

Catch it, Check it, Change it

This is a simplified version of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

CBT is based on the idea that the way you see yourself, the world and other people can affect your thoughts and feelings, and can ultimately lead to mental health problems.

But through practice, you can learn to change the way you think, which can really help in recovering from psychological problems and improving your mental wellbeing.

What we're offering here is only a very simple version, but it still might be useful to understand your own thoughts.

We've called it Catch It, Check It, Change It.

Is your glass half full or half empty? We all face challenges on a daily basis, but how you react to a problem can affect how you feel physically and emotionally, as well as what you decide to do.

For example: You're walking down the road and you see someone you know. They recognise you but they walk on by, without saying anything.

Negative/glass half empty response
A common response by someone who's depressed might be:

Thoughts: They ignored me – they don't like me

Emotions: Low, sad and rejected

Actions: Go home and avoid people

This can become a vicious circle; the more negative your thoughts, the more depressed you might become, and the more depressed you are, the easier it is to believe quite unrealistic and depressing things.

Helpful/glass half full response
Someone who isn't depressed might have a more positive view of the situation:

Thoughts: They look a bit distracted – I wonder if there's something wrong?

Emotions: Concerned for the other person

Actions: Get in touch to make sure they're OK

How to Catch It, Check It, Change It

This is about breaking the vicious circle of depressing or anxious thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

Step 1 – Catch It

Spot when you might be having these kinds of negative thoughts. The best way to do this is probably to use your emotions as 'cues'. When you feel anxious or depressed, check your thoughts. What are you thinking? Could those thoughts make you depressed or anxious?

Step 2 – Check It

Stop and reflect on what you're thinking. Is it really true? Do you have evidence to back it up? Would other people interpret things in the same way? This is perhaps the most difficult part of the exercise as nearly everybody believes their own thoughts are right (think about arguments with friends about politics or football). It's very difficult to check out your own thoughts objectively. That's why CBT is best done with a therapist, who is much more able to take that 'one step back' perspective.

Step 3 – Change It

At this point you need to try substituting more realistic thoughts. If your automatic thoughts tend to be depressive or anxious, you need to think of different – but realistic – ways of thinking about the situation. Then, check out these new ways of thinking. Are they more likely to be true than your automatic thoughts? Do they make you feel any different?

Step 4 – Practice Makes Perfect

Psychologists and psychiatrists have found that homework is important here. It's important to practice, so try using the simple diary below. There's an example version to show how you can use it. Print it off and practice.

Remember, this is a very difficult process. Overcoming mental health problems is a huge challenge and even though CBT is an effective approach, our Catch It, Check It, Change It guide is just a very simple first step.

Example diary:

When/Where	Event	Emotion	Automatic thoughts	Rational response
Monday at work	My manager points out my mistakes at work... so I immediately start to make more mistakes!	Anxious and depressed	I think she secretly dislikes me and is trying to undermine my job... I'm convinced she's going to fire me.	Well... all bosses, even good ones (perhaps especially good managers) sometimes point out mistakes. I do recognise I got some things wrong, and she was quite polite about it. She criticises other people a lot more than me... and criticises me a lot less than other managers I've worked for... she always tells me she's pleased with my performance.

Blank diary:

When/Where	Event	Emotion	Automatic thoughts	Rational response