

# Helping Trauma-Impacted Youth and Caregivers Develop Healthy Views of Themselves, Their World and Their Future

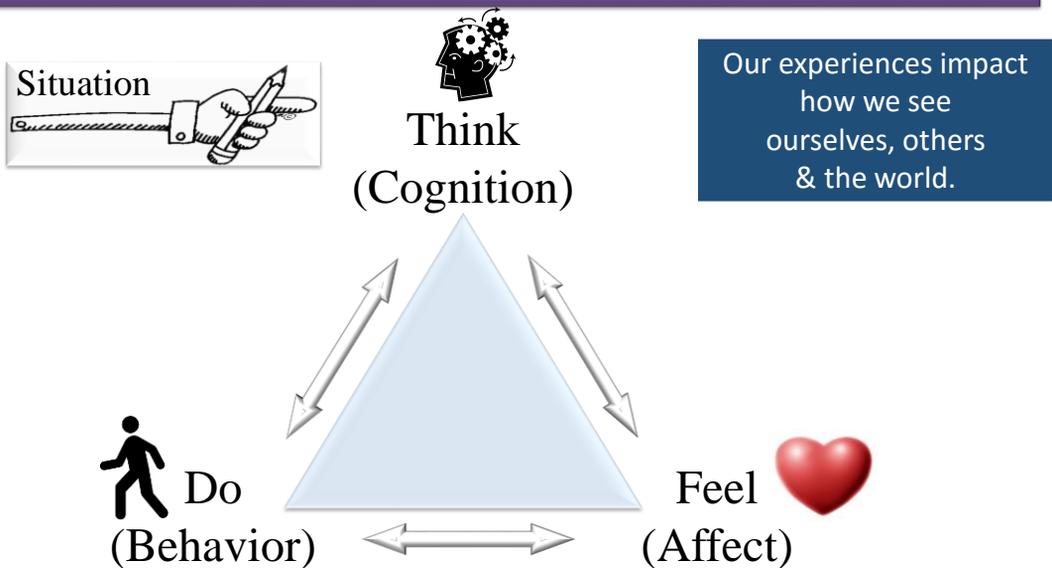
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## Goals for Today

- Identify common trauma-impacted beliefs
- Provide specific techniques to address common barriers to effective cognitive processing in both children and caregivers
- Practice specific techniques with typical unhelpful thoughts of trauma impacted children and caregivers

Cognitive Processing is the evaluation and re-balancing of beliefs about self, others, and the world that were formed in the storm and aftermath of trauma.

## Cognitive Triangle



# Identifying Dysfunctional Beliefs

## The 3 C's of Cognitive Therapy



### atched

Identify the thought that came before the emotion



### heck

Reflect on how accurate and useful the thought is



### hange

Change the thought to a more accurate or helpful one as needed

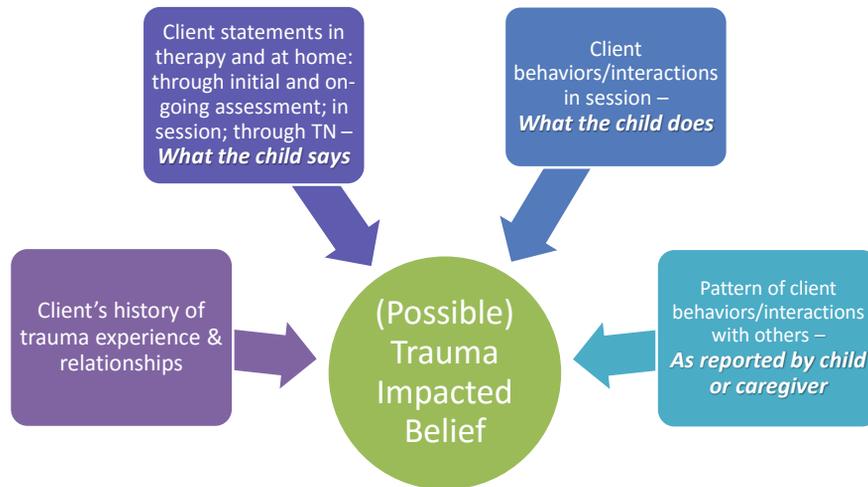
## Where do I start? Common Trauma Impacted Beliefs

	Of Self	Of Others/World
Trust	I make bad decisions. I can't trust my own judgement.	People can't be trusted. Don't trust the system; authority.
Control/Power	I don't have control of future. Control is all or nothing. Must control what I can.	Life is unpredictable, uncontrollable.
Esteem	I am a bad person. I am worthless. I am only valuable for....	People are bad, will hurt you.
Intimacy	I shouldn't get close to people.	Others will take advantage of me. Relationships cause pain.
Safety	I am unsafe. Something bad will happen to me....	Adults won't keep me safe. Adults are dangerous.

McCann & Perlmann, 1990

## Identifying Trauma Impacted Beliefs

Throughout treatment, listen and watch for clues on how trauma has impacted child's (and caregivers) beliefs about self, others, world.



## To be effective, Processing must (be)...

### ➤ Collaborative

- ✓ Therapist must VALIDATE client's current beliefs
- ✓ New belief must be realistic and helpful
- ✓ Therapist guides exploring belief

### ➤ Acknowledge Truth in both sides of a debate

- ✓ Avoid taking polar opposite view of client, often this is inaccurate, unhealthy as well
- ✓ Avoid power struggle – Not trying to prove client wrong

### ➤ Empowering client to evaluate own beliefs

### ➤ Acknowledge that changing beliefs is an effortful process & requires practice/repetition



## Developing Balanced Thoughts

### Unbalanced

"I'm useless. I can't do anything right."

"I can't show any weakness; people will hurt me!"

"My daughter's innocence was stolen."

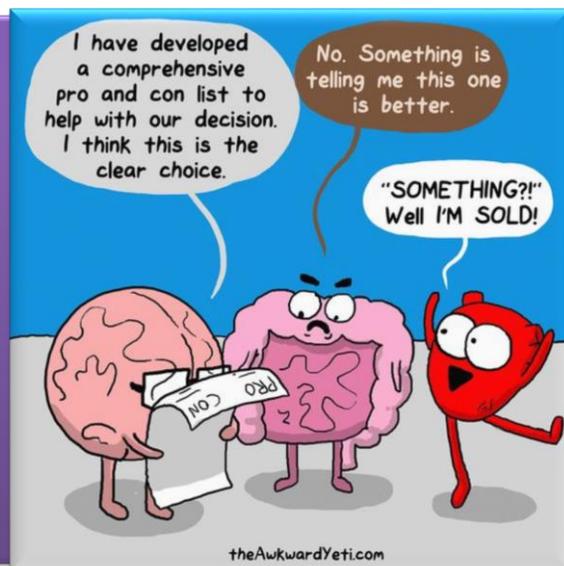
### Balanced

"I'm not happy with where my life is, **and** I am working hard to improve."

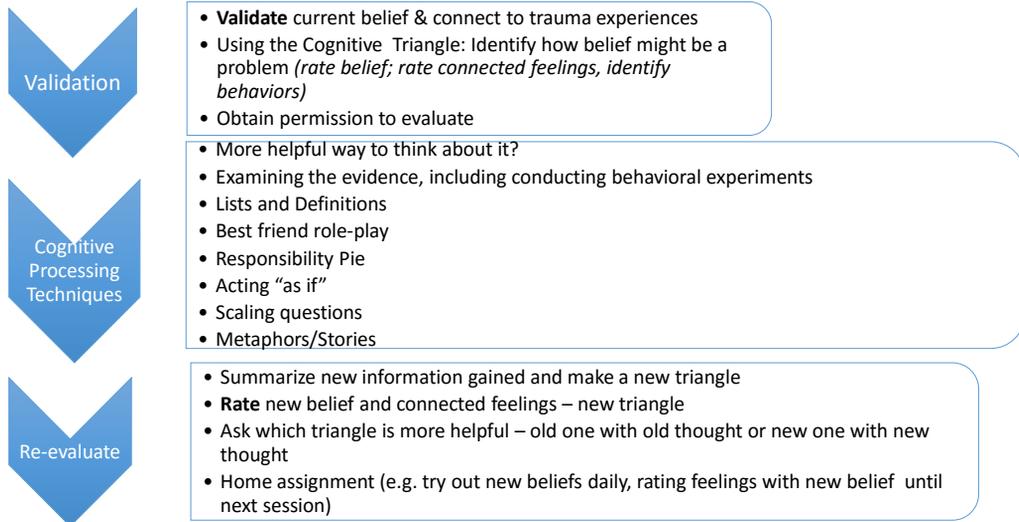
"Sometimes it is a bad idea to show weakness, **and** there are some people I can trust to not hurt me when I cry."

"I can't take away what happened to her, **and** she can still have a happy childhood."

Getting  
Started in  
Cognitive  
Processing



## Cognitive Processing: Step-by-Step use of Socratic Questioning



## Helpful Cognitive Processing Techniques

- **Family/friend role-play**
  - “I deserved to get beaten because I talked back” – What would you tell your best friend/your younger sister/brother?
- **Responsibility Pie**
  - “It’s my fault I was sexually abused. I kept going back to his house even after he abused me.” - Let’s make a list of any person, thing, or situation that may also have some responsibility. Use progressive logical questioning. Create pie chart.
- **Acting “As If”**
  - “I suck at everything!” - What if you acted “as if” you didn’t suck at everything? What would you do, how would you act? Would you be willing to try an experiment this week?
- **Stories/metaphors**
- **Lists/Definitions**

## Lists and Definitions

### Ask client to define words AND/OR make lists

- DEFINITION: “You said you cannot trust anyone. Let’s define ‘trust’ tell me what trust means to you.” (Write down trust characteristics)
- LIST: “One thought that is difficult for you is thinking “I am a terrible mom”. Let’s make a list of good things that mom’s do for their children. These can be big things but they can also be small, everyday kinds of things.”

## Lists

**Example:** “Your thought is, ‘I am a bad kid.’ Let’s make a list of things kids do that are good. Tell me what you think of when you think about what a kid does that is good.”

- Have client generate a list of actions kids do that are helpful, constructive, and positive
- Ask the client which of these actions they ever done or could do.
- Write down the list of actions the child owns
- Based on the list and identified personal actions, have the child come up new, more helpful thoughts such as:
  - ✓ I help my brother with his homework
  - ✓ I help with chores sometimes
  - ✓ I do some good things so I am a good kid

## Definitions

**Example:** “I can’t trust anyone.”

- Have the child (or caregiver) define what trust means. What actions or behaviors indicate that people could be trustworthy?
- Have the child (or caregiver) generate a list of people they know or knew who could be trusted even for the little things, even some of the time.
- Now – ask the child or caregiver if they have a new, more helpful thought about trust. *A more helpful thought might be, “I can trust some people for some things.”*

## Lists

*Caregiver thought:* My child had her innocence taken away. She’ll never have a happy childhood.

Therapist statement: Let’s make a list of fun, child activities your child does.

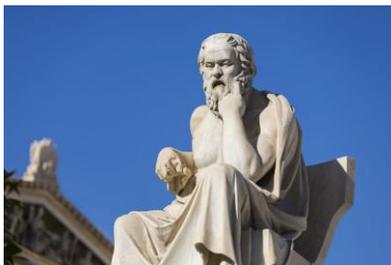
## Responsibility Pie/Circle

### Most often used for “my fault” thoughts:

- Ask the client to draw a circle. Write the thought above the circle.
- Ask client to come up with a list of everyone or everything that is responsible
- Have the client divide the pie, showing by size the proportion of responsibility
- Use Socratic questions to understand reasoning for pie slice sizes
- Gently challenge unhelpful/faulty reasoning
- When more helpful/accurate thoughts emerge, have client draw new circle with new divisions
- Ask client to come up with a new, more helpful thought based on the activity

## Socratic Questioning

- Exploration of a belief through guided questioning
- Power lies in client discovering evidence
- Requires PLANNING!!!



*“... any type of open questioning gets called Socratic Dialogue. Maybe it sounds better saying I engaged in Socratic dialogue with the client compared to I questioned them about themselves for an hour.”*

## Socratic Questioning

Use a series of questions to gently challenge the client, such as...

*(For a child physical abuse victim who believes the abuse is all his fault & he deserved it...)*

- *What have you ever heard about why some children/teens get abused?*
- *Whose responsibility is it to make sure children are safe? Why?*
- *When your teachers get mad or frustrated, do they hit you? Why not? Is it ever okay for a teacher to hit a student? Why not?*
- *When you get angry, do you hit the person you are angry with? Why not?*
- *How are grown-ups supposed to discipline or teach children when they make mistakes?*
- *When you were hit by your (name of caregiver), did they want you to tell? Why not?*
- *What would you tell a friend who just told you they were beaten by their parent?*

## Socratic Questioning – Prep Work

- What is the dysfunctional belief? Why is it dysfunctional?
- What is a more helpful, **balanced** alternate thought?
- What questions do you ask to get them there?

Adapted from slide by Shannon Dorsey, Washington Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science

Old Unhelpful Thought: *My mom loves drugs more than me.  
That's why I can't live with her.*

Possible Endpoint (New Thought):

What I want to tell her

- 
- 
- 

Turn into eliciting questions

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- 



Adapted from slide by Shannon Dorsey, Washington Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science

## Socratic Questioning with Caregivers

- Beliefs may negatively impact treatment engagement and parenting practices
  - "I'm worried talking about trauma will make it worse."
  - "My own kids would never have acted like this. It's like she has no conscience."
  - "We've already tried all that (coping skills) with other therapists, none of it works for him."
  - "Nothing motivates him. I can take everything away, he doesn't care."
- Again, VALIDATE first. Then, guide exploration...

Unhelpful Old Thought: *It's my fault my daughter was abused.*

Possible Endpoint/New Thought: *I couldn't stop the abuse but I am helping her now.*

What I want to tell the mother questions

- *You did your best when you found out*
- *Your daughter knows that you support her*
- *Your daughter trusted you enough to tell you after the abuse happened*

Turn into eliciting

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Adapted from slide by Shannon Dorsey, Washington Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science

## Socratic Questioning



# Bringing Creativity into Cognitive Processing: Case Examples

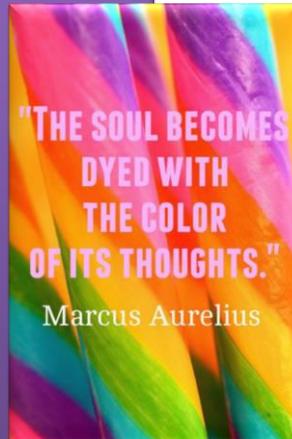
*“CREATIVITY  
IS  
INTELLIGENCE  
HAVING FUN.”*

## Re-evaluate

### **Once you have completed your cognitive processing technique:**

- Summarize the new thoughts the child has come up with through the activity
- Create a new triangle and ask the child if instead of their old thought, they have a new thought that makes them feel less upset (use feeling word of child)/feel better. Rate the level of belief in the new thought and rate the feelings associated with the new thought
- Compare the triangles (old and new) and ask which triangle works better for the client/makes them feel better
- Develop homework that has child rate feelings associated with using the new thought.

# Cognitive Processing Homework



## THINK-FEEL-DO WORKSHEET

SITUATION	 THINK	 FEEL		 DO
	Original Thought(s)	Original Feelings		Original Behaviors
		Feeling	Intensity 0 = not at all 10 = most intense	
	1.		0-----5-----10	
	2.		0-----5-----10	
	3.		0-----5-----10	
	New Thought(s)	Changed Feelings		Changed Behaviors
		Feeling	Intensity 0 = not at all 10 = most intense	
1.		0-----5-----10		
2.		0-----5-----10		
3.		0-----5-----10		

MY PLAN		
✓	I am feeling:	My feeling level is at a: (Lightest) 0 – 10 (Heaviest)
	Mad	
	Sad	
	Other:	
My urge to cope in an unhelpful way is at a:		
 <p>If my urge is at a 7 or higher, I will go to my teacher, parent or a trusted adult for support.</p>		
My brain is thinking:		
✓	Type of Thought	My Heavy Thoughts
	"Bad Mouth Brandy" Thinking I'm bad	
	"Blaming Blake" Blaming myself	
	"Shoulda Sharonda" Thinking I should be doing better or more	
	Other:	
Ways to lighten my thoughts and feelings:		
	A helpful thought about myself	
	A helpful thought about the situation	
	I can do this now to feel better	
	I can do this later to feel better	
I will use this coping skill now:		
	Muscle Relaxers	Belly Breaths
	Channel Switching	Other:

## Trouble Shooting

- Client appears “lost” in discussion or Therapist feels going in circles
  - Be explicit in focus
  - Add structure or visuals, hands-on activity to teach points
  - Use ratings to measure progress
- Client “arguing” for current belief or disengaged
  - Allow client to fully educate you on why he/she thinks this way
  - Validate current belief “It makes sense given your experiences of xyz...”
  - Move on to another strategy
  - Pay attention to if your questions come off as requiring a specific response
- Therapist struggling to find acceptable & true endpoint
  - Occurs when ideal isn’t reality (child may never see parent again, neighborhood is dangerous, parents DID choose to abandon child, etc) – **Often the thought is true but unhelpful**
  - Belief often overgeneralized – What part isn’t true?
  - May seek consultation

## Trouble Shooting

- Dysfunctional belief is vague – hard to challenge
  - Turn into an “If-then” statement.
  - “I have to be in control” → “If I am not in control, I will get taken advantage of.”
- Child can’t do solely verbal activity
  - Actively connect belief – feeling in triangle walk through
  - Look for evidence & paste under old & new belief