



Affective Center for Therapy

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COGNITIVE → AFFECTIVE → BEHAVIORAL APPROACH TO CHANGE

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CABT says: The way you think determines what you feel, and from your feelings, you choose your behaviors. CABT recognizes that your brain has two different ways of thinking. The left brain is logical, systematic and thinks in words and numbers.

Information about people, events and words (which is everything there is) can be processed in either the right brain or in the left brain or in both. As a result, the mind may experience contradictory emotions. Anyone who has ever been bitten by a dog may know logically that most dogs are safe and friendly BUT, may still have a strong visceral reaction when confronted with even the most friendly of dogs.

PEOPLE *** Who it is
EVENTS *** What is done
WORDS *** What is said

We do not react to people, events or words but to what they mean to us and we choose the meanings. This thinking, for most people, is done totally unconsciously. You assume that words mean whatever the dictionary says they mean. You will never find the meaning of words in the dictionary. The dictionary only has the definition of words. **Words have no meaning, only people have meanings.**

What does the sentence, “Woman without her man is nothing” mean? Is it saying that men are nothing without a woman in their life or is it saying that a woman is nothing without a man? Yes, the sentence needs two commas. In your mind, were did you choose to put the commas?

What meaning do you choose to put to this sentence, “In fifteen years of marriage, I have never seen anyone that I would rather be married to than you.” Is the person saying that they have been looking for someone else for fifteen years?

You choose to think and you can think anything you want to think. Thinking is what you do to create reality. A word is nothing more than vocalization, sound, to which you give meaning. As human beings, you create or invent words, and then put the meanings on your words. In turn, the words create your feelings.

“Men are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of them.” Epictetus 55 – 135 AD

The right brain thinks in pictures, smells and textures. The right brain is not logical and it believes that what it “sees” is real and is happening now. Flashbacks and nightmares are experienced in the right side. This side of the brain learns through emotional experiences, both positive and negative, such as a trauma. This Stimulus→Response (S—R) type of learning leaves “pictures” in the right side which can be re-experienced as flashbacks and panic attacks. The right side also attaches meanings to the pictures that it “sees.” However, since this side of the brain is not logical, it cannot be talked out of what it sees.

MEANINGS ***

Thoughts, Beliefs, Expectations,
Conclusions, Decisions, Values,
Judgments, “Shoulds” (I, You, & It)

Meanings can be stored in either the right or the left brain. The meanings that your left brain attributes to people, events and words can be changed fairly easily with more updated and correct information because it operates much like your computer. You can change information in a computer without it becoming emotional. This is not so with information stored in your right brain because that information is stored in pictures.

For some people, snakes, spiders and rats can be scary and will create an instant revulsion. At the same time, your left brain is saying, "Don't be silly. That little dog cannot hurt you."

When I hear someone say, "I understand, that makes sense, but. . . ." That is when I know that person has different and contradictory meanings in the two sides of their brain. Their left side is telling them one thing and their right side is saying the opposite. At this point, all my logical and cognitive arguments will have no effect in helping them to change.

This was a problem with the Freudian insight therapy approach. Having insight into what caused the problem does not help a person change when the right brain is presenting a different "picture." This is also the reason that "why" questions often do not lead to change. You can understand, "I am this way because I was abused as a child and my parents divorced and I felt abandoned." Having a logical (left brain) understanding of how you got to be the way you are seldom helps you to change your unwanted fears and behaviors.

The emotional, empathetic feelings that you have are a direct result of the meanings, stored as pictures, which you put onto people, events or words. You can experience feelings either from the meanings that are in the left side of your brain because you have been told that something or somebody is dangerous, or because you experienced getting shocked when you put your finger in a light socket!

There are three levels of feelings that you will experience starting with the Primary feelings. Feelings are a direct result of what you think and/or the level of intensity of what you have experienced. If you change your meaning, you will change your feelings. If you believe that garbage is what people reject, then you get to feel valueless. But if you change your belief to, people reject things because they cannot see the value in them. Then the problem is in the person doing the rejecting.

PRIMARY FEELINGS ***

MEANINGS →	RESULTS IN	→	PRIMARY FEELINGS
"I'm in danger."	→	→	→ Fear
"I did wrong"	→	→	→ Guilt

"I'm bad."	→	→	→	Shame
"I can't"	→	→	→	Powerlessness
"I should (you, it)"	→	→	→	Disappointment
"I'm not important"	→	→	→	Discounted
"Nothing to do"	→	→	→	Boredom
"My mate left me."	→	→	→	Loss
Contradictory Beliefs	→	→		Confusion

SECONDARY FEELINGS ***

Anger is a secondary feeling. Anger is the "energy" designed to change the environment and/or yourself and to reduce the presence of primary feelings. Anger comes in degrees from mild to strong: Annoyed, Irritated, Upset, Frustrated, Disgusted, Mad, Hostile, Hate, Livid, Furious, Rage.

There are three uses of secondary anger. The one most people think about is, using anger to reject someone or keep them out of your life forever. Of the three uses of anger, using anger to keep someone out of your life forever is the one that is used the least often but is assumed the most. This is because most people do not get the fact that the opposite of love is not hate or anger. In fact, you get angriest most at the people you love the most! The opposite of love is indifference; it is not anger or hate (strong anger). If you cannot get angry at the one you love, but have indifference about what he/she does, then you have indifference, not love!

Manipulation is the second way anger is used and it is the one most often employed. Using one of the degrees of anger to manipulate someone is not necessarily bad. Yelling at a child for running in the busy street or to prevent them from touching a hot stove is an act of love. The wife who yells at her husband for being a workaholic, "I didn't marry you to have you working all the time," is expressing desire to have a closer and more intimate relationship.

Venting, expressing anger without the expectation of changing someone, is a way of reducing the energy that builds up in you after a frustrating day. The rule is, "Feelings expressed verbally, as intensely as they are felt, will take place and are free to change." If after venting you do not find relief, then it is important to see if you have "tied" your feelings to the behavior of the one you are angry

with. In this case, you will find yourself staying angry until that person changes their behavior to match your expectations!

Being angry is not a problem. Nobody has ever gone to jail for being angry. It is what you do with your anger that gets you into trouble!

THIRD LEVEL FEELINGS ***

Many people see anger as negative and bad. As a result, they will lie about being angry, “**I’m not angry, I’m just upset!**” These people often see anger as a sin. IF anger were a sin, then you lied about it, would not that be sinning twice?

The result of denying and repressing your anger was identified by Freud over a hundred years ago when he pointed out, “Depression is anger turned inward.”

Notice that you are choosing to be depressed because you are choosing not to be angry. You cannot be yelling angry and depressed at the same time. What you can do is to be angry and attack someone with putdowns, name calling and threats. Then you get to feel guilty and stuff your anger again. This will result in the buildup and blowup syndrome which just adds to the depression and feelings of powerlessness.

Other third level feelings include anxiety, resentment, bitterness, apathy and boredom. Third level feelings are not a fun place to be. So, now the question becomes what are you going to do with these feelings?

BEHAVIOR ***

If you wait until your feelings have reached the third level, then you options are limited.

Get Even: I once saw a sign that said, “I don’t get angry; I get even.” This type of passive-aggressive behavior is a way of expressing anger which is guaranteed to make your relationship worse. These people are afraid of anger and see it as dangerous. They usually have come from families where anger between mom and dad was never expressed openly. For these people, it is the fear of the unknown. Or, they come from families where anger was expressed as verbal and/or physical abuse.

Get Sick: Depression is not just an emotional state. When you are depressed, your whole body immune system is depressed. People who are depressed are more susceptible to colds, flues and other physical problems. About ten years ago, our County Hospital, VMC, was part of a National research study that found that over 60% of cancer patients reported being depressed for a period of 6 to 18 months before developing cancer.

Get Out: Nobody enjoys third level feelings, so, other options are soon being employed. These will include fighting, then when nothing changes, the person moves on to withdrawing and finally divorce and/or suicide.

Now, I know none of these options seem like good choices, so I will offer you a radical idea that you might consider when all else fails.

Get Help! When to get help for your anger and depression:
1) If you have a long list of “I should’s” you will be depressed. The longer your list of “I should’s,” the more depressed you will be. Not one of your “I should’s” is yours. If they were yours, you would be doing them. It is possible to live without a single “I should.”

2) If you are in a relationship where nothing is getting solved. You have fought the same fights over and over and nothing gets solved. There is help out there. What are you willing to risk to get the changes you say you want?

3) Or, when you are sick and tired of being sick and tired and want to change. Depression is an option that you can choose to get help for. You can choose to feel alive!

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If you would like to know more about this subject see my book, TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE.