

Day 6 – Getting the facts

Did you struggle yesterday seeing the facts or evidence you had against an unhelpful thought and belief?

Sometimes we have to dig a little to get to the detail.

It is important for you to be able to distinguish between fact and opinion:

FACT

- Evidence to support its truth
- Undisputed
- Driven by rational thought

OPINION

- Based upon a belief or personal view
- Varies according to individuals' knowledge, experience, culture, belief systems etc.
- Driven by and reinforced by emotion

At stressful times, we tend to be driven by our emotions and opinions, which create a vicious cycle by fuelling each other. Our emotions strengthen our opinions, which in turn, intensify our emotions.

This can lead to impulsive acts and unhelpful longer term consequences, which help to maintain the overall problem.

It can therefore be helpful to ask ourselves whether what we are thinking is **FACT** or **OPINION**.

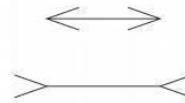
- If it's a fact, then we can make choices about what we can or cannot do.
- If it's an opinion, then we can look at the facts – what we do know about the situation.

Realising that many thoughts are opinion rather than fact makes it less likely that we'll be distressed by them, and more able to make wise and calm decisions about what the best action to take.

Get into the habit of asking yourself whether your thoughts or beliefs are **FACT** or **OPINION**?

Beat those Blues

The familiar images of two straight lines (of equal length) and a candlestick (or two faces) show us that things are often not as they first seem, and there's almost always a different perspective.



To give you an example of a different perspective think about a traffic accident. Police ask for witnesses to come forward to describe what happened. They like to have as many witness statements as possible, so they can build up a broader picture and a more realistic version of events. In a traffic accident, there will be many different perspectives on what happened. The driver will have one perspective, another driver, or a passenger will have yet another perspective. Each onlooker who witnessed the accident will have a slightly different perspective, depending on where they were, how far away they were, how much their view or vision was restricted, how much danger they felt they were in, what else was going on, how the accident affected them, what the accident means to them, whether they have been in an accident before. As humans we all tend to have our own perspective; our own view of the world.

So it's the same principle with everything – each situation, event, conversation means something different to all those involved, and to those not involved. We give different meanings, according to our belief systems, and how we are affected by the event. We all have our own realities.

We look at situations and events, and interpret what other people say and do, according to our own set of past experiences, culture, faith, values, all of which help us form our beliefs about ourselves, about others, and about the world in general. The meaning we give events, the way we make sense of our world, is based upon our core belief system.

Our minds are constantly trying to make sense of our world, forming judgements and opinions about every situation, event, and interaction. Those judgements and opinions will be affected by our central or core belief system. It is as though we are looking at the world through distorted or coloured lenses – and everyone has their own personal prescription or colour for their glasses.

We talked about our core beliefs on Day 4.

If we take our example from Day 3 of someone not wanting to go out for a drink we would map it out as follows:

Childhood Experience: I was shy and quiet in school. No-one wanted to be my friend and I was bullied and hurt.

Event/Situation: Jo asked me to go for a drink with her and the gang: Sees the event as threatening and dangerous. Interpret others reactions as critical or threatening.

Core Beliefs: I will get hurt by other people. I'm a useless friend and no-one would love me. The world is a dangerous place for me.

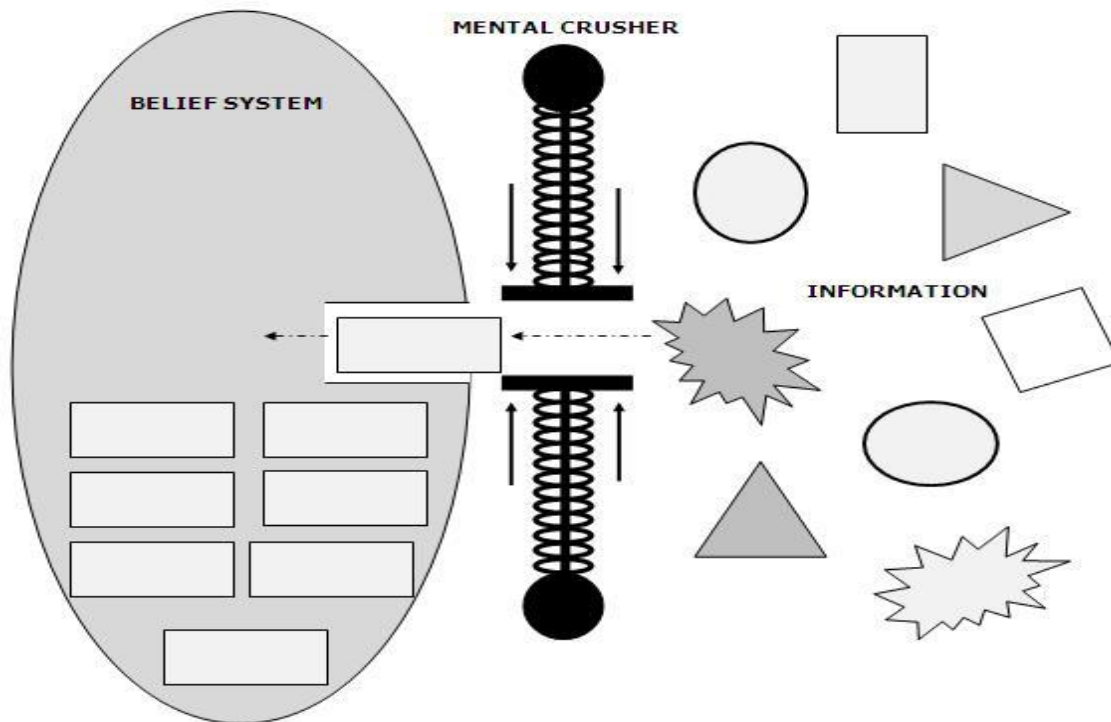
Behaviour: Passive, don't talk, avoid eye contact.

Emotions: Anxious, depressed, low self-esteem, fear.

Thoughts: I'm rubbish at small talk and a useless friend. This situation is dangerous and I will avoid it or I will get hurt again. I can't let people know how boring and useless I am.

In the example above, even situations which others find enjoyable and relaxing, this particular person will experience it very differently, and feel threatened by it and by others. A look, word or gesture intended to be friendly and kind, may be interpreted as 'They don't mean that'. 'They're only trying to be kind to me because they pity me'. Or even, 'They mean to hurt me'. Their mind is interpreting the situation with the bias of 'I'm vulnerable, others might hurt me, this is dangerous, and I'm useless and unlovable'. The mind will work to make any contradictory information fit with those beliefs.

This is demonstrated further by 'The Mental Crusher':



‘The Mental Crusher’ sits outside the entrance to our belief system, and only allows information or ‘evidence’ which fits with our own belief system to enter. Any contradictory evidence or information (any shape other than a rectangle) is rejected, or made to fit (crushed into a rectangle). In the diagram, the explosion shape is about to enter the Crusher. As it passes through (shown by the arrow), it becomes a rectangle – it’s been crushed and distorted to fit. Therefore, our beliefs remain unchanged in spite of apparently contradictory evidence being out there. *Paraphrased from p. 58 of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Anxiety Disorders by Butler, Fennel & Hackman (Guilford 2008).*

In the case of our earlier example, the information that *a person asked me if I wanted to join the gang for a drink*, is “crushed” and distorted to confirm that others dislike or mean to hurt me.

What information do you feel you distort to fit your model of the world?

If you did have difficulty yesterday noting down the facts then we would like you do the exercise again. If you did not have difficulty yesterday noting down the facts, review your notes and make any changes given what we have portrayed during today's session.

Write down several thoughts from a recent distressing situation. What did those thoughts say about you, or mean to you? Of all those, which thought (or images) was the one that made you most upset?

Beat those Blues

Let's take that thought and ask the following questions about the thought:

- Is this thought a fact, or my opinion?
- What am I reacting to?
- What meaning am I giving this situation?
- Is there another way of looking at it?
- What would someone else make of it? It's often helpful to think about a particular person who you respect, and imagine what they would think about that thought, what meaning they would give it, and how they would react to it.
- What advice would I give someone else?
- Is this one of those unhelpful thinking patterns?
- Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event?
- How important is this really?
- How important will it be in a months time?
- How am I reacting?
- What if I tried to see this situation as an outside observer. How would that look? Would things be likely to have a different meaning?
- What evidence is there that this thought is true?
- What evidence is there that this thought isn't true (partly or totally)?
- What would be a more balanced way of looking at it?
- What is the bigger picture?

Tomorrow we will be looking at 'doing things differently'.

We would also like you to switch to Exercise 2 – Body Scan meditation today.

Today we would like you to:

- Start the body scan meditation
- Start asking yourself whether you are dealing with FACT or OPINION with negative thoughts and beliefs
- Ask yourself the questions noted above for several thoughts from a recent distressing situation

With Love xxxx