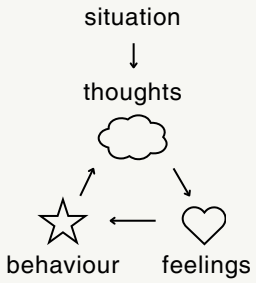
The CBT Model

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is based on the principle that it is not situations or people that make us feel certain ways - it's how we interpret or think about situations that influences how we feel and what we do. First, we experience a situation or a trigger. Then, we experience thoughts about that situation, which affect what type of emotions we experience and how intensely we feel them. Our feelings and their intensity consequently influence our behaviour.



What makes a thought unhelpful? Unhelpful thoughts are those that are either inaccurate (and therefore should not be taking up so much of our mental real estate) or detrimental to us because of the emotions and behaviours they lead to. Helpful thoughts are balanced, realistic, and beneficial to us because they reduce the intensity of our emotions and help us act in accordance with who we want to be.

See the following example of how to apply the model:

Situation	**Unhelpful Thoughts**	**Feelings**	**Behaviour/Outcomes**
Your boss arranges a meeting with you without telling you what it's about	"He's going to point out how I've been falling behind lately" "I'm a terrible worker" "I'm going to get fired"	Anxious 90/100 Stressed 90/100	Worry all day Fall further behind on my work Enter the meeting feeling on-edge

Situation	**Helpful Thoughts**	**Feelings**	**Behaviour/Outcomes**
Your boss arranges a meeting with you without telling you what it's about	"I'm not sure what this is about, but I'm not going to stress over something I can't control" "I've been working hard lately" "If my boss has feedback for me, I'll be open to it and I'm sure it'll improve my work"	Anxious 40/100 Calm 60/100 Content 70/100	Able to continue working for the day Enter the meeting feeling assured and confident in my abilities

Questions to ask when challenging unhelpful thoughts and identifying more helpful thoughts:

- Are my thoughts based on facts or on feelings? What is the evidence?
- Are my thoughts detrimental to me because of the emotions or behaviours they lead to?
- Am I falling into a thinking trap/cognitive distortion?
- Is it possible other people would have different interpretations of this same situation?
- Could my thought be an exaggeration of what's true?
- What is the most realistic thing that would happen if my unhelpful thoughts came true?
- If I was giving advice to someone I care about in this situation, what would I say?

Unhelpful thoughts:

Situation	**Unhelpful Thoughts**	**Feelings**	**Behaviour/Outcomes**

Helpful thoughts:

Situation	**Helpful Thoughts**	**Feelings**	**Behaviour/Outcomes**