

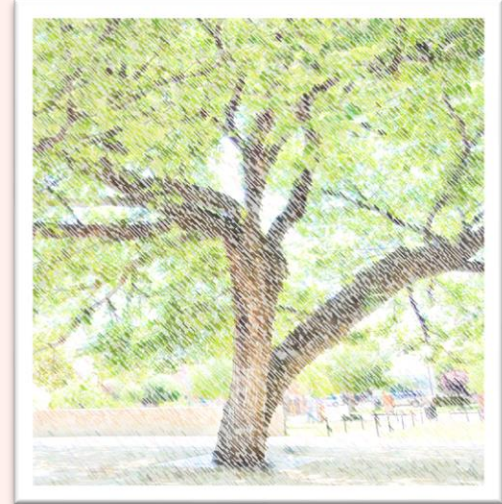
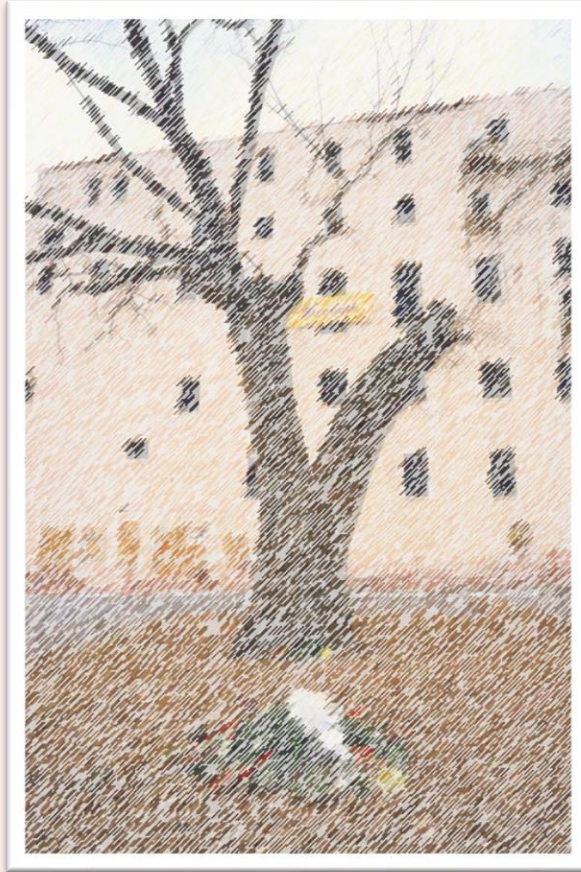
"Dear Past, thank you for the lessons.
Dear Future, I'm ready..."

Using Cognitive Processing to Help Children
and Caregivers Step Forward into Growth.

Susan Schmidt, PhD

Kate Theimer, PhD

What is Posttraumatic Growth?



- Positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995)
- Struggling with adversity may lead to higher post-trauma functioning (Linley & Joseph, 2004)
- Not necessarily positive adjustment. Those reporting PTG may report less emotional well-being than those exhibiting resilience.

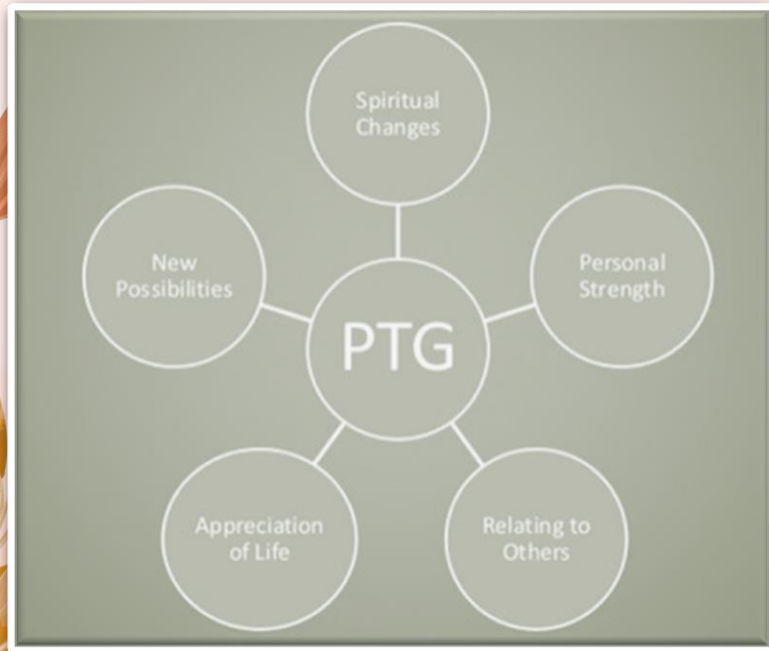
Trauma creates change
you don't choose.

Healing is about creating
change you do choose.

Michelle Rosenthal

5 Domains of Posttraumatic Growth

(Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995)



New possibilities

"I have a chance to do things I couldn't"

Relating to other

"I learned how nice/helpful people can be"

Personal strength

"I can handle big problems better"

Appreciation of life

"I appreciate/enjoy each day more"

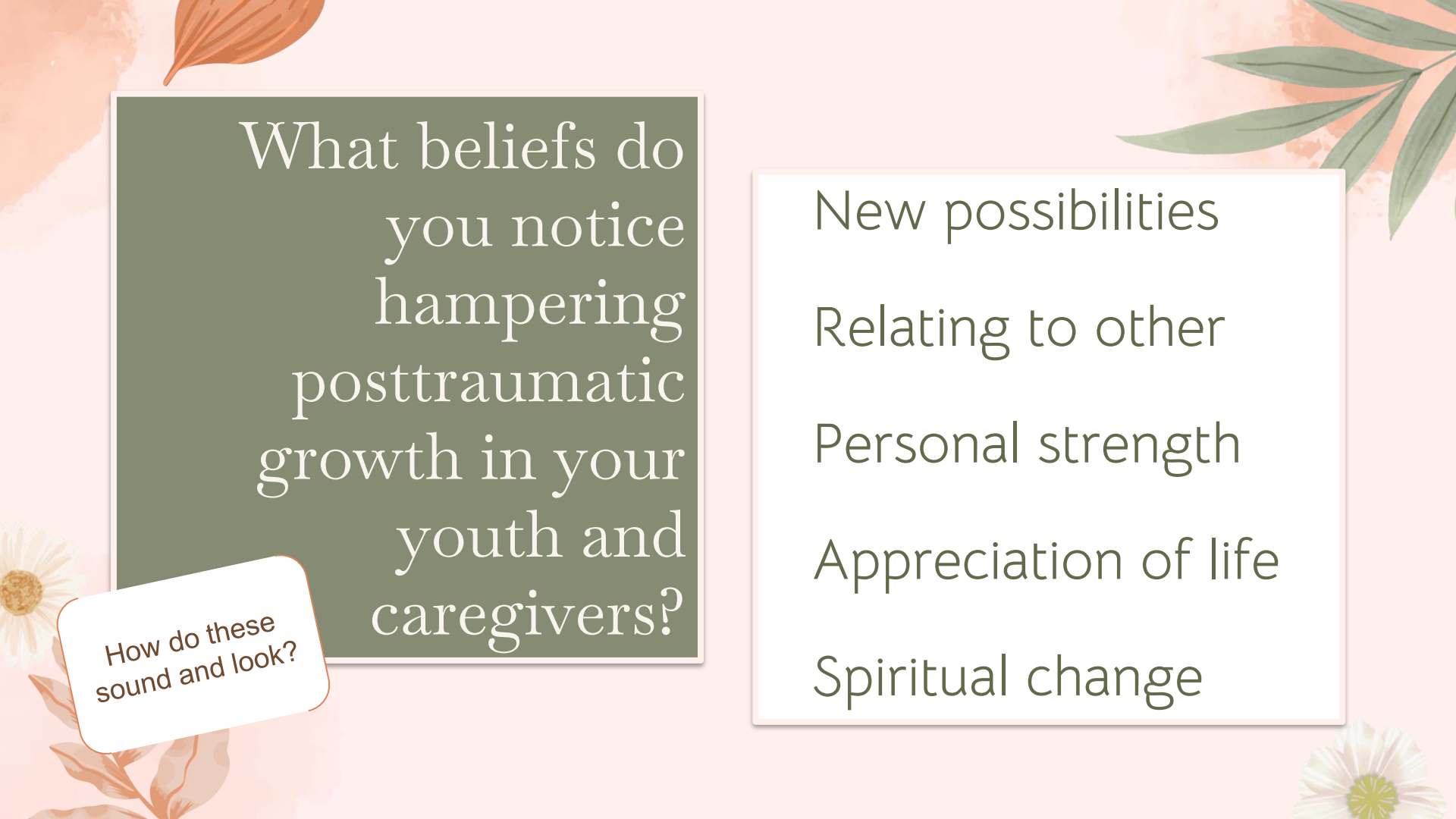
Spiritual change

"My faith/belief in God is stronger"

Facilitating PTG within TF-CBT



- Can happen across each PRACTICE Component
- “The domain the clinician may find to be the most productive for a possible focus on elements of posttraumatic growth is the process of cognitive engagement, cognitive processing, and cognitive change, including narrative reconstruction.”
- “As individuals weave the experience of posttraumatic growth into the fabric of their life narratives, the way they understand themselves and their lives can change.” (Tedeschi et al., 2014)



What beliefs do
you notice
hampering
posttraumatic
growth in your
youth and
caregivers?

How do these
sound and look?

New possibilities
Relating to other
Personal strength
Appreciation of life
Spiritual change

Growing from Impacts to Intentionality

Trust

I can't trust myself or others for help when needed.

Intimacy

I shouldn't get close to people.

People will hurt or take advantage of me if I get close.

Esteem

I am bad/unworthy/unlovable.

Other people are bad.

Power/Control

I don't have control of my life or my future.

Life is unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Safety

I can't keep myself or others safe.

People are dangerous and won't keep me safe when I need it.



New possibilities

Relating to other

Personal strength

Appreciation of life

Spiritual change

A life story supporting Posttraumatic Growth includes:

- A coherent narrative with the trauma as a catalyst/turning point
- Appreciation of life paradoxes
 - ❖ Loss and gain
 - ❖ Support and individual strength
 - ❖ Grief and gratitude
 - ❖ Vulnerability and strength
- Enhanced acceptance of the “grays” of life

Joy is a decision,
a really brave one,
about how you're
going to respond to life.

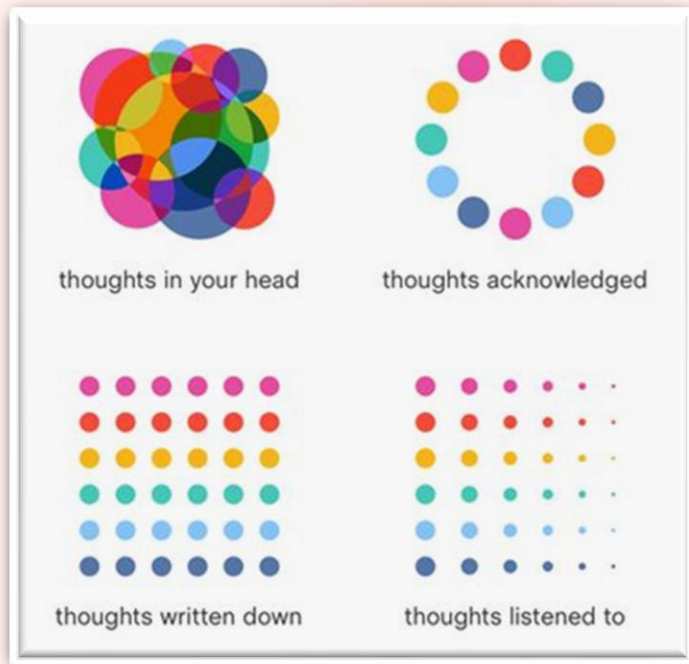
Wess Stafford

How to restructure the life narrative in a way that accommodates the event
is a part of the cognitive challenge of trauma leading to growth.

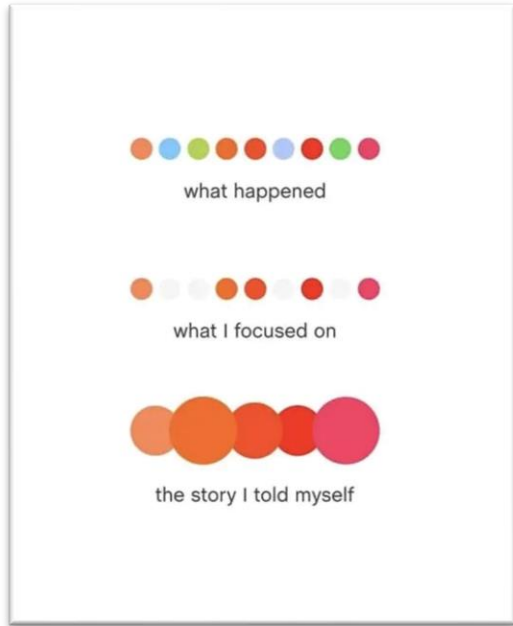
(Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006)



COGNITIVE PROCESSING FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

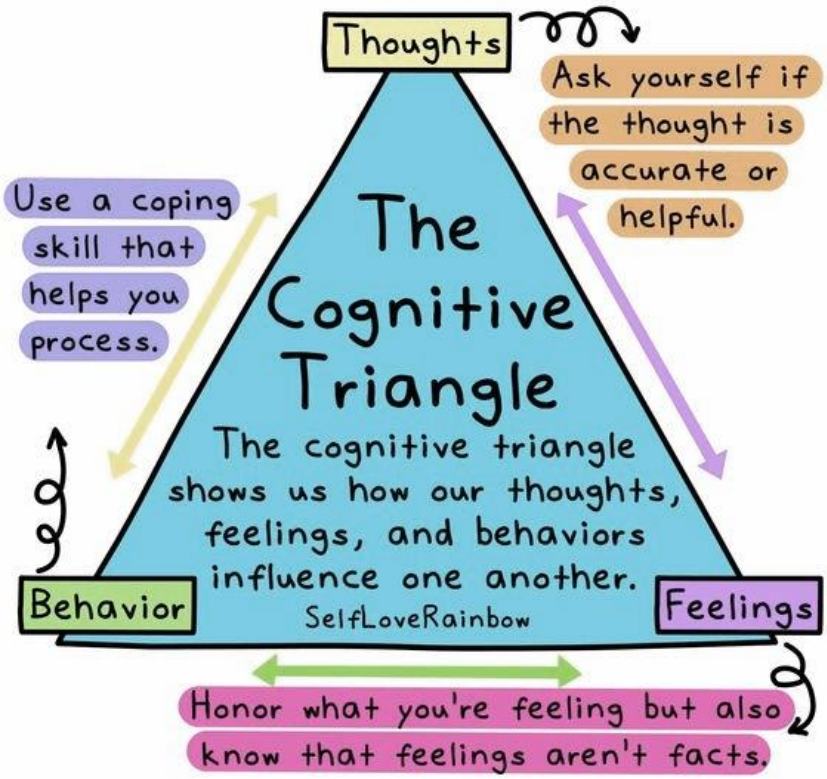
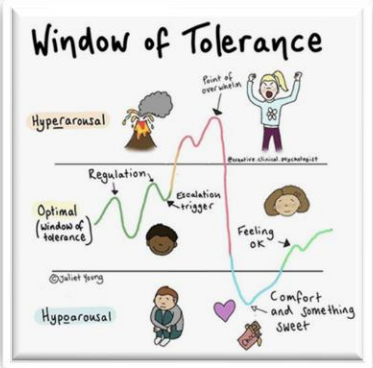


EFFECTIVE COGNITIVE PROCESSING IS:



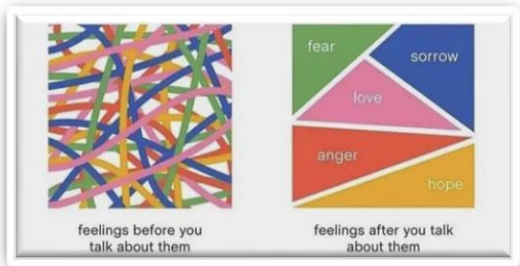
- Collaborative
 - VALIDATE current beliefs does not mean we are AGREEING with those beliefs
- Empowering
 - Therapist as a guide – avoid a power struggle
- Realistic and helpful
 - Finding balanced thoughts is critical

Start Here



The Test of Two

	Accurate	Inaccurate
Helpful		
Unhelpful		



Listen for Problematic Core Beliefs (Examples)

Harmful Core Beliefs

Some common harmful core beliefs.

I am a bad person	I don't deserve to be happy	I am not good enough	I am such an idiot
I can't do anything right	I need to hide who I really am	I am irrevocably broken	I deserve bad things that happen
I am not important	I am a failure at everything	Things will never be broken	I am too stupid to do xyz
Asking for help makes me weak	No one will ever truly love me	I must succeed at all costs	I have to be perfect

SelfLoveRainbow

What are Core Beliefs?

Core beliefs are a person's most central ideas about themselves, others, and the world. These beliefs act like a lens through which every situation and life experience is seen. Because of this, people with different core beliefs might be in the same situation, but think, feel, and behave very differently.

Even if a core belief is inaccurate, it still shapes how a person sees the world. Harmful core beliefs lead to negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, whereas rational core beliefs lead to balanced reactions.

Situation: Two people with different core beliefs receive a bad grade on a test.			
Person	Core Belief	Reaction	
A	➡ "I am a failure."	➡	Thought: Of course I failed... why bother? Feeling: Depressed Behavior: Makes no changes.
B	➡ "I am perfectly capable, when I give my best effort."	➡	Thought: I did poorly because I didn't prepare. Feeling: Disappointed Behavior: Plans to study before the next test.

Common Harmful Core Beliefs

Core beliefs are often hidden beneath surface-level beliefs. For example, the core belief "no one likes me" might underlie the surface belief "my friends only spend time with me out of pity".

Helpless	Unlovable	Worthless	External Danger
"I am weak"	"I am unlovable"	"I am bad"	"The world is dangerous"
"I am a loser"	"I will end up alone"	"I don't deserve to live"	"People can't be trusted"
"I am trapped"	"No one likes me"	"I am worthless"	"Nothing ever goes right"

Consequences of Harmful Core Beliefs


Interpersonal Problems	Mental Health Problems
difficulty trusting others	depression
feelings of inadequacy in relationships	anxiety
excessive jealousy	substance abuse
overly confrontational or aggressive	difficulty handling stress
putting others' needs above one's own needs	low self-esteem

Facts About Core Beliefs

- People are not born with core beliefs—they are learned.
- Core beliefs usually develop in childhood, or during stressful or traumatic periods in adulthood.
- Information that contradicts core beliefs is often ignored.
- Negative core beliefs are not necessarily true, even if they *feel* true.
- Core beliefs tend to be rigid and long-standing. However, they can be changed.

CHALLENGING PROBLEMATIC BELIEFS USING THE TEST OF TWO

The Test of Two

	Accurate	Inaccurate
Helpful		
Unhelpful		

Additional Example Techniques to Challenge Problematic Beliefs

TEN WAYS TO UNTWIST YOUR THINKING

1.	Identify the Distortion	Write down your negative thoughts so you can see which of the ten cognitive distortions you're involved in. This will make it easier to think about the problem in a more positive and realistic way.
2.	Examine the Evidence	Instead of assuming that your negative thought is true, examine the actual evidence for it. For example, if you feel that you never do anything right, you could list several things you have done successfully.
3.	The Double-Standard Method	Instead of putting yourself down in a harsh, condemning way, talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you would talk to a friend with a similar problem.
4.	The Experimental Technique	Do an experiment to test the validity of your negative thought. For example, if, during the episode of panic, you become terrified that you're about to die of a heart attack, you could jog or run up and down several flights of stairs. This will prove that your heart is healthy and strong.
5.	Thinking in Shades of Grey	Although this method might sound drab, the effects can be illuminating. Instead of thinking about your problems in all-or-nothing extremes, evaluate things on a range of 0 to 100. When things don't work out as well as you hoped, think about the experience as a partial success rather than a complete failure. See what you can learn from the situation.
6.	The Survey Method	Ask people questions to find out if your thoughts and attitudes are realistic. For example, if you believe that public speaking anxiety is abnormal and shameful, ask several friends if they ever felt nervous before they gave a talk.
7.	Define Terms	When you label yourself "inferior" or "a fool" or "a loser," ask, "What is the definition of a 'fool'?" You will feel better when you see that there is no such thing as a "fool" or a "loser."
8.	The Semantic Method	Simply substitute language that is less colorful and emotionally loaded. This method is helpful for "should statements." Instead of telling yourself "I shouldn't have made that mistake," you can say, "It would be better if I hadn't made that mistake."
9.	Re-attribution	Instead of automatically assuming that you are "bad" and blaming yourself entirely for a problem, think about the many factors that may have contributed to it. Focus on solving the problem instead of using up all your energy blaming yourself and feeling guilty.
10.	Cost-Benefit Analysis	List the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling (like getting angry when your plane is late), a negative thought (like "No matter how hard I try, I always screw up"), or a behavior pattern (like overeating and lying around in bed when you're depressed). You can also use the Cost-Benefit Analysis to modify a self-defeating belief such as, "I must always try to be perfect."

Example: Examining the Evidence

Problematic Belief:

I can't trust anyone ever again.
If I do, they'll just hurt me.

CPT Domains:

Trust
Intimacy
Esteem
Power/Control
Safety



PTG Domains:

New possibilities
Relating to other
Personal strength
Appreciation of life
Spiritual change

Putting Thoughts on Trial



In this exercise, you will put a thought on trial by acting as a defense attorney, prosecutor, and judge, to determine the accuracy of the thought.

Prosecution and Defense: Gather evidence in support of, and against, your thought. Evidence can only be used if it's a verifiable fact. No interpretations, guesses, or opinions!

Judge: Come to a verdict regarding your thought. Is the thought accurate and fair? Are there other thoughts that could explain the facts?



The Thought



The Defense

evidence for the thought



The Prosecution

evidence against the thought




The Judge's Verdict

Practice Restructuring Problematic Beliefs (Examples)

COPING THOUGHTS

WHAT DO YOU MOST NEED TO REMIND YOURSELF OF RIGHT NOW?

Check all that apply. 

- ☐ Just because I'm thinking something, does not make it true.
- ☐ This hurts, so I need to be extra kind towards myself.
- ☐ This feeling is uncomfortable. But it will pass.
- ☐ It's not that great right now, but it's not the worst thing either.
- ☐ Not everything will go my way, but I can be flexible.
- ☐ It's okay to have a not-okay day.
- ☐ I've dealt with harder situations and I know it will get better.
- ☐ I prefer something else, but I can deal with this, too.

WHAT TO TELL MYSELF WHEN I'M FEELING DISCOURAGED

1. This is tough. But so am I.
2. I may not be able to control this situation. But I am in charge of how I respond.
3. I haven't figured this out...yet.
4. This challenge is here to teach me something.
5. All I need to do is take it one step at a time. Breathe. And do the next right thing.



SELF-CRITICISM → SELF-SUPPORT

Everyone thinks I'm weird.



I am unique & don't need to be anyone else but me.

I'll never be good at that.



I will try my best.

I did horrible on the test. I am such a failure.



I can learn from my mistakes and do better next time.

I hate how I look. I am so ugly.



I am grateful for my body for allowing me to experience my life.

What to Tell Myself When I'm Feeling Anxious



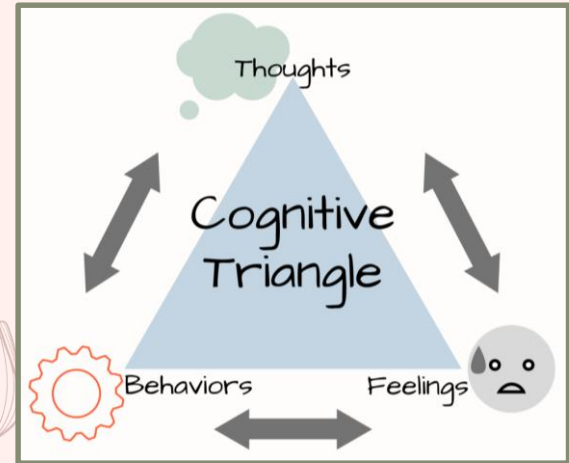
1. This feeling won't last forever.
2. Thoughts and emotions aren't facts.
3. I can feel anxious and still handle this.
4. My bravery is stronger than my fear.
5. I am safe right now.
6. Anxiety is reminding me to slow down my breathing.
7. I've survived other tough times before, and I will be resilient this time, too.
8. This feeling is a normal reaction. I will use my coping tools to respond with thoughtfulness and self-compassion.
9. I don't have to figure this all out right now, I will trust the process.
10. Thank you anxiety for always trying to look out for me, but it's okay now. I got this.

INVITE
SPIRITUALITY
INTO
COGNITIVE
PROCESSING AS
APPROPRIATE
TO SUPPORT
POSTTRAUMATIC
GROWTH

- Inquire about whether unhelpful thoughts are consistent with their spiritual beliefs/religious teachings/values.
 - “I’m not worthy of love” → “What does God say about that?” “Would God agree with you about that?”
 - As typical, don’t answer the question for the client – allow them to process through.
- Can invite the use of religious texts, scripture, or teachings with personal significance to client to help replace unhelpful/unbalanced thoughts or understand *why* suffering occurs.
 - “What questions do you have for Allah related to [trauma]?” “How might Allah respond to [question]?”
 - Various religious traditions discuss suffering – ask the client/family! You don’t need to be the expert on it; utilize the family’s expertise.

- Tenets of cognitive processing may beautifully align with spiritual beliefs and practices.
- Many can find meaning, purpose, peace, acceptance, unconditional love, and hope for the future through spirituality.

“What captures your mind controls your thoughts and dominates the desires of your heart... [it] shapes the way you view yourself and life... your view of those things shapes the choices you make and the actions you take...”



SOCRATIC QUESTIONING



TO SUPPORT
POSTTRAUMATIC
GROWTH

Technique involves guided exploration of a belief through progressive logical questioning.

THE 6 TYPES OF SOCRATIC QUESTIONS



Socratic questions can be used in influencing, leading and coaching to stimulate critical thinking



CLARIFYING THINKING & UNDERSTANDING

Can you give me an example?
Could you explain further?
Are you saying ... ?
What is the problem you are trying to solve?



CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

Is that always the case?
Are you assuming ... ?
How could you verify or disprove that?
What would happen if ... ?



EXAMINING EVIDENCE & RATIONALE

Why do you say that?
How do you know?
Why?
What evidence is there that supports ... ?



CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Are there any alternatives?
What is the other side of the argument?
What makes your viewpoint better?
Who would be affected and what would they think?



CONSIDERING IMPLICATIONS & CONSEQUENCES

What are the implications/consequences of ... ?
How does that affect ... ?
What if you are wrong?
What does our experience tell us will happen?



META QUESTIONS

Why do you think I asked that question?
What does ... mean?
What is the point of the question?
What else might I ask?

SOCRATIC QUESTIONING PREP

Problematic Belief(s):

Possible Endpoint (New Belief):

What I Want To Tell This Client:

Eliciting Questions:

CPT Domains:

Trust

Intimacy

Esteem

Power/Control

Safety



PTG Domains:

New possibilities

Relating to other

Personal strength

Appreciation of life

Spiritual change

1. Clarify the problem
2. Challenge assumptions
3. Examine evidence
4. Explore perspectives
5. Consider implications
6. Question the questions

SOCRATIC QUESTIONING PREP

Problematic Beliefs(s):

*No one will want to date me if they learn
I was abused. They'll only want me for sex.
And maybe that's all I have to give.*

Possible Endpoint (New Belief):

CPT Domains:

Trust

Intimacy

Esteem

Power/Control

Safety



PTG Domains:

New possibilities

Relating to other

Personal strength

Appreciation of life

Spiritual change

What I Want To Tell This Youth:

Eliciting Questions:

BREAKOUT ROOMS ACTIVITY

10 MINUTES

what we think healing will look like:

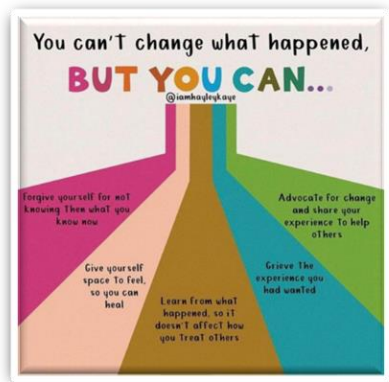


what healing actually looks like:



@letstalk.mentalhealth

COGNITIVE PROCESSING TO SUPPORT



CAREGIVER POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

Helping caregivers to cognitively process their beliefs supports family-based healing, enhances the praise letter, and promotes healthy communication during conjoint reviews (which all facilitate growth and support for the child)

Child Trauma and Caregiving

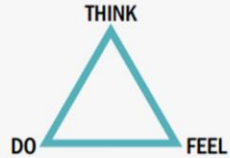
Below are common experiences of caregivers of youth who have gone through traumatic experiences. Which of the experiences below currently fit you? Use the blank spaces to write in any experiences you're having that aren't listed.

Common Thoughts		
	Think about what happened while working or at other challenging times	Concern that your child will never be the same
	Concerned about what others will think	Wonder if you're doing enough to help your child
	Think you are responsible for your child experiencing the trauma	Think your child's future is less hopeful now
	Think your child uses their trauma as an excuse for bad behavior	Wonder if your child is going to grow up and hurt others
Common Feelings		
	Upset about it happening to your child	Embarrassed that it happened
	Sadness	Shame about it happening
	Fear for your child	Insecurity since it happened
	Anger that it happened	Guilt about not knowing sooner
	Numbness	Confusion
Common Reactions		
	Trouble sleeping	More rules and restrictions for your child
	Physical symptoms – headaches, stomachaches, etc.	Fewer rules and less structure and consistency with your child
	Crying, moodiness, angry outbursts more often	Increased conflict with your partner or other adult relationships
	Not talking about what has happened	Shutting off from others

Creating Alternative Thoughts – Caregiver

What is an unhelpful thought you have had related to your teen's trauma?
Write it below and walk through the exercise to create a new, more helpful
and balanced alternative thought.

Unhelpful Thought



Outcomes

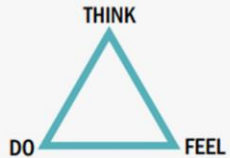
Positive

Negative

Evidence that supports the thought

Evidence that does *not* support the
thought

Alternative (More Helpful) Thought




Outcomes

Positive

Negative

WRITING YOUR PRAISE LETTER



Consider Asking Caregiver(s) to Create a Praise Letter

Your child has worked very hard to overcome fear and anxiety to be able to tell their trauma story. Many children are nervous to share their story with caregivers. Your support is MOST important for your child! Coming together with your child to talk openly about their trauma is an opportunity for you to provide support by listening, tell them how proud you are of them, correct any concerns or worries they have, and plan for the future.

Today you will write a "Praise Letter" to your child that you will share in the next session. Below are questions to consider in writing your Praise Letter. Not all questions apply to every child. Remember the goal is for your child to feel heard and accepted by you.

Questions to Consider:

How do I feel about my child being able to tell their trauma story?
How proud are you of your child?


What healthy messages do I want to give my child about the trauma?
How do you feel about what happened to your child?
Who is responsible for the trauma?
What actions did my child take that I am proud of?
What will life from here on out be like for my child and our family?

What positive changes have I seen in child since starting group?
Does my child manage stress in better ways?
Is my child more open in talking with me?
Does my child seem happier?

Who can my child come to or talk with when upset?
Will I be available for my child when they need to talk about what happened or about future upsetting experiences?

Who else can my child talk to?
How will I help child when they're upset?

What do I hope for my child and for our family?
Do I believe my child is healing?
Will my child be happy, have fun, learn, grow, enjoy life?
Will we get through any future difficulties or stressors?
Is my child (our family) stronger?



Some caregivers want to write this on their own. Others may benefit from your active support in session. Always review drafts together before the conjoint to support a positive, healthy message for their child.

Dear _____,

I wanted to take a minute and let you know how proud I am of the work that you have done. I know just how brave you have been having to think about the things that upset you and write them down and talk about them. It takes so much courage to do those things and I am so very proud of you for how hard you have worked. I want to tell you that even though you have experienced tough things those things and experiences are going to make you such a strong and wonderful man! I hope that you know that none of them were your fault! You were just a little boy and you had nothing to do with the things that happened. Sometimes I feel mad and really sad about the things you are having to deal with! It makes me feel like having a meltdown myself! But you have been my hero for the last 3 years! You are my hero!

I love you so much and watching how much you struggled the past few years has been painful for me. Watching you face down your fears and hurt and trauma has been amazing! Proud doesn't even say how much I feel for your strength and courage! You are my hero! I have noticed lately how much better you are about getting angry and not letting it control you. You are learning to walk away. Even though things are tough right now, I'm here for you! I don't know what will happen but you and I will face it together! I will listen to your problems and fears and I will help you face them head on! We will defeat our future problems as a team!

I believe that you are healing your hurts! I believe you will succeed no matter what the future throws at you! You are strong and I am strong. Together, we are Superman! We will fly together!

With all my love!



UTILIZING A FINAL CHAPTER TO FACILITATE

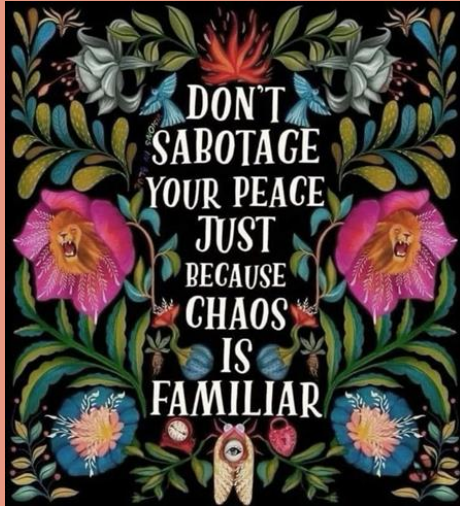


YOUTH POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

Final Chapter Possible Prompts:

- How are you different now from when [the sexual abuse] happened?
- How are you different now from when you started therapy? What have you learned?
- What have you learned about yourself as a result of [your mom dying]?
- Can people grow after [trauma]? How have you grown as a result of [trauma]?
- What would you tell other teens/children who experienced something similar?
- Are there any times in the future where things might be difficult because of [trauma]? How can you prepare for those? Who should we involve in the preparation?
- What does your future look like?

TROUBLE- SHOOTING CHALLENGES IN COGNITIVE PROCESSING



The processing conversation feels unfocused or like it's going in circles:

- Add structure or visuals, hands-on activity to explore the belief and to teach as appropriate.
- Use scaling to measure shifts in belief intensity.



Client "arguing" for current belief or appears disengaged:

- Allow client to fully educate you on their perspective.
- Validate how the client's experiences have led to this perspective: "It makes sense given your experiences of xyz..."
- Shift to another processing strategy.
- Consider that your questions or comments may be sounding biased to the individual. Consider options for enhancing your neutrality/curiosity.

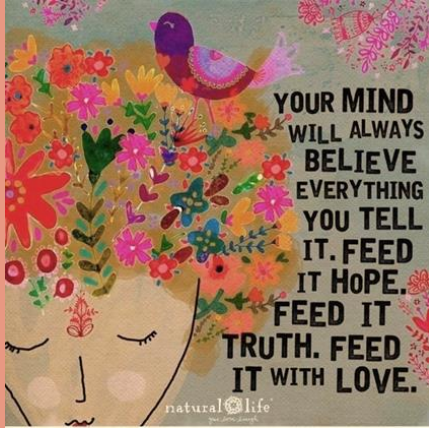
TROUBLE- SHOOTING CHALLENGES IN COGNITIVE PROCESSING



Therapist struggles to find a healthy and true belief 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.**
- Consider if the client's belief may be overgeneralized. Is it always true? Are there exceptions?
- Explore with the client what it's like for them to carry around this belief. Does it cause difficulties for them in their daily life? How is the belief helpful? How is it problematic or could be problematic in the future?
- Seek consultation if you continue to feel stuck.

TROUBLE- SHOOTING CHALLENGES IN COGNITIVE PROCESSING



Dysfunctional belief is vague & hard to challenge:

- Help the client clarify their belief into an “If-then” statement:

“I have to be in control. If I am not in control, then I will get taken advantage of.”
- Then you have more capacity to find exceptions

Child can't do solely verbal activity:

- Actively connect beliefs/feelings/behaviors in triangle or chart walk through.
- Be detectives and collaboratively look for evidence for/against & place under old belief

Thank you for
joining us!

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