

Thinking Clearly

Session III

Aarsha Vidya Foundation

About Vedic Wisdom for a fulfilling life



Programme of 6 sessions based on Vedic wisdom for anyone who wants more from life.



Even if one is not interested in Vedic wisdom, **the principles if understood and applied** will offer windows of insight and mirrors of reflection, **paving the way for a fulfilling life**. Why would I seek to apply these principles?



Firstly, it will help me to enhance **the fulfillment that I wish to derive** through family, work or any other pursuits.



Secondly, as I am engaged in my many pursuits, being a student of Vedanta, **my self growth is a necessary and non-negotiable step to Self discovery**

PROGRAMME: VEDIC WISDOM FOR A FULFILLING LIFE

Session	Topic	Attachment
I	Who am I? Where do I come from? How does my past flow into my present?-Freeing oneself from the conditionings of past	Session I_Who am I
II	My life in my hands – Moving into a deeper self acceptance and creating your own destiny.Accepting who you are, what you are and starting to master your life	Session II_My life in my hands
III	Think clearly and feel deeply- Discovering emotional balance	Session III_Think clearly.Feel deeply. Act decisively
IV	Where are you headed in life? Finding deepest priorities and learning to live in harmony with these.	Session IV_Discovering priorities
V	Building understanding and connectedness with people by learning to communicate	Session V_Building understanding and connectedness
VI	What is Dharma? What is Dharma centered living?	Session VI_Dharma centered living

Thinking clearly and feeling deeply

Self esteem is a disposition by which I experience myself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and to see myself as worthy of happiness, while refusing to be my enemy. (Adapted from Six pillars of Self esteem - Nathaniel Branden)

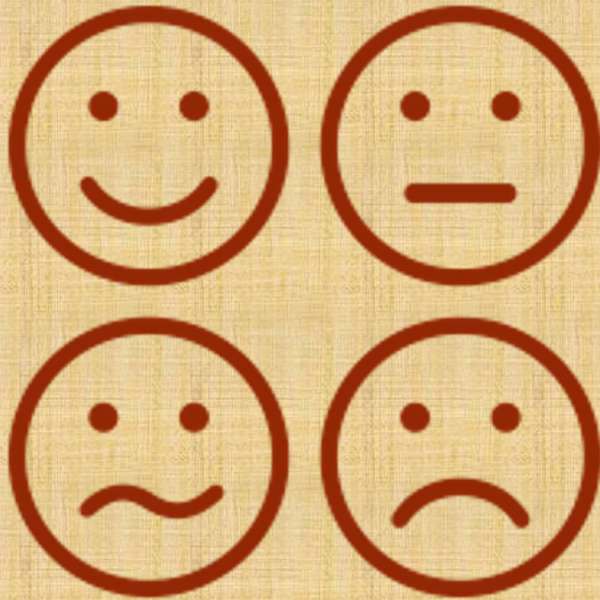
Self esteem = Self efficacy + Self respect

Samatvam yogah uchyate (Bhagavad Gita 2.48) :Remaining the same to success and failure this evenness of mind is Yoga.

Much of my self efficacy comes from **my ability to increasingly deal with the complexities of life**, my capacity to command a mind that is **contemplative – alert yet relaxed**, my capacity to command a balanced approach to situations, in other words ***samatavam***

Feelings

To discover our capacity for **samatvam**, an equanimous, balanced approach to situations we need to look into the dynamic of our feelings and thoughts. Our **viveka** – discriminative ability is required because these appear mixed up.



- We **welcome feelings and emotions** like excitement, happiness, joy, peace, determination, confidence etc.
- However, **most of us struggle with feelings such as sadness**, disappointment, jealousy, anger especially when these are experienced intensely.
 - Inappropriate/self destructive emotions **are enduring, immobilizing, and non-productive**. They reflect overreactions to stimuli and lead to negative self image – rage, shame, jealousy, hatred
 - We try to suppress the intensity because it **affects our moods**, our functioning and sometimes almost stunts action.
- Because we feel threatened by the intensity, **we push away or rationalize feelings**.
- E.g., Your son is in the 10th standard. He shows you his first unit test reports. He has failed in Math's and Physics. You experience panic, anger and feeling cheated. **Has the event caused the emotion or has something else?**

Basics of thinking and feeling

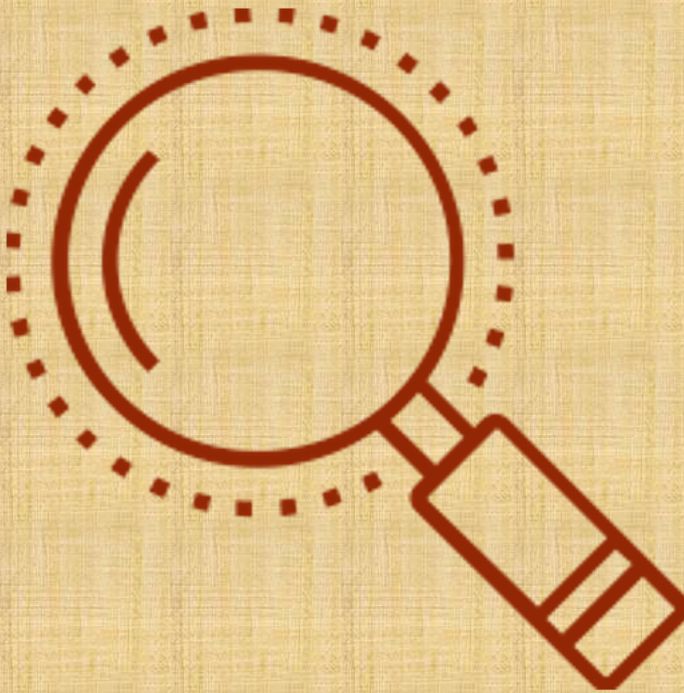
To be objective, is to **see what it IS that we need to examine** if there is anything that interferes with clear thinking



- ***People are not disturbed by events but the view they take of them*** – Epictetus, Greek philosopher.
- In most cases, people do not merely get **upset by unfortunate adversities**, but also by **how they construct their views of reality through their language**, evaluative beliefs, meanings and philosophies about the world, themselves and others.
- **Ellis (founder of Rational Emotive therapy)** suggests humans have an innate nature to want, need and condemn when needs aren't met.
- Appropriate emotions are **transient, manageable, in proportion to stimulus** and enhance self acceptance – both positive and negative

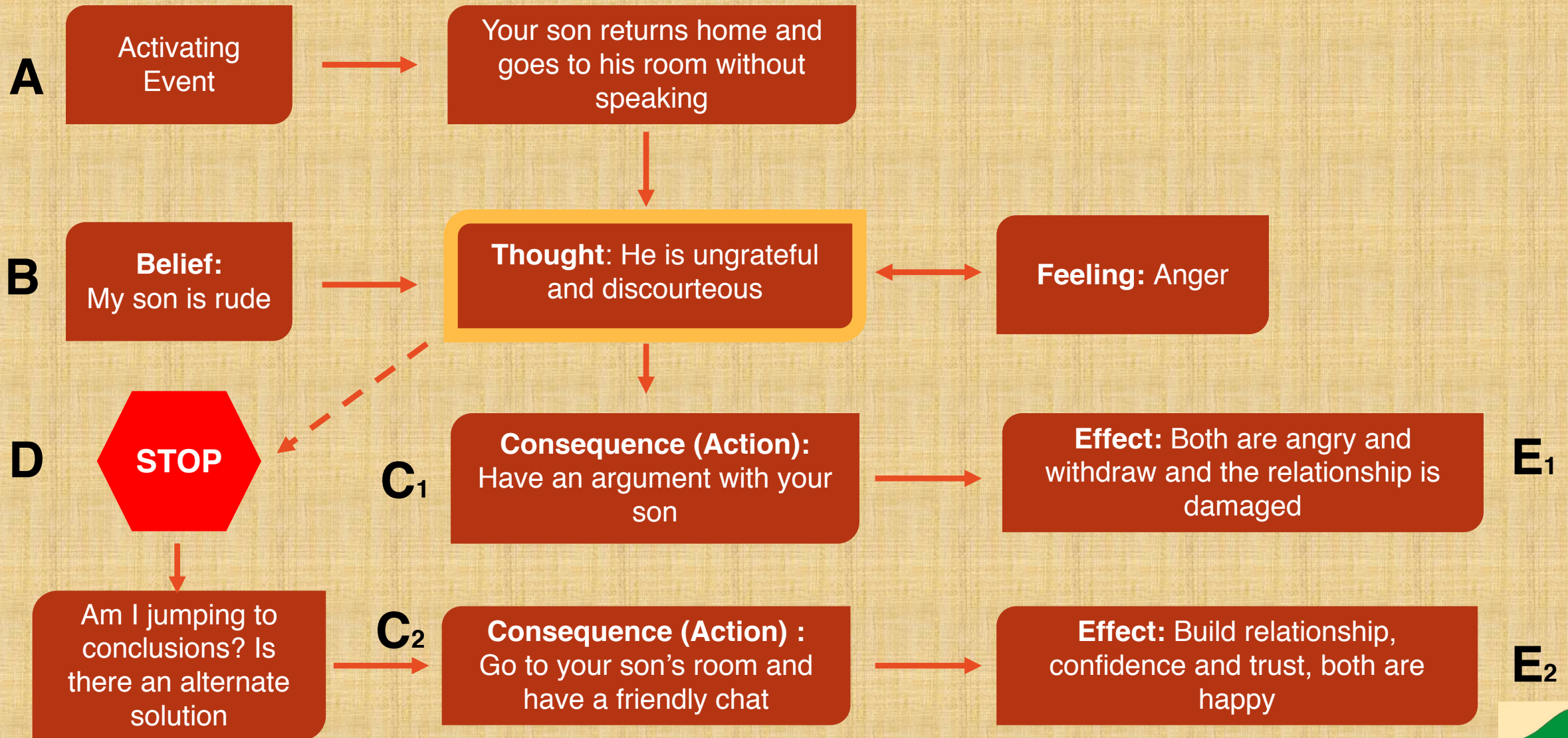
Basics of thinking and feeling

If an individual's needs aren't met, they display a **tendency to childishly condemn themselves**, others and the world

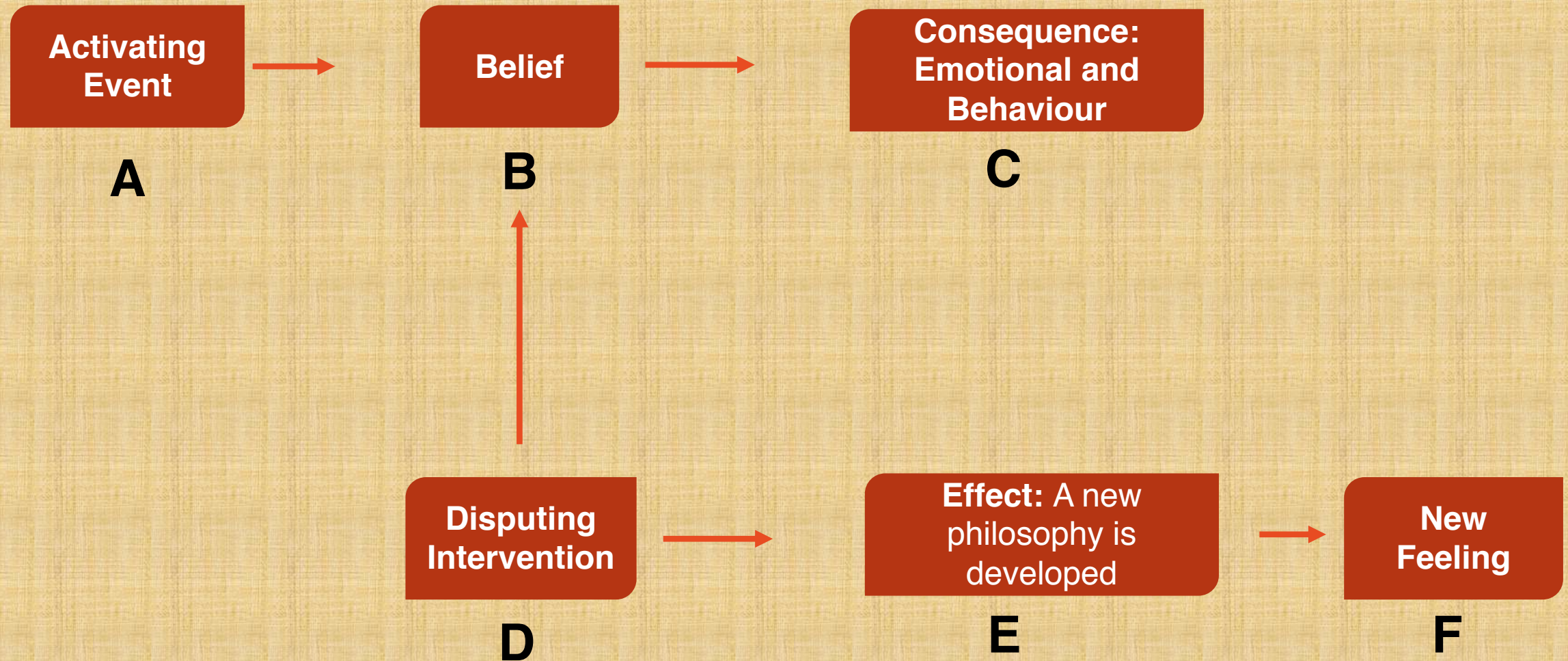


- We are **self-talking, self-evaluating and self-sustaining**.
- **We learn and invent disturbing beliefs** and keep ourselves disturbed through our self-talk
- We have **the capacity to change** our cognitive, emotive, and behavioral processes
- Thoughts and feelings **are not different processes** – they affect each other
- There is an element between stimulus and response; it is choice, **and this is based on thought**
- **Stimulus → Choice → Response**
- The causes of an individual's problems are not the events that have happened but how **the individual perceives them, thinks about them**
- **Beliefs are more important than events** in contributing to emotions.

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) Approach to changing your thoughts, feelings, behaviour and their consequences



The A – B – C Theory of Emotion



A – B – C Theory of Emotion: Example

A	B	C
Failed a test		Depressed 80%
Failed a test	I failed a test I'm going to fail them all This is awful I need to study more I should quit I am stupid I'll never make it	Depressed 80%

- **A = C or A + B = C**
- **D = Dispute “B”**

- Is it true? **What is the evidence for this?**
- Is it **healthy?**
- Is it **helpful?**
- Is it **realistic?**
- Is it **logical?**
- Is it **rational?**

**Disputation leads to
Consequent (E)
New Emotion &
Behaviour.**

Cognitive Distortions/Errors in thinking

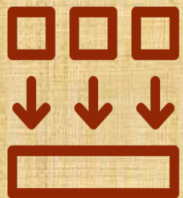
Aaron Beck first proposed the **theory behind cognitive distortions** and David Burns was responsible for popularizing it with **common names and examples for the distortions**.



1. Filtering: We take the negative details and **magnify them while filtering out all positive aspects** of a situation. For instance, a person may pick out a single, unpleasant detail and dwell on it exclusively so that their vision of reality becomes darkened or distorted.



2. Polarized Thinking (or “Black and White” Thinking): We have to be perfect or we’re a failure — there is no middle ground. You place people or situations in “either/or” categories, with no shades of gray or **allowing for the complexity of most people and situations**. If your performance falls short of perfect, **you see yourself as a total failure**. We expect disaster to strike, no matter what. This is also referred to as “magnifying or minimizing.” We hear about a problem and use what if questions (e.g., “What if tragedy strikes?” “What if it happens to me?”).

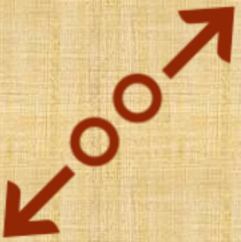


3. Overgeneralization: In this cognitive distortion, we come to a **general conclusion based on a single incident or a single piece of evidence**. If something bad happens only once, we expect it to happen repeatedly. A person may see a single, unpleasant event as part of a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Cognitive Distortions/Errors in thinking



4. Jumping to Conclusions. Without individuals saying so, **we assume we know what they are feeling and why they act the way they do.** We can determine how people are feeling toward us. For example, a person may conclude that someone is reacting negatively toward them but doesn't bother to find out if they are correct. Another example is a **person may anticipate that things will turn out badly and will feel convinced that their prediction is already an established fact.**



5. Exaggerating: A person might **exaggerate the importance of insignificant events** (such as their mistake, or someone else's achievement). Or they **may inappropriately shrink the magnitude of significant events until they appear tiny** (for example, a person's own desirable qualities or someone else's imperfections). With practice, you can learn to answer each of these cognitive distortions.



6. Personalization: It is a distortion where a person believes **that everything others do or say is a direct, personal reaction to the person.** We also **compare ourselves to others trying to determine who is smarter, better looking, etc.** A person engaging in personalization may also see themselves as the **cause of some unhealthy external event that they were not responsible for.** For example, "We were late to the dinner party and caused the hostess to overcook the meal. If I had pushed my husband to leave on time, this wouldn't have happened."

Cognitive Distortions/Errors in thinking



7. Control Fallacies: If we feel externally controlled, we see ourselves as helpless a victim of fate. For example, “I can’t help it if the quality of the work is poor, my boss demanded I work overtime on it.” The **fallacy of internal control has us assuming responsibility for the pain** and happiness of everyone around us. For example, “Why aren’t you happy? Is it because of something I did?”



8. Fallacy of Fairness: We feel resentful because we think we know what is fair, but other people won’t agree with us. As our parents tell us when we’re growing up and something doesn’t go our way, “**Life isn’t always fair.**” People who go through life applying a measuring ruler against every situation judging its “fairness” will often feel badly and negative because of it. Because life isn’t “fair” — **things will not always work out in your favour, even when you think they should.**



9. Blaming: We hold other people responsible for our pain or take the other track and blame ourselves for every problem. For example, “Stop making me feel bad about myself!” Nobody can “make” us feel any way — only we have **control over our own emotions and emotional reactions.**

Cognitive Distortions/Errors in thinking



10. “Shoulds”: We have a list of ironclad rules about how others and we should behave. People who break the rules make us angry, and we feel guilty when we violate these rules. A person may often believe they are trying to motivate themselves with should and shouldn't, as if they have to be punished before they can do anything. For example, “I really should exercise. I shouldn't be so lazy.” **Musts and ought to's are also offenders.** The emotional consequence is guilt. When a person directs ‘should’ statements toward others, they often feel anger, frustration and resentment.



11. Emotional Reasoning: We believe that what we feel must be true automatically. If we feel stupid and boring, then we must be stupid and boring. You **assume that your unhealthy emotions reflect the way things really are** — “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”



12. Fallacy of Change: We expect that other people will change to suit us if we just pressure or cajole them enough. We need to change people because our hopes for happiness seem to depend entirely on them.

Cognitive Distortions/Errors in thinking



13. Global Labelling: We **generalize one or two qualities into a negative global judgment**. Instead of describing an error in context of a specific situation, a person will attach an unhealthy label to themselves. For example, they may say, “I’m a loser” in a situation where they failed at a specific task. **Mislabelling involves describing an event with language that is highly coloured and emotionally loaded.** For example, instead of saying someone drops her children off at day care every day, a person who is mis labelling might say that “she abandons her children to strangers.”



14. Always Being Right: We are **continually on trial to prove that our opinions and actions are correct. Being wrong is unthinkable and we will go to any length to demonstrate our rightness.** For example, “I don’t care how badly arguing with me makes you feel, I’m going to win this argument no matter what because I’m right.” Being right often is more important than the feelings of others around a person who engages in this cognitive distortion, even loved ones.



15. Heaven’s Reward Fallacy: We **expect our sacrifice and self-denial to pay off, as if someone is keeping score.** We feel bitter when the reward doesn’t come

Disputing errors in thinking

If you want to stop the irrational thinking, you can start by trying out the exercises below



1. Identify: Identifying our cognitive distortions helps us in our need to create a list of our troublesome thoughts and examine them later for matches with a list of cognitive distortions. An examination of our cognitive distortions allows us to see which distortions we prefer. Additionally, this process will allow us to think about our problem or predicament in more natural and realistic ways



2. Examine the Evidence: A thorough examination of an experience allows us to identify the basis for our distorted thoughts. If we are quite self-critical, then, we should identify a number of experiences and situations where we had success.



3. Double Standard Method: An alternative to “self-talk” that is harsh and demeaning is to talk to ourselves in the **same compassionate and caring way that we would talk with a friend in a similar situation.**



4. Thinking in Shades of Gray: Instead of thinking about our problem or predicament in an either-or polarity, evaluate things on a scale of 0-100. When a plan or goal is not fully realized, think about and evaluate **the experience as a partial success, again, on a scale of 0-100.**

Disputing errors in thinking

If you want to stop the irrational thinking, you can start by trying out the exercises below



5. Survey Method: We need to seek the opinions of others regarding whether our thoughts and attitudes are realistic. If we believe that our anxiety about an upcoming event is unwarranted, **check with a few trusted friends or relatives.**



6. Definitions: What does it mean to define ourselves as “inferior,” “a loser,” “a fool,” or “abnormal.” An examination of these and other global labels likely will reveal **that they more closely represent specific behaviours**, or an identifiable behaviour pattern instead of the total person.



7. Re-attribution: Often, we automatically blame ourselves for the problems and predicaments we experience. **Identify external factors and other individuals that contributed to the problem.** Regardless of the degree of responsibility we assume, our energy is best utilized in the pursuit of resolutions to problems or identifying ways to cope with predicaments.



8. Cost-Benefit Analysis: It is helpful to list the **advantages and disadvantages of feelings, thoughts, or behaviours.** A cost-benefit analysis will help us to ascertain what we are gaining from feeling bad, distorted thinking, and inappropriate behaviour

Example of disputation

Situation	Automatic Thoughts	Emotion	Distortion	Disputation	New emotion and behaviour
During your appraisal your senior points out 5 areas where you have performed well and two areas where you have to improve	Oh no there goes the chance for my promotion. The boss will not trust me with any responsibility in the future	Disappointment, sadness, helplessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Filtering• Black or white• Catastrophizing• Fallacy of fairness• Emotional Reasoning	Ask the boss	This is not the end (relief and hope), Motivated confidence

Benefits of thinking clearly and feeling deeply

- Life being a series of situations, **thinking clearly contributes to effective choices** and responses.
- Thinking clearly **contributes to objectivity**.
- Thinking clearly is based on **facts and the reality of situations**
- Thinking **clearly without distortions increases my ability to see WHAT IS**
- Seeing **what IS contributes to my objectivity**
- Seeing what is reduces **my resistance to facts**. I see what is and **do what needs to be done**.
- For a person who thinks clearly emotions do not pose a problem. **Emotions just like desires are considered an endowment – a glory of *Ishwara***. They have their dance – they come and go.
- When I think clearly **emotions like love, compassion, joy, motivation, hope come naturally to me**.
- My **relative objectivity in situations** is a sign of my self growth
- It is **my objectivity that contributes to a balanced and equanimous approach** to situations (***samatvam***)

Thank you

