

Notes on David Burns' "Feeling Good"

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Cognitive Therapy

- Dr Abraham Low - One of the first health professionals to emphasize the important role of our thoughts and attitudes on our feelings and behavior.
- Dr Albert Ellis - Created Rational Emotive Therapy. Emphasized the role of negative self-talk (such as shoulds and oughts) and irrational beliefs (such as I must be perfect) in a wide variety of emotional problems.
- Dr Aaron Beck - Adapted the ideas into treatment techniques: "Thinking therapy" or "cognitive therapy". "helping the depressed patient change these negative thinking patterns."

Introduction

Why Cognitive Therapy

1. basic ideas are down to earth and intuitively appealing
2. many research studies have confirmed that cognitive therapy can be very helpful for individual suffering depression and anxiety
3. there are many successful self-help books to create strong popular demand

Cognitions - "the way you are thinking about things at any moment"

Epictetus (a stoic) - people are disturbed "not by things, but by the views we take of them"

Proverbs 23:7 "for as he thinks within himself, so he is"

Shakespeare - "for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." (Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2)

What you may be thinking now helps prove the point.

"my problems are real"

"Burns is just a con artist trying to get rich"

How do these thoughts make you feel?

Premise of the book: "You can defeat depression by changing the negative thinking patterns that cause it."

Chapter 1 - Breakthrough in Mood Disorders

Benefits

1. Rapid Symptomatic Improvement
2. Understanding - how to distinguish normal from abnormal
3. Self Control - coping strategies
4. Prevention and personal growth - challenging assumptions and real change

Basic Principles

"The moment you have a certain thought and believe it, you will experience an immediate emotional response. Your thought actually creates the emotion."

"When you are depressed, your thoughts are dominated by a pervasive negativity. You perceive not only yourself but the entire world in dark, gloomy terms."

"negative thoughts always contain gross distortions. Although these thoughts appear valid, you will learn that they are irrational or just plain wrong, and that twisted thinking is a major cause of your suffering."

"Master the methods that will help you pinpoint and eliminate the mental distortions which cause you to feel upset. As you begin to think more objectively, you will begin to feel better."

Chapter 2 - How to diagnose your moods

Test to see if you are suffering from depression. Take the test often and keep track of your scores. Follow instructions on how to read your results.

NOTE: attached PDF

Mania - "Mania is accompanied by increased sexual or aggressive activity; hyperactive, continuous body movements; racing thoughts; nonstop, excited talking; and a decreased need to sleep. Manic individuals have the delusion that they are extraordinarily powerful and brilliant, and often insist they are on the verge of some philosophical or scientific breakthrough or lucrative money-making scheme."

Chapter 3 - Understanding your moods: you feel the way you think

"You are probably skeptical of all this because your negative thinking has become such a part of your life that it has become automatic. For this reason I call negative thoughts 'automatic thoughts.' They run through your mind automatically without the slightest effort on your part to put them there. They are as obvious and natural to you as the way you hold a fork."

"you must understand what is happening to you before you can feel it."

"Nearly every depressed person seems convinced beyond all rhyme or reason that he or she is the special one who really is beyond hope. This delusion reflects the kind of mental processing that is at the very core of your illness."

Cognitive Distortions (mostly my wording in notes)

NOTE: See Attached PDF (Burn's wording)

1. All or nothing thinking - Never and always type thoughts. Unrealistic because life is rarely completely either one way or the other.
2. Overgeneralization - Because something bad happened once, you conclude it will occur over and over. Challenge the truth of the statement.
3. Mental Filter - Dwelling on a negative detail to turn an entire experience negative. Overlooking the truth that some (probably most) of the experience was positive. Also known as "selective abstraction."
4. Disqualifying the Positive - Ignoring positive experiences or turning them into negative experiences. "Reverse alchemy!" Such as discarding compliments as ingenuine. Stop seeking to prove a pre-conceived hypothesis about yourself.
5. Jumping to conclusions - "Mind reading" and "fortune telling" errors. Stop believing you can read minds or tell the future.
6. Magnification and Minimization - Blowing your fears out of proportion or creating catastrophies. Looking down on your own accomplishments as if they were not important. Check your perspective.
7. Emotional Reasoning - Taking your emotions as evidence of truth. For example, "I feel overwhelmed and hopeless. Therefore my problems must be impossible to solve." Remember that your thinking creates your emotions, not the other way around. Challenge your assumptions when they are based on how you feel.
8. Should Statements - Adding unnecessary pressure to life. Albert Ellis called it: "MUSTurbation." Change your expectations to approximate reality.
9. Labeling and Mislabeling - Thinking something like: "I'm a born loser" when you miss a putt in golf; instead of thinking: "I goofed up on my putt." Stop labeling. It is always an overgeneralization.
10. Personalization - Assuming responsibility for something over which you have no control, or are not causally related to. For example, blaming yourself for someone else's failure. Come to grips that you have less influence and control over others than you think you do.

"Feelings aren't Facts." p.48

"If your perceptions make no sense, the feelings they create will be as absurd as the images reflected in the trick mirrors at an amusement park. But abnormal emotions feel just as valid and realistic as the

genuine feelings created by undistorted thoughts, so you automatically attribute truth to them. This is why depression is such a powerful form of mental black magic."

"Most psychotherapists today share the conviction that becoming more aware of your feelings and expressing them more openly represents emotional maturity. The implication is that your feelings represent a higher reality, a personal integrity, a truth beyond question."

Chapter 4 - Start by Building Self-Esteem

Aaron Beck - "A depressed self-image can be characterized by the four "D's". You feel: Defeated, Defective, Deserted, and Deprived."

Paraphrase: Some therapists (for example Sigmund Freud) buy into whatever a patient says is true about themselves.

"The way a therapist handles your feelings of inadequacy is crucial to the cure, as your sense of worthlessness is a key to depression. The question also has considerable philosophical relevance -- is human nature inherently defective? Are depressed patients actually facing the ultimate truth about themselves? And what, in the final analysis, is the source of genuine self-esteem? This, in my opinion, is the most important question you will ever confront."

Answer:

"You can't earn worth through what you do. Achievements can bring you satisfaction but not happiness. Self-worth based on accomplishments is a "pseudo-esteem," not the genuine thing. ... The great majority of depressed individuals are in fact very much loved, but it doesn't help one bit because self-love and self-esteem are missing. At the bottom line, only your own sense of self-worth determines how you feel."

Defeating the sense of worthlessness

"Unless you substantially reverse your self-defeating thinking and behavior patterns, you are likely to slip back again into depression."

"Pinpointing the nature or origin of your problem may give you insight, but usually fails to change the way you act. That is not surprising. You have been practicing for years and years the bad mental habits that helped create your low self-esteem. It will take systematic and ongoing effort to turn the problem around."

Daily techniques to boost self-esteem

1. Talk back to that internal critic. Use of three column chart (fig 4-1) p.63 Or, Aaron Beck's "Daily Record of Dysfunctional Thoughts" is another chart you could use daily.

2. Mental Biofeedback. Keep track of how many negative thoughts you have with a wrist counter. Do this for at least three weeks to start to see a dip in the tally.

3. Cope, don't mope. What if your inadequacies are real? Criticizing yourself, or moping about your inadequacies doesn't address the problem. Coping skills involve: Defining the real problem, breaking it down into its specific parts, and applying appropriate solutions.

"How can I develop a sense of self-esteem? You don't have to do anything especially worthy to create or deserve self-esteem; all you have to do is turn off that critical, haranguing, inner voice (because it is wrong)."

Chapter 5 - Do Nothingism: how to beat it.

"You can substantially change the way you feel by the way you act."

NOTE: I think that this section is of particular use to Masons. The permission you need to join in or start up what you know in your heart would help our world is entirely your own to give. Procrastination is one of the hurdles Masons must overcome, and it is largely related to your self-esteem.

Defeating four popular reasons why people procrastinate:

1. It's your nature: you're basically lazy.
2. You want to hurt yourself and suffer. You have a self-destructive drive.
3. You're passive aggressive, and like to frustrate those around you by doing nothing.
4. You're getting rewarded for doing nothing. For example, you enjoy all the attention you get when you're depressed.

The first is just labeling and suggests that a lack of motivation is an irreversible trait.

People don't want to hurt themselves and depression is agonizing. No one enjoys misery and seeks it out.

"Resentment or anger could contribute to your lack of motivation, but it is not usually central to the problem. It is more often the case that you fear displeasing others and implications that you do it on purpose only makes you feel worse."

Depressed people might receive support and attention but they don't normally get anything from this support because they disqualify it. ... Depression and lethargy have no real rewards.

Diagram of Lethargy Cycle. p.87

Common Mindsets for procrastination:

1. Hopelessness. Inconceivable that you might feel better in the future, so it is pointless.
2. Helplessness. Trapped by circumstances beyond your control.
3. Overwhelming yourself. Magnify the task. Assume you must do everything at once. Distract yourself considering other unfinished tasks.
4. Jumping to conclusions. Not in your power to take effective action that will result in satisfaction.

5. Self-labeling.
6. Undervaluing the Rewards. Not worth the effort.
7. Perfectionism. Unrealistic goals so you don't try.
8. Fear of Failure.
9. Fear of Success. People will want more.
10. Fear of Disapproval or Criticism
11. Coercion and Resentment. You feel you're under intense pressure to perform.
12. Low Frustration Tolerance. Unrealistic assessment of what you should be able to do.
13. Guilt and Self-Blame. You let others down.

Work out a Daily Activity Schedule. (fig 5-2) p.95
Mastery/Pleasure ratings.

Antiprocrastination Sheet. (fig 5-3) Breaking down tasks and accurately predicting how hard they are.

Pleasure Predicting Sheet. (fig 5-5) p.105

Note: repeatedly the exercises Dr. Burns recommends show people how they make errors in assessing themselves and what they do. Believing the assessments is believing in a distorted reality and feelings based on these distortions are also in error.

Some more techniques:

The "But" Rebuttal

Paraphrasing: Learn to endorse yourself. Don't convince yourself that what you do doesn't count. How would you praise someone else for doing what you did? Others will give up trying to compliment you, if you always contradict what they say with self-drowning statements.

TIC-TOC - task interfering cognitions, and task oriented cognitions.

Little Steps for Little Feet. Break things down.

Summary: Motivation without coercion. Identify inappropriate systems for self-motivation. Devalue the "musts" and "shoulds". Eliminate those words from your inner dialogue. Replace these thoughts with your freedom to choose to do these things and realize how good it would feel to do them.

Disarming Technique p.118

Summary: Agree with the person attempting to coerce you, but do it in a way that reminds the coercer that you are agreeing based on your own decision, and not because they are telling you what to do.

Visualize Success.

Summary: List benefits. Visualize the reward and make it real. Imagine that you already have succeeded and are enjoying the benefits from your list.

Count what Counts.

Summary: Using a wrist counter to count how many things you do without prodding and encouragement from anyone. Clicking the counter reinforces the moments when you are in control of your own life.

Test Your "Can'ts"

Summary: "Can't" can become a hypnotic suggestion. Challenge your conclusion and make a test to see if you really "can't" do it. Break it down into smaller parts.

The "Can't Lose" System

Summary: List the negative consequences you predict will happen if you do something. Then examine each for distortions and develop coping strategies for each. Knowing that you have a coping strategy for loss keeps you from feeling that consequences are crippling.

Don't Put the Car before the Horse

"Action comes before motivation. Individuals who procrastinate frequently confuse motivation and action. You foolishly wait until you feel in the mood to do something. Since you don't feel like doing it, you automatically put it off."

Summary: You whine, "I don't feel like it." Well, who said you were supposed to feel like it? If you wait until you're "in the mood," you may wait forever.

Chapter 6 - Verbal Judo: Learn to talk back when you're under the fire of criticism

Problem: Upsetting, ongoing internal self-criticism.

"Why does criticism impact some people more than others?"

"First, you must realize that it is not other people, or the critical comments they make that upset you. To repeat, there has never been a single time in your life when the critical comments of some other person upset you - even to a small extent. No matter how vicious, heartless, or cruel these comments may be, they have no power to disturb you or create even a little bit of discomfort."

"Your own negative thoughts are what upset you. These thoughts are automatically triggered when someone else puts you down. And your thoughts all contain the mental errors described in chapter 3."

Verbal Techniques (defenses)

Step One - Empathy

"Don't assume that the person attacking you is perfectly conveying their thoughts. Ask a series of questions to get them to define exactly what he or she means. Avoid being judgemental or defensive in

your probing. Most attacks are vague labels. Have them be more specific. Turn the exchange into a collaboration where you learn more about each other."

Step Two - Disarming the Critic

"Whether your opponent is right or wrong, find a way to agree with them. If you can't find something to agree with, agree in principle. Or you can agree that you might feel that way if you had their perspective. Three rules: find some way to agree; avoid sarcasm or defensiveness; always speak the truth."

Step Three - Feedback and Negotiation

"If someone is wrong, try to stay factual and avoid insults like labeling. Review the fact together. Try explaining your reasoning, without anger. After a negotiation, thank the person for their concern."

Better Mad than Sad

Summary: Sometimes it might just be better to get angry. At least it might be better than turning the anger inward. But how you get angry is important to maintaining relationships.

Burn's Antiheckler Technique

Heckling characteristics:

1. They are intensely critical but seem inaccurate or irrelevant to the material presented.
2. They often come from a person who is not well accepted or regarded among his or her local peers.
3. They are expressed in a haranguing, abusive style

Technique

1. Immediately thank the person for their comments.
2. Acknowledge that the points brought up are indeed important
3. Emphasize the need for more knowledge about the points raised and encourage the heckler to pursue meaningful research and investigation of the topic.
4. Invite the heckler to share his or her views with me further after the close of the session.

With criticism you will choose to react with the Sad Route, Mad Route or Glad Route. (fig 6-2) p. 146

Chapter 7: Irritability Quotient

Test starts on page 150

Who/what is making you angry?

External Events and Internal Events. What is under your control?

NOTE:

The Serenity Prayer is the common name for a prayer authored by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr[1][2] (1892–1971). The best-known form is:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.

The rest of Chapter 7 goes into a whole course on anger management, dealing with crazy, obnoxious, etc., type people. This is too much for our group to address. Chapter 8 focuses on guilt.

The rest of the book, in my opinion, addresses more serious topics and attempts to get people to perform self-assessments that will help some get professional help, and reassure others that they don't need professional help (although it may not hurt). Part VI is particularly useful if you have not developed personal coping strategies.

I am very sure I won't get this far in our discussion.

Part III - Knowing the difference between Depression and Sadness

Part IV - Self Worth and Personal Growth

Part V - Defeating Hopelessness and Suicide

Part VI - Coping Strategies for everyday living

Part VII - Biological Facts/Chemistry of Moods

Finally, can you believe this paperback book has an index? It does! How rare is that!

