

CBT: Thoughts, Feelings & Behaviors

A simple framework for understanding how interpretations and actions can influence emotion.

The CBT model

CBT looks at the interaction between situations, thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and behavior. A thought is not automatically true just because it appears quickly or feels convincing.

A five-part check-in

- Situation: What happened? Stick to observable facts.
- Thought: What did your mind say it meant?
- Emotion/body: What did you feel, and where did you notice it physically?
- Behavior: What did you do next?
- Alternative response: What is another accurate, useful way to respond?

Helpful questions

- What evidence supports this thought? What evidence does not?
- Am I treating a possibility as a certainty?
- What would I say to someone I care about in the same situation?
- Is this thought useful right now, even if part of it is true?
- What action would fit my goals rather than my fear?

Practice

CBT works best when ideas are tested in real life. The goal is not positive thinking; it is more flexible, accurate thinking paired with effective action.

Try this reflection

Write one recent situation using the five-part check-in. Try to describe the thought as a hypothesis, not a verdict.

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.