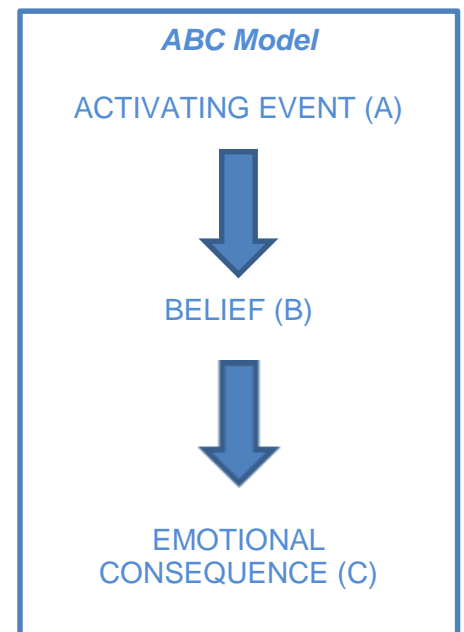




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Figure 1



## Think Well, Feel well

### Introduction: Theory

The general theory of REBT (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) is based on the ABC model (see below).

According to Ellis, Beck, & Young, founders of cognitive therapy, we experience Activating Events (A) every day that prompt us to look at, interpret, or otherwise think about what is occurring. Our interpretation of these events result in specific Beliefs (B) about the event, the world and our role in the event. Once we develop this belief, we experience Emotional Consequences (C) based solely on our belief.

According to cognitive theory, the impact of various life events (e.g., the death of a close relative; a practical problem; A) on various psychological consequences (e.g., feelings, behavioural, cognitive, psychophysiological reactions; C) is mediated by information processing (cognitions/beliefs; B; Figure 1).

Cognitive therapy focuses on the interaction between beliefs and emotional consequences and behaviours. In Cognitive Therapy, a distinction is made between rational and irrational beliefs. **Rational** beliefs are logically, empirically, and/or pragmatically supported, and generate functional consequences (e.g., functional feelings, adaptive behaviors, healthy psychophysiological reactions).

**Irrational** beliefs are illogical, non-empirical, and/or non-pragmatic, and generate dysfunctional consequences (e.g., dysfunctional feelings, maladaptive behaviours, and unhealthy stress reactions).

In this document we will explain and teach strategies to get a better grip on negative emotions, by altering and challenging the way we think (our belief system).

***‘Changing the way you think about things influences both feelings and behaviour’***

Every problem has a cause and effect, and these effects are for many people the reason to seek professional help. Before we can deal with the problem effectively, more insight in the nature of the problem is needed, for example type, duration, onset of the ‘problem, when is the problem less present, when more etc.

A simple tool to make the problem more transparent and understandable is to make a division in the four aspects of the problem. We call this an ABC. It looks like this:

1. Situation .....
2. Thoughts .....
3. Feelings .....
4. Behaviour .....

In order to complete the above, ask yourself the following questions :

**When the problem occurs.....**

- 1. Situation** Where am I , and what happens?
- 2. Thoughts** What thoughts go through my head ? What kind of conversation do I have with myself?
- 3. Feelings** How do I feel?
- 4. Behaviour** What do I do? Or what do I stop doing? What do I try to avoid?

***Exercise***

***Create your own ABC. Pick a situation you struggle with on a regular basis.***

***Exercise***

***Please complete the following:***

Situation: I 'm home alone .

Thought :

Feeling: depressed .

Situation: someone says to me : "don't worry about that ."

Thought : ?

Feeling: anger.

Situation: I'm learning for an exam .

Thought : ?

Feeling: tense .

***An example:***

***1. Where am I , and what happens?*** I 'm home alone and I am sitting on the sofa, staring in front of me.

***2. What thoughts I have, what goes through my head?***

- Nobody loves me .
- When I call someone, they won't be able to help me.
- What is the meaning of life ?

***3. How do I feel?***

I feel depressed , tense and unhappy

***4. What I do?*** I take two sleeping tablets and I go to bed at half past nine .

***What do I omit , what am I going out of the way ?***

Calling someone or enjoy myself , for example, watching TV or reading

Inner dialogue :

When you think about the situation, you appraise the event and you develop thoughts about it. These thoughts in turn affect how you feel about it.

It is important to understand that what we feel about a situation is not caused by the situation *itself*, but by our appraisal; the inner dialogue, our thoughts about it . One situation can lead to an entirely different set of feelings because different people have different thoughts, different appraisals of the situation.

Everyone has developed a different style of 'self talk'. This style is not hereditary, nor automatic, but has developed over the course of the lifetime though the experiences that we have, and through interaction with the people around us.

As mentioned, it is possible that negative self talk causes negative feelings and behaviours you would rather not have.

### ***Situation + Thoughts + Feelings = Behaviour .***

You often have little control over what happens in a certain situation and avoiding it altogether is not desirable and often not possible. But.....

You can, however, control your thoughts. This may seem complicated, but by following the step by step approach in this document, it will become clear. The hardest part is perhaps to take a step back from the situation and take a rational look. They say sometimes " Having a problem does not mean that you are a problem."

### ***An example which reflects a situation in Josephine's (see vignette on the right) life***

#### **1. Situation**

I am queuing at the checkout.

#### **2. Thoughts**

'Oh no, my heart is pounding fast again.'

'I am feeling dizzy, I'm going to hyperventilate and I will faint.'

'I hope I don't get a heart attack.'

'Everybody is looking at me, they probably think I am acting weird.'

#### **3. Feelings**

Frightened , panic , sad

#### **4. Behaviour?**

I check my pulse. Seeking distraction.

***"Feelings are not caused by the event, but by the conversation that you have with yourself about that event (self talk)."***

*Josephine is A 22-year-old woman in her first year of college. She reports waking in the middle of the night with a pounding heart, hot flushes, smothering sensations, and intense nausea. The attacks come suddenly and unexpectedly, are not in reaction to a nightmare, and the symptoms subside within a few minutes. Over the last few months, she has been feeling more anxious and has experienced similar episodes each week at varying levels of intensity. She is worried that she might be on the verge of a "nervous breakdown" and admits to being overly aware of her "fast breathing and heart rate."*

## 1) Feelings

### 'self talk affects emotion'

The following answers to this question are given , for example :

- I 'm depressed ..... because home alone bored .
- I 'm angry .... because someone has said something unkind to me
- I 'm afraid .... to get a panic attack.
- I feel tense .... because I have to take an exam tomorrow.

So :

$$\text{Event} + \text{Thoughts} = \text{Feelings} + \text{Behaviour} .$$

In cognitive therapy, there is a distinction between "appropriate " and "in- appropriate" feelings.

'Appropriate feelings'' are feelings that occur in a situation you appraise as negative. They 'fit' with the difficult nature of the situation. In addition, they allow you take appropriate action to deal with that situation adequately.

Inappropriate feelings also occur in a situation you appraise as negative. However, they are much more extreme than 'appropriate' feelings. They don't allow you to respond constructively to, and often elicit behaviours that worsen the situation.

Sometimes it's hard to label your feelings in a certain situation. Then it may be easy to keep the following acronym:

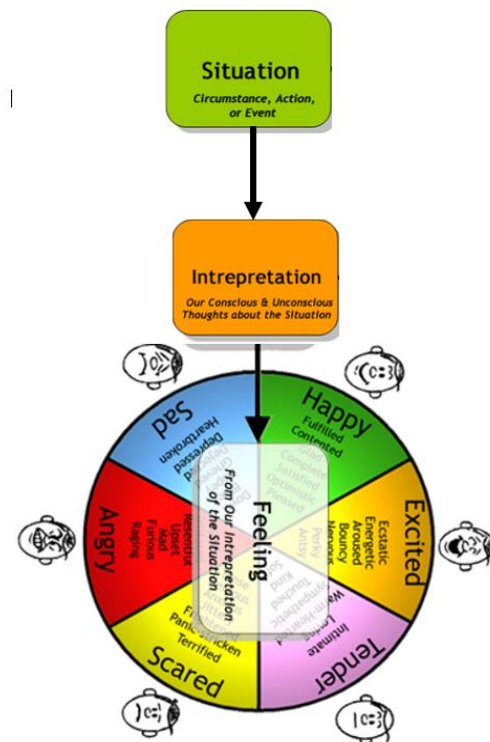
**SASHET** is an acronym for Sad, Angry, Scared, Happy, Excited and Tender. Many people have difficulty expressing how they are feeling, and this simple acronym facilitates identifying and expressing emotion. Figure 2 puts it all into place:

Appropriate and inappropriate negative feelings differ from each other in their intensity. Inappropriate feelings are more bothersome. The challenge lies in bringing these to an acceptable level in order to deal with the situation more effectively. The goal isn't to hide and deny feelings, but to end with a feeling that fits with the situation you have experienced, fits with you as a person, and allows you to deal with the situation more effectively .

For example :

Imagine that you are very angry at someone, and you know that this is not appropriate. Your goal might be feeling : not **very** angry (8), but **moderately** angry (5)

Figure 2



### Exercise

Again, complete an ABC, but now for a more challenging situation. In the 'feelings' box, also differentiate your 'desirable' intensity or feeling.

#### 1. Situation

Where am I , and what happens?

#### 2. Thoughts

What thoughts do I have?

#### 3. Feelings

a) How do I feel ?

b ) How I would I like to feel instead?

#### 4. Behaviour

a) What do I do and / or what do I stop doing?



## 2) Behaviour

Imagine your friend is always late for appointments. Rather than talking about this, you have never discussed your frustration about it with your friend, but on occasions you have overreacted.

'Target behaviour' is the way ***you wish you had behaved*** because this would have been appropriate in the situation. It is possible that this is already how you have handled the situation, or perhaps you behaved a little more intense than you would have liked.

In this example, your target behavior may be to have a chat with your friend in order to discuss how his behaviour affects you, and to look for solutions. In this example, the target behavior is appropriate for the situation and solves the problem.

## 3) Thoughts

In order to change feelings and behaviours, cognitive theory stipulates that we have to change how we appraise and what we think about things that happen in our lives.

### 'Hot' thoughts

Change your thoughts and you will change the way you feel and behave – that's the central concept in **cognitive therapy**. So figuring out how you think (especially becoming aware of repeated patterns of self-critical, undermining or otherwise negative thoughts) is central to the process of change. If you take a step back from your thoughts you will realise that, however powerful and seductive they may be, they are only thoughts, so you can choose to think differently.

It's especially important to look out for 'hot thoughts'. These are the thoughts that come with an almost instantaneous charge of negative emotion – so the thought seems inseparable from that emotion. For example:

- *I really hate him, he's such a liar!* = Anger
- *I'm just pathetic, whatever I try I always screw it up* = Depression
- *God, is that a shark's fin?* = Fear

Clearly in some cases, such as spotting a shark's fin, it makes perfect sense to feel a surge of negative emotion – after all, that's basically what emotions like anger, disgust and fear are for. They are emotional alarm bells generated by the mind telling us to take quick and decisive action (in this case, get the hell out of the water!).

But often, the hot thought is inaccurate or misleading. For example, we might mistakenly think our partner is flirting with someone at a party, when in fact he is having a perfectly innocent conversation. We may think, *Look at him flirting with that girl – I bet they're having an affair!* Having made a rash judgment on the basis of a skewed interpretation of events, we may then storm out of the party, or start a

### Ask yourself the following questions:

- ❖ *Is there any evidence to support that thought?*
- ❖ *What would I say to a friend who thought that?*
- ❖ *Would that idea stand up in court?*

massive row with our partner, thus ruining the evening.  
Clearly not so helpful.

As a simple exercise to start identifying and challenging your hot thoughts, try writing down whatever is going through your mind the next time you feel any negative emotion (fear, hatred, anger, disappointment, a dip in confidence...). Then look at the list of thoughts and see which one seems most troubling to you – that's likely to be the hot thought.

I can hear you think: 'changing how I think? How on earth can I do that?'

A first step is to pay close attention to your thoughts . Paying attention to your thoughts , to your inner conversation', is something that most people are not used to. It often requires a bit of practice to hear our inner voice and pay attention to our hot thoughts. Try the following steps:

#### *Step 1: Finish your thoughts.*

Often, looking closely at our thoughts, reveals a deeper layer of insecurities.

#### *Example:*

Situation: I am sitting in a meeting  
Thought: I soon will have to pitch and I don't know anything to say  
Feeling: tense, nervous  
Behaviour: going to the toilet (avoidance)

The thought in this situation is that 'It will be my turn next and I don't have anything to say'. But if you look more closely at this thought, it is about 'I don't have anything to say **and I'm stupid and others will agree and will reject me.**'

So the core of the idea is not so much that you know nothing to say, but you feel judged by others and this invites all sorts of inferences about other people's behaviours

#### *Another example :*

**Situation:** Your girlfriend turns up late .

**Thought:** 'she is always late !'

**Feeling:** angry , tense.

**Behaviour :** Not saying anything

The thought is: " She 's always late ." But perhaps there is more to it than just this one thought. For example : " I am always on time , and I think other people should do too", or " The fact that she is always late means I am not important enough. "

Summarizing: Analyzing your 'hot' thoughts means that you take a close look and **finish your thoughts** as well as possible. Secondly, ask yourself whether there may be more than one thought in that situation. Thirdly, ask yourself what appraisal takes place.

#### *Exercise:*

*Make an ABC using a slightly more complex situation and have a think about the most desirable behaviour you can think of. Try to generate achievable steps to reach this point.*

### **For example**

“Others may think I am stupid because and that is unbearable”

### **Or**

"She finds other things more important, so I'm not important, which is unbearable."

**Now that we have established that hot thoughts play a large role in affecting your feelings, it is time to challenge our thinking!**

### *How?*

- ❖ By using add-ons like
  - " Because .... "
  - "Because .... "
  - " And then ...." ,
  - " Why is that so bad .... " .
- ❖ By asking yourself:
  - Question: What will they think of me ?
  - You will probably notice that you already know the answers to the questions you ask yourself .

### *Challenging your thoughts*

In order to experience more desirable feelings, it is important to challenge your thinking. Please follow the steps laid out below.

#### **Step 1) Is this true?**

- ❖ Do I know that for sure ?
- ❖ How can I be sure about it?
- ❖ Is this always and everywhere the case?
- ❖ Is it valid for everyone ?

#### **Step 2) Is this thought helping me reach my target behaviour?**

For example:

“She is always late, so I am not important to her and this is unbearable”.

1) Is this true?

*No. Someone being late does not mean they don't care about me. How do I know I am not important to them, did they tell me so? And is it really unbearable? Or can I stand it?*

2) Is the thought helping me reach my target behaviour?

*No. The thought is making me upset and angry, which is getting in the way of a normal conversation about it.*

#### **Step 3) Generating 'helping' thoughts**

Helping thoughts are:

- ❖ True
- ❖ invite a neutral feeling
- ❖ invite problem solving

## Thinking errors

The section below will sum up a few of the most common 'hot thought categories':

### *Mental Filter*

Mental filtering is when we focus exclusively on the most negative and upsetting features of a situation, filtering out all of the more positive aspects. For example, you may undertake a presentation at work. You get positive feedback by 95 per cent of the team. Instead of being very pleased with yourself, you find yourself ruminating about the 5 per cent of the people that gave you learning points, ignoring the vast majority of positive feedback. Consequently, your view of reality can become distorted with a solely negative perspective preventing you from participating in future events and enjoying the praise offered to you.

### *Disqualifying the Positive*

Disqualifying the positive is when we continually discount the positive experiences we encounter by stating that 'they don't count' or dismissing them as unimportant. For example, we may think when a friend compliments us that 'they are just saying that to be nice'. We are mostly concerned with the negative aspects of a situation than putting that into a bigger picture which includes the positive elements.

### *'All-or-Nothing' Thinking or 'black or white thinking'*

These types of thoughts are characterised by terms such as 'always', 'never' or 'every'. Everything is seen as 'good or bad', 'successes or failures', and all the other colors of grey within the spectrum are dismissed. Viewing not getting 100 per cent on an exam as a total failure, despite getting 80 per cent is an example of all or nothing thinking.

*Overgeneralisation* People falling into this thought trap have the tendency to see a single unpleasant incident or event as evidence of 'everything being negative'. If something bad happens then it will be seen as part of a never-ending pattern of negativity and defeat. For example, someone looking for a partner who is going on a bad date may think that they will never find a partner.

### *Jumping to Conclusions*

Making a negative interpretation or prediction even though there is no evidence for it. This type of thinking is often made in the social context and is often divided into two categories:

- ❖ Mind Reading: Assuming the thoughts and intentions of others, e.g. 'I know they were talking about me'
- ❖ Fortune-telling: Anticipating the worse and taking that as fact, e.g. 'I am definitely going to fail'

### *Magnifying or Minimising (also referred to as 'Catastrophisation')*

Thinking in a magnifying or minimising manner is when we exaggerate the importance of negative events and minimise or down-play the importance of positive events. In depressed individuals, it is often the positive characteristics of other people that are exaggerated and negatives understated. This type of thinking is also characterised by catastrophe. When we think catastrophically we are unable to see any other outcome other than the worse possible, however unlikely this result may turn out to be. For example, a simple and small mistake in the office will be turned into 'I will lose my job, and then I won't be able to pay my bills and then I will lose my house'.

### *Personalisation:*

People engaging in personalisation will automatically assume responsibility and blame for the cause of negative events that are not under their control. For example, you may think that it's your fault your project failed despite the fact it was your colleague who did very little work and you did your work on time. This distortion has been described as the 'mother of guilt' because it leads to painful feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy.



### *Musts, Oughts and Shoulds*

Individuals thinking in 'shoulds', 'oughts' or 'musts' have a radical view of how they and others 'should' and 'ought' to be. As a result, if the rules cannot be followed, feelings of anger, frustration, resentment, disappointment and guilt occur. For example, feeling that you 'should get full marks on an exam', that 'you shouldn't have made so many mistakes' or 'I must please everyone'.

### *Emotional Reasoning:*

'I feel it, therefore it must be true'.....Emotional reasoning is when we assume feelings reflect fact regardless of the evidence. These types of thought can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies whereby our thoughts can end up eliciting the behaviour we predicted just because we changed our behaviour in accordance with that thought.

### *Labelling:*

Labelling is an extreme form of 'all-or-nothing thinking' and overgeneralisation'. For example, upon making a mistake an individual may say 'I am a loser' or 'I'm so stupid' rather than 'I made a mistake'. Rather than describing the behaviour, a negative and highly-emotive label is assigned. These thoughts can lead to anger, guilt and, importantly, are so absolute that there leaves no room for change.

These 'thinking errors' are at the core of what cognitive behavioural therapy is about; firstly to identify and secondly to change your thinking. By recognising when we are thinking dysfunctionally, we then can begin to question them and eventually replace them with more balanced thinking.

### *Target Thoughts*

Target Thoughts are 'helping' thoughts that make you feel better and facilitate displaying your target behaviour. Helping Thoughts are thoughts that are based on facts rather than fiction, and help you achieve your goal.

Some tips and tricks:

- ❖ Try to imagine that your friend is experiencing similar difficulties as you do. What would you say to him or her to help them?
- ❖ Replace "should, ought, or must" by "I prefer" or by "may".
- ❖ Speak positively about yourself, there is always something good about what you did.
- ❖ If you are afraid of what others think of you, try to think of any other, perhaps positive way, they might think about you?
- ❖ Reduce the demands and expectations you have of yourself and of others

### *Exercise*

- ❖ *Make another ABC*
- ❖ *On the next page there are 40 rational and irrational thoughts. Please indicate whether you think they are rational or irrational to you, and describe why*
- ❖ *Which of the following statements do you recognize in yourself ?*

1. I can't stand it if I do not get my way.
2. It's very annoying when my partner is mad at me and does not talk to me.
3. The world is all misery.
4. My problems will never pass .
- 5 . I try not to stand out, so I won't have to speak in the group. What if I would get negative feedback, that would be terrible in front of a group of people.....
6. People must treat me with respect.
7. If I 'm doing something , I have to finish first before I start something else.
8. The things I do must be 100% correct.
- 9.If I would say how angry I am, I would hurt the other. So I keep my mouth shut .
10. Others should not notice I am struggling with something.
11. It is unbearable when people are unfairly angry with me or criticize me.
12. You should not refuse reasonable request, just because you cannot be asked.
13. Without appreciation of others, I am worthless.
14. Making mistakes is terrible .
15. I would like everyone to think rationally .
- 16 . People cannot be trusted.
17. If people really knew me they would reject me.
18. You can't do everything by yourself.
19. You can't live without notice and appreciation of others.
- 20 . You can judge everything based on two things : good or bad .
21. Unpleasant feelings and thoughts should be avoided at all times as they make you feel even worse.
22. It's horrible if someone declines your invitation for a date.
23. It is good to keep your feelings for others under control as they may take advantage of you.
- 24 . It is a disaster if you are being laughed at if you stumble.
25. If you can think rationally you'll never have to feel bad .
26. Making a mistake can be tedious
27. It is horrible if someone says 'no' to your invite to go into town together.
28. No one is perfect.
29. Unpleasant feelings like sadness or anger are part of life and can't always be avoided.
30. It 's okay not to be liked by everyone.
31. It is always important to impress others by showing you can hold a conversation about anything.
32. If you have little to say at a party doesn't mean you are worthless.
33. If you are not good at certain things you can always learn .

34. When I ask someone to consider my feelings, the person should honour that request.
35. By thinking rationally I will accomplish feeling comfortable and happy all the time.
36. It 's nice to have a special talent.
- 37 If I do something well, I should get a compliment.
- 38 It 's terrible when people see you doing something stupid.
39. Some people deserve a good smack.
40. I do not like to be laughed at.

### *Counseling Service Amsterdam can help*

If you think you may be helped to overcome difficulties in your life by learning to think differently, a psychologist at Counseling Service Amsterdam can be consulted. They will be able to discuss this guide with you and coach you through the process sensitively and emphatically.

At Counseling Service Amsterdam, our experienced and fully registered psychologists can help you taking steps towards developing strategies to diminish the influence of negative thinking on your life.

You can refer yourself by calling our service on 020-6184243.

We will be able to answer your call between 9.00am and 3.00pm, Monday to Friday. If you are being referred to our answer phone, please leave us a message and we will return your call as soon as possible.

### *Where can I find extra help or information?*

Alternatively, your GP can refer you to us by sending us your details and you can ask your GP to notify us of any special requirements in accessing our service, for example if English is not your first language and you require an interpreter.

Alternatively, you can read more online. Some helpful websites may be:

<http://www.rebtnetwork.org/>

<http://albertellis.org/>

<http://www.beckinstitute.org/history-of-cbt/>

<http://www.nacbt.org/whatiscbt.htm>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Cognitive-behavioural-therapy/Pages/Introduction.aspx>