

Session Thirteen

## MANAGING STRESS WITH COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

**KEY POINT:** Positive coping strategies help people manage stress by increasing control and reducing helplessness. Since emotions come from our thoughts and beliefs, using effective cognitive coping methods can improve composure and resilience during emotional challenges.

**STRESS:** Stress is a key contributor to mental health issues, triggering conditions like anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder. Chronic stress disrupts brain chemistry, raising cortisol and undermining emotional stability, while major stressors often precede psychiatric disorders.<sup>1</sup>

**SCRIPTURES:**

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).<sup>2</sup>*

*"...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).*

*"...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure... think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).*

*"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:2).*

**NOTES:**

What's On Your  
Mind?



**COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT):** CBT is a structured, goal-oriented, and evidence-based talking therapy that focuses on changing dysfunctional thinking, emotions, and behaviors. It is used to treat mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder in conjunction with appropriate medication treatment.<sup>3</sup>

- While CBT is often highly effective as a standalone treatment for conditions like anxiety and depression, it is generally considered an **adjunctive** (add-on) treatment for bipolar disorder, rather than a replacement for medication.<sup>4</sup>

**CBT THESIS:** The main thesis of CBT is that our emotions and behaviors are not caused by external events, people, or circumstances, but rather by our interpretations and beliefs about them.

**ABCDE:** This is a structured technique designed by Albert Ellis (the “grandfather” of CBT) to challenge irrational beliefs. It involves identifying an **Activating** or triggering event (A), the resulting **Beliefs** that create reactions (B), and **Consequences**, i.e., the emotions and behaviors that result from beliefs (C), then applying **Disputation** (D) to actively challenge and replace unhelpful thoughts with rational ones, often leading to a new, healthier **Effect** (E). Looks like this: ABC + D → E.<sup>5</sup>

**SUMMARY:** CBT enables us to replace negative thought patterns with constructive ones, empowering self-management of emotions and behaviors.

**NOTE:** This is not intended to imply that long-term therapeutic care should be disregarded in favor of complete self-reliance. Instead, consider the dynamic akin to the relationship between an **effective coach and a skilled player**—while the player develops autonomy in executing plays, they continue to value the guidance and support offered by coaching.

**SUMMARY:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) facilitates the replacement of negative thought patterns with constructive alternatives, thereby enhancing self-management of emotions and behaviors.

NOTES:

## 4 REFLECTIVE PAUSE PROJECTS

### TIMEOUT

#### Overcoming Survivors & Support Partners:

1. Healthy thinking isn't just positive thinking; it's about viewing life realistically and with balance, since not everything is good all the time.

*Describe ways others advise us—or we advise ourselves—to “think positive” in a spiritual sense. What do you believe it means to think in a clear and balanced way?*

2. Negative thoughts, or “thinking traps,” can distort our self-perception and lead to extreme reactions, such as believing we'll fail or aren't good enough. These are common experiences, often amplified by mental health challenges—but no less true for support partners.

*Describe how these “thinking traps” often interfere with your day-to-day life and/or get in the way of your work, school, church events, or relationships.*

3. Unhealthy “thinking traps” can be changed. Using basic CBT styled tools, we can reframe negative thoughts and develop healthier, clearer perspectives.

*Describe how you have been able to change a negative thought about yourself and/or how you are discovering different ways to change negative views into clearer, balanced perspectives.*

4. Healing-recovery is a continuous process that means developing healthy coping strategies and resilience.

*How have you seen spiritual and mental health resilience develop in your own life related to the cultivation of the use of coping strategies?*

### NOTES:

## RENEWED THINKING

The following include six **Unhealthy Thinking Lenses** that can quickly become barriers to our overall well-being. Read the descriptions and indicate which patterns you experience most often.<sup>6</sup>

Different situations throughout our lives can cause us to react with one or more of these negative thought patterns at the same time. So, don't be discouraged if you find yourself checking multiple boxes. Thankfully, we do not have to remain stuck looking through these Unhealthy Thinking Lenses!

**STEP ONE:** Check the [ ] of the unhealthy thinking lens, or lenses, that you most commonly experience.

### **#1 BLACK OR WHITE THINKING [ ]**

Looking at things in absolute black or white categories, such as seeing small mistakes as total failures.

***"I THOUGHT I WOULD FEEL BETTER BY NOW. THIS MEDICATION ISN'T WORKING SO I MIGHT AS WELL STOP TAKING IT."***

### **#2 PREDICTING THE FUTURE [ ]**

*Anticipating that things will turn out badly without any evidence.*

**"I'VE BEEN WORKING HARD TO PREPARE FOR THIS PRESENTATION BUT I KNOW IT'S GOING TO BE A FAILURE."**

### **#3 NEGATIVE LABELING [ ]**

*Saying or thinking only negative things about yourself or others.*

**"I JUST GOT TURNED DOWN FROM A JOB. I AM A FAILURE AND MY LIFE IS GOING NOWHERE."**

#### **#4 JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS [ ]**

*Presuming what others are thinking without any evidence.*

**“I WASN’T INVITED TO THE CO-WORKER’S HOLIDAY PARTY. CLEARLY NOBODY LIKES ME OR WANTS ME AROUND ANYMORE.”**

#### **#5 CREATING EXPECTATIONS [ ]**

*Telling yourself that you or others “should” or “must” act in a certain way.*

**“I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO THIS WITHOUT BEING SO FEARFUL AND AFRAID.”**

#### **#6 THE BLAME GAME [ ]**

*Believing that everything others do or say is your fault.*

**“MY SON IS HAVING A CHALLENGING TIME MAKING FRIENDS. I AM A HORRIBLE MOTHER. IT’S ALL MY FAULT THAT HE IS NOT LIKED BY OTHERS.”**

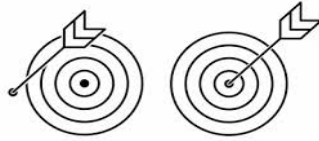
**\*\*\***

**STEP TWO:** Think of a common stressor or stressful event and use the tool below to renew your thinking lens: **Recognize** → **Review** → **Realize** → **Recall** → **Renew**.

1. **RECOGNIZE:** What’s the stressful event?
2. **REVIEW:** What were your thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions?
3. **REALIZE:** What was the thinking lens you looked through?
4. **RECALL:** What is one comforting truth from your redefined identity statements? (Review “redefined identity statements” in Lesson/Chapter Eleven.)
5. **RENEW:** What is your renewed thought about this event?

**NOTES:**

# STRESS BUSTERS



shutterstock.com - 2230051469

Managing mental health can be tough. Identify your coping methods by reviewing the list below and marking any unhealthy or healthy strategies you use.

## **UNHEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES**

- Finding ways to feel physical pain
- Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol or taking drugs
- Avoiding family or friends; spending extended time alone
- Seeking physical/sexual relationships
- Yelling, getting into physical fights, etc.
- Multiple impulsive purchases
- Not eating enough, skipping meals, comfort eating, or over-eating
- Sleeping too much or not sleeping at all
- Blaming yourself or thinking negative things about yourself
- Participating in risky or dangerous activities or behaviors
- Spending time with others who reinforce all of the above

## **HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES**

- Creating a schedule or routine
- Starting a simple project (e.g., cleaning, gardening, painting, knitting)
- Completing a relaxation exercise (e.g., deep breathing, Biblical meditation, etc.)
- Saying a simple prayer that reinforces God's presence and care
- Using healthy thinking and reaffirming identity tools
- Focusing on gratitude journaling
- Reading an uplifting devotional
- Attending an exercise class
- Going for a short walk or run
- Spending time with a close friend
- Watching a short, funny, and light-hearted TV show/video
- Taking a relaxing shower or bath
- Playing a game or working on a puzzle
- Picking up an old hobby (e.g., art, photography, music, reading, writing)
- Getting a massage

## **IN THE SPACES BELOW ...**

1. Describe a common stressful situation (**STRESSOR**) that you typically encounter throughout your week.
2. Using the list of Healthy Coping Strategies listed on the previous page, choose one new way that you plan to manage this stressor (**COPING STRATEGY**).
3. As you prepare to use this new coping strategy, what is the **RESULT** that you want to see?
4. How do you hope this new strategy will impact your physical, mental, spiritual, and relational health and well-being?

(Use the example listed below to help you get started.)

## EXAMPLE

1. **STRESSOR** = Overwhelmed by the amount of work I have to get done before a deadline, not knowing where to begin, and stressed that I won't get it done.
2. **COPING STRATEGY** = Create a detailed schedule, breaking up overall work responsibilities into small, manageable parts over a few days.
3. **RESULT** = Feeling like each day there is an opportunity for a small accomplishment along with making actual progress on the work, rather than feeling overwhelmed and paralyzed.

## STRESS BUSTER STRATEGY

**STRESSOR** =

**COPING STRATEGY** =

**RESULT** =

## ENDNOTES

1. **Google:** Neurobiology of Chronic Stress-Related Psychiatric Disorders: Evidence from Molecular Imaging Studies / National Library of Medicine (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5976254/>  
#:~:text=Chronic%20stress%20accounts%20for%20billions,or%20bipolar%20disorder%20to%20date).
2. All Scripture references in Syllabus 13 are from the New International Version (NIV) translation, unless otherwise indicated.
3. **Google:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) / Cleveland Clinic (<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/21208-cognitive-behavioral-therapy-cbt>)

4. **Google:** CBT for Bipolar Disorder: How It Helps - Peak Mental Health (<https://mentalhealthpeak.com/cbt-for-bipolar/#:~:text=The%20journey%20toward%20stability%20can,through%20their%20specialized%20CBT%20programs>).
5. **Google:** What is Albert Ellis' ABC Model in CBT Theory? (Incl. PDF) (<https://positivepsychology.com/albert-ellis-abc-model-rebt-cbt/>).
6. Thinking Patterns by: Burns, D. D. (1981). Feeling good: The new mood therapy. New York, N.Y: Penguin Books.

**SOURCE ATTRIBUTION:** Tim Reside developed the video and syllabi content from original work and adapted materials. A special debt of gratitude acknowledges the original work of the Grace Alliance (Mental Health Grace Alliance) in Waco, Texas as a resource. Joe Padilla, Co-founder and President of Grace Alliance, provided permission to use their materials as a partial source for this presentation, notably from the “Living Grace” workbook Chapter Six and Chapter Eight. More information about Grace Alliance can be found by internet searching for “Mental Health Grace Alliance Resources.”

**DISCLAIMER:** The eighteen video chapters and syllabi are meant for information and education only, not clinical advice. Tim Reside is not a healthcare provider; he seeks expert guidance for his own care. Please consult medical professionals before making health decisions.