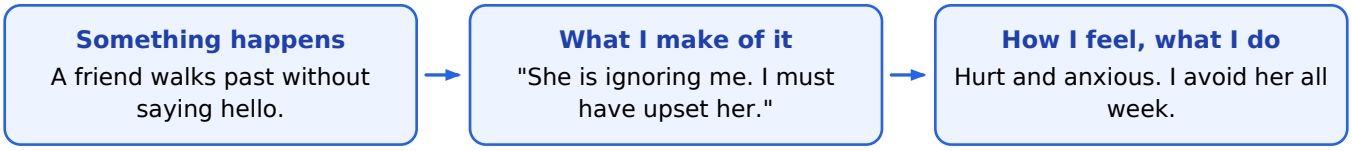
What is CBT?

A short guide to cognitive behavioural therapy and how we will use it.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a practical, structured kind of talking therapy. It looks at how the way you think about things, and the way you respond to them, affect how you feel. It is one of the most researched therapies and is recommended for many common difficulties, including anxiety, low mood, panic, OCD and trauma.

The basic idea

How we feel often depends less on the situation itself than on what we make of it and what we do next. Two people can get the same text message and feel completely different, depending on how they read it.



A different reading ("She looked miles away, she probably did not see me") leads to a different feeling and a different response. CBT helps you notice these readings, check them out, and try new responses.

What CBT involves

- **Working together.** You know your own life, and I know how these difficulties tend to work, so we work it out between us.
- **A focus on now.** We may look at where things came from, but most of the work is on what keeps the problem going today.
- **Clear goals.** We agree what you want to be different and keep checking how it is going.
- **Trying things out.** Change happens between sessions as much as in them. We will agree small things to practise or test.
- **Learning skills.** The aim is that you learn to do this for yourself and need me less over time.

What it asks of you

1. You do not need to have things worked out before you come.
2. Say what is going through your mind as openly as you can, even if it seems silly or embarrassing.
3. Try the between-session practice and tell me honestly how it went. If something did not work, that is useful to know.

> **Note**
> CBT is not positive thinking, and nobody will tell you that your feelings are wrong. The aim is to see things accurately, including yourself.

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My goals for therapy

What you want to be different, and how close you are to it now.

Name _____ Date _____

What has brought me to therapy now?

If therapy goes well, what will be different? What will I be doing that I am not doing now?

A useful goal

is specific, is about what you will do (not only how you will feel), and is within your own influence. "Go for coffee with a friend once a week" is easier to work towards than "be more confident".

Goal 1

How close am I to this today?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Nowhere near ... There

Goal 2

How close am I to this today?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Nowhere near ... There

Goal 3

How close am I to this today?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Nowhere near ... There

What might get in the way, and what would help?

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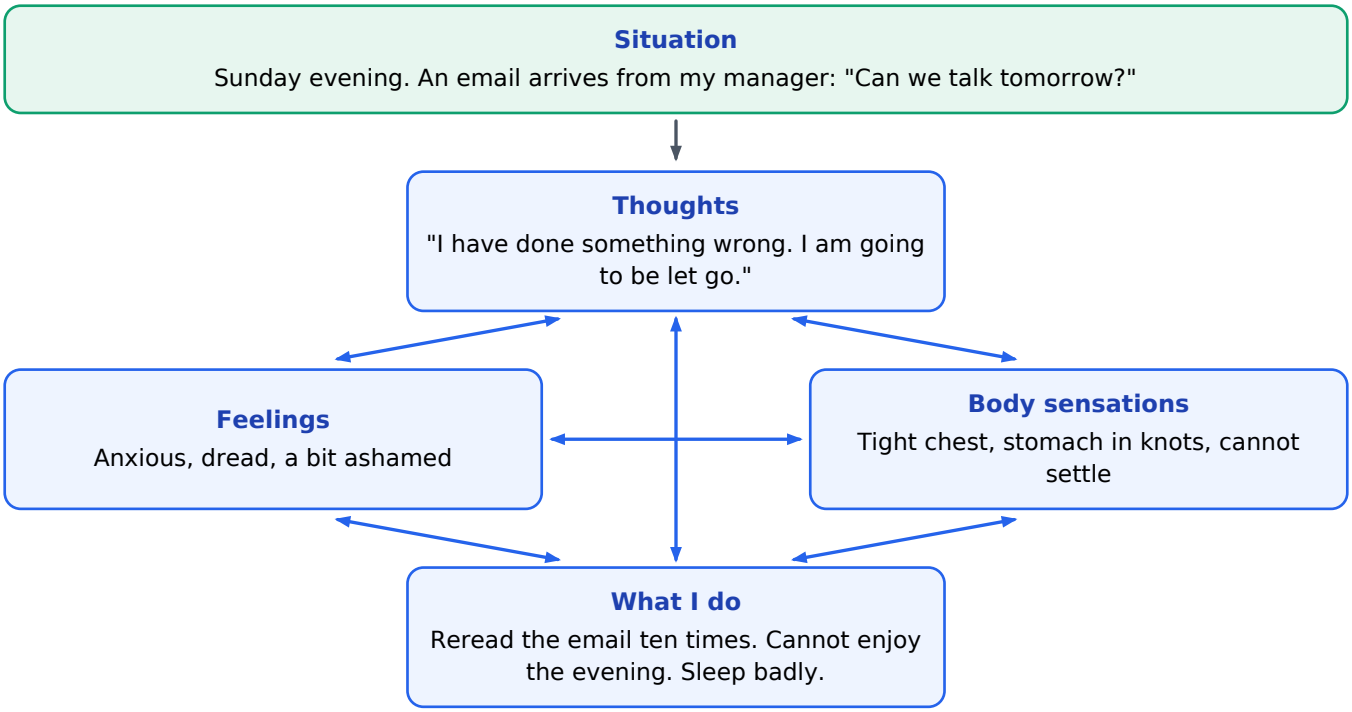
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The five areas: how it all links up

Thoughts, feelings, body and behaviour all affect each other.

When something difficult happens, we react in four connected ways: what goes through our mind, what we feel, what happens in our body, and what we do. Each one affects the others, so a small change in one area can shift the whole pattern.

An example



What the example shows

- The thought ("I am going to be let go") is a guess, but the body reacts as if it were a fact.
- The tight chest and churning stomach seem to confirm that something is wrong, which makes the thought more convincing.
- Rereading the email and lying awake keep attention locked on the threat, so the anxiety stays high.

Why this matters

Because the areas are linked, a change in any one of them affects the others. Testing a thought, calming the body or doing something different can each ease the whole pattern.

The five areas model was developed by Chris Williams. It builds on the "hot cross bun" model of Christine Padesky and Kathleen Mooney.

My notes and questions

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My five areas map

Pick one recent moment when your mood changed, and map what happened.

Name _____ Date _____

Situation

Where was I? Who was there? What happened?

Thoughts

What went through my mind?

Feelings

What emotions? How strong (0 to 10)?

Body sensations

What did I notice in my body?

What I do

What did I do, or avoid doing?

What do I notice when I look at this map? Which area might be easiest to change?

If a friend were in this exact situation, what would I say to them?

Based on the five areas model developed by Chris Williams.

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Catching automatic thoughts

How to notice the thoughts that go with a change in mood.

Automatic thoughts are the quick, running commentary your mind produces all day. Most of the time you do not notice them. You only notice the feeling they leave behind.

What they are like

- **Fast.** They arrive in a flash, often as a few words or a picture.
- **Believable.** They feel true, even when they are only opinions.
- **Biased.** When you are anxious, they lean towards danger. When you are low, they lean towards loss and failure.
- **Habitual.** The same themes come round again and again.

How to catch one

1. **Use your feelings as a signal.** A sudden drop in mood, a spike of anxiety or a flash of anger means a thought has just gone by.
2. **Ask the question.** "What was going through my mind just then?"
3. **Look for pictures as well as words.** Sometimes the thought is an image of something going wrong.
4. **Write it down as it came.** Not tidied up. "I am going to make a fool of myself" is more useful than "I felt nervous about the meeting."
5. **Turn questions into statements.** "What if I fail?" usually hides "I am going to fail."

If you cannot find the thought

- What did this situation mean to me? What does it say about me?
- What was I afraid might happen?
- What would be the worst thing about it?

> **Note**
> At this stage you are only catching the thought, not changing it. Once it is written down we can work on it.

My notes and questions

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Thought record (simple)

Use this when you notice a sudden shift in how you feel.

Name _____ Date _____

Catch the moment as close to when it happens as you can. One line is enough. Rate how strong the feeling was from 0 (not at all) to 10 (the strongest it could be).

When and where	What I felt (0 to 10)	What went through my mind
Tuesday, on the bus to work	*Anxious 7*	*"I am going to mess up the presentation and everyone will see."*

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Unhelpful thinking styles

Common habits of mind that make things look worse than they are.

Everyone's mind takes shortcuts, especially under stress. These habits are normal. Once you can spot one, you can decide whether to go along with it.

All-or-nothing thinking

Seeing things as total success or total failure, with nothing in between. "I missed one session at the gym, so the whole week is ruined."

Catastrophising

Jumping to the worst possible outcome and treating it as likely. "This headache is probably something serious."

Mind reading

Assuming you know what others think, usually something bad about you. "They went quiet. They think I am boring."

Fortune telling

Predicting that things will go badly before they have happened. "There is no point applying. I will not get it."

Mental filter

Noticing the one thing that went wrong and filtering out everything that went well.

Discounting the positive

Explaining away good things. "They only said that to be nice."

Emotional reasoning

Taking a feeling as proof. "I feel like a fraud, so I must be one."

"Should" and "must"

Holding yourself or others to rigid rules. "I should be able to cope with this on my own."

Labelling

Summing up a whole person in one harsh word. "I am useless." "He is a waste of space."

Taking it personally

Blaming yourself for things that were not all down to you. "The meeting went flat. It was my fault."

Try this

Over the next week, see if you can catch one of these each day. You do not need to argue with it. Just name it: "That is mind reading again."

My notes and questions

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Session notes: what I am taking away

Fill this in straight after a session, while it is fresh.

Name _____ Date _____

The main things we talked about

What stood out, surprised me or hit home

What I want to remember

What I am going to try before next time

Questions, or things I want to bring to the next session

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Between-session practice plan

What you will try before the next session, and how it went.

Name _____ Date _____

Why this practice matters to me

What I will do	When and where	What might get in the way	How it went

How confident am I that I will do this?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Very

If confidence is below 7, make the task smaller until it feels doable.

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