Introduction & Assumptions

- Thoughts & interpretations about situations influence our emotions, not the situation itself.
- There is a bidirectional relationship between thoughts and emotions.
- Thoughts can be consciously identified and adjusted, therefore influencing an emotion.
- CR involves (1) identifying a thought (2) appraising the thought (3) flexibly reframing the thought as reasonable (4) testing the thought for it’s validity

Identification

- Thoughts which either (1) preceded a change in emotional state, or (2) are noticed to be biased
- Attend to the aspect of thoughts involving:
  - **demandingness or rigidity** “people/I should/must...”,
  - **evaluations** “I am/They are bad/awful, it is awful/terrible, I can’t cope”
  - **estimations of likelihood** “this will/won’t happen”, “if it happens then...”

Appraising & Reframing

- Evaluate the; rationality & reasoning, helpfulness*, and evidence.
  - Rationality: Is this thought accurate?
  - Evidence: Has this thought been true 100% of the time before? What else has happened?
  - Helpfulness: What is this thought doing? Could there be a more helpful thought to have that still acknowledges the evidence?

Testing with Behavioural Experiments

- Despite developing a balanced and revised thought on paper, there are occasions when we might not fully ‘feel’ or believe it, despite understanding it’s logically sound.
- There can be a delay between our logical understanding of a situation and our emotional response to it.
- So, move beyond merely documenting evidence against the initial thought, and start to apply it in real-life situations through a method known as Behavioral Experiments.
- Experiential learning often accelerates the process, as you’ll develop personal experiences and memories that ratify the new thought, or, provide additional information which can help continue to reframe the thought.
- Review our guide on exposure exercises for more information on this step.
Consider two individuals, Alex and Jordan, who both receive critical feedback at work.

- Alex's Initial Thought: "I always mess things up. I'm not good at my job. Maybe I'm not cut out for this."
- Jordan's Initial Thought: "This feedback is tough, but it's an opportunity for me to grow and improve my skills."

**Emotional and Behavioral Response:**
- Alex feels demoralized, anxious, and may begin to disengage from work, believing they are doomed to fail.
- Jordan, while initially disappointed, feels motivated to address the feedback and seeks ways to develop professionally.

**Applying Cognitive Reframing to Alex:**
- Identify Negative Thoughts: First, help Alex become aware of the automatic negative thoughts that arise in response to the feedback.
- Challenge Distortions: Work with Alex to examine the evidence for and against the thought, "I always mess things up." Highlight instances of success and competence.
- Develop Alternative Thoughts: Encourage Alex to consider a more balanced view of the situation. For instance, "I received some critical feedback, but this doesn't define my entire performance. I can learn from this and improve."
- Encourage Perspective-Taking: Ask Alex to consider how someone they admire might view the feedback or how they would advise a friend in a similar situation.
- Focus on Actionable Steps: Shift Alex's focus towards concrete steps they can take to address the feedback, fostering a sense of control and resilience.

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**A Note on Semantics**

- The goal of reframing is to promote flexible thinking processes and develop adaptive & rational alternatives, if appropriate.
- By doing so, functional behaviours and emotions can be experienced, rather than dysfunctional counterparts (which contextually vary).
- Rational & adaptive thinking does not equal ‘positive’ or ‘unemotive’.
- A rational thought regarding misfortune acknowledges misfortune and its impact, thus uncomfortable emotions may still be experienced.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Functional</th>
<th>Dysfunctional</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotions</strong></td>
<td>Concern, Frustration, Guilt, Sadness</td>
<td>Anxiety, Rage, Shame, Depressed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Behaviours</strong></td>
<td>Engagement, Assertiveness, Approaching</td>
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4 Primary Thought Biases

1. Should Statements/Demandingness: Having a fixed idea about how you, other people, or the world around you, ‘should’ be. For example; ‘The world should be fair’, ‘People should treat me better’, ‘I should be more organised’.
   - Usually based on moral/value propositions (honestly, fairness, respect); these ‘shoulds’ are often preferences (‘I want the world to be fair’), but confused as absolute expectations.
   - In more severe forms; these thoughts can include ‘must/needs’.
   - An important note is the content of these thoughts (what is being expected or demanded) are not irrational and therefore not relevant for reframing.
   - Instead, the leap between a preference and an expectation (‘I want the world to be fair, therefore the world should be fair’) and then the rigidity at which that expectation is held, is the subject of reframing.
   - Alternate: I want the world to be fair, but that doesn’t mean it should be, and I can tolerate it not being fair.

2. Catastrophizing/Aftrfulising/Minimisation/Maximisation: Exaggerating the impact or likelihood of negative events or inappropriately shrinking the magnitude of positive events.
   - Often influenced by attentional processes, the degree to which situations are perceived as negatively impactful is magnified.
   - Can refer to overestimating the impact of an event (‘it will be horrible if that happens’), or underestimating the tolerance/coping of an event (‘I can’t cope when this happens’).
   - Often unfortunate events by nature, and perceived significantly worse, or perceived as intolerable.
   - Example: “The world should be fair, and it is awful/terrible when it isn’t.”
   - Alternate: “It’s unfortunate that this has happened, but not a catastrophe. But I can tolerate the distress.”

3. Labelling/Evaluations: Attaching a label to others or the self-based on a single event or few events.
   - Perceiving an instance(s) of behaviour, and using that instance as evidence for labelling.
   - Often does not acknowledge context or evidence for when the label does not fit.
   - Confuses fallibility for categorical traits.
   - Can be applied at micro levels (‘My partner did not clean up, they are so uncaring/disrespectful’), ‘I did not exercise today, I’m so lazy’) macro-levels (“The world is so unfair”), or unreasonably externalised to others with reference to positive traits (“Everyone else is so much smarter than I am”).
   - Alternate: Behaviour > Character. E.g. ‘I had a lazy day, but that does not mean I am entirely lazy’.
   - Example: ‘My partner did not clean up, they are so uncaring/disrespectful/horrible’ or ‘I did not exercise today, I’m so lazy’.

4. Estimation Bias/Arbitrary Inference: A category of other documented thoughts that become biased fundamentally via overestimation or underestimation.
   - Includes biases such as; mind reading, personalising, self-blame, fortune-telling, permissive thinking, and others.
   - Can generally be appraised and reframed with the collection of additional information, inclusion of language negating absoluteness, and increased cognitive flexibility.
Developing Alternate Thoughts

- Importantly, several of the above-noted biases can chain together and make up a single thought process.
- Examples:
  - (2) My partner is a disrespectful person, and (1) they should respect me (2) because I can't cope if they disrespect me.
  - (1) My partner should be fair, and (3) they are a 'uncaring/disrespectful/horrible' person if they're not, and (2) I can't tolerate my partner being unfair'.
  - (2) My partner is a disrespectful person, and (1) they should respect me
  - (1) my partner should be more respectful (4) because they will impact the relationship if they're not respectful, and (4) then the relationship will fall apart.
- They can begin with any of the 4 noted biases, however, the initial thought does not necessarily cause most of the distress.
- As such, techniques such as the 'downward arrow' may be needed to identify which thought precedes others, and which may be most distressing.
  - It has been noted by clinicians before, that the 'should' thoughts will typically play a larger role in the process, either as the initial activating thought or, as a mediator between the other thoughts and distress.
- When developing alternative thoughts, consider the inclusion of multiple factors that counter each of the biases;
  - Examples:
    - Assert Preference/Acknowledge Misfortune
      - (I would prefer if/It’s unfortunate that)
    - Negate Demandingness/Absoluteness
      - (but it does not need to be/but it is not terrible)
    - Acknowledge Tolerance/
      - (and I can bear/cope)
    - Identify Accuracy/Potential for Missed Factors
      - (and still enjoy somethings)