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Module 3

The Thinking-Feeling Connection

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Completing Activities On Screen:

To make the modules more interactive, you can type your responses on screen whenever you see instructions typed in blue.

If you have Adobe Reader you CANNOT SAVE YOUR RESPONSES. To keep a copy, please print the pages as a record. If you have the full Adobe Acrobat, you can save your responses.

If you don't want to do the activities on screen, you can print out the module and work through it by hand.

The Thinking-Feeling Connection

People often believe that the feelings and emotions they experience are determined by external events, situations, and the behaviour of others. For example, we may hear ourselves say, "My boss made me so nervous," "My partner made me so angry," "This trip down south made me feel so relaxed," or "I'm depressed because I didn't get the job I wanted." What is the assumption underlying these statements? That someone or something other than ourselves was directly determining the feelings we experienced.

We come to these conclusions automatically without asking ourselves if this assumption is true. However, if we stop to analyse the process that links an external situation to our emotional responses, we will find that there is a step in between.

How Our Thoughts Influence Our Feelings

What really makes us feel and respond the way we do, is often not the situation or the words and actions of another person, but how we perceive that situation or that person's actions. It is how we see something or someone and what we think about it or them that really influences how we feel. It is our thoughts and beliefs about an event that significantly influences our emotions and actions.

Here's an example. Suppose you went to a party and your host introduces you to Mike. As you talk to him, you notice that he does not look directly at you but often looks around the room. How would you feel if you thought, "Boy, this guy is so rude! He won't even look at me while I'm talking with him! How nasty!" What if you thought, "Mike must think that I'm really unattractive and uninteresting. I must be a really boring person. Nobody wants to talk to me!" What about if you were to think, "Mike's probably waiting for a friend to come. Maybe he's getting a bit anxious." You probably realised that you felt three different emotions as a result of those three different thoughts. Often, we are not aware of our thoughts and beliefs because they are so automatic and happen quickly. But they are there, and they affect the way we feel.

What am I Feeling?

It is often difficult to know exactly what we are feeling, and sometimes it can also be difficult to put it into words. The list below contains words that describe feelings, and this might be a useful starting point in you being able to understand the connection between your thinking and your feelings.

Words That Describe Feelings

Tense	Enraged	Frightened	Cheerful
Annoyed	Happy	Panicky	Euphoric
Unhappy	Exhilarated	Frustrated	Mad
Calm	Keyed-up	Scared	Uneasy
Anxious	Irritated	Flat	Sad
Depressed	Joyful	Tired	Discouraged
Angry	Excited	Nervous	Jealous

This is only a limited list but it should give you an idea of the kinds of words we could use to describe our feelings.

Automatic Thoughts

Just as we are not always conscious of the way we walk or how we drive a car, we are often not aware of our thinking. Some of our thinking is so habitual that it is automatic, and just like driving, when things are automatic, we might not be conscious of them. All of the time, our brains are turning over thoughts and ideas. However, we are not consciously aware of most of them because it happens relatively fast and we are not accustomed to slowing them down. Our automatic thoughts, however, play an important role in our emotional well-being.

There are three kinds of automatic thoughts:

Neutral thoughts, e.g. "I think I will buy some bread today."
Positive thoughts, e.g. "This is something I can do really well."
Negative thoughts, e.g. "I often find it hard to concentrate – I must be really stupid."

Automatic thoughts often reflect worries and concerns, however they can be about anything at all, anything we have ever seen, heard or learned. In addition, it can be anything we know about from any source at all. Obviously, though, negative automatic thoughts are the ones that can cause us emotional distress. People who are depressed tend to think negative thoughts about themselves, the world about them, and their future, and it is these thoughts that can be changed to lift your depression.

Feelings are not Thoughts

When we first try to distinguish thoughts from feelings, it can be easy to confuse them. We might be used to talking about thoughts and feelings as being part of the same experience, but it is more helpful to separate them and remember that feelings are not thoughts. For example, you might hear a person saying "I *think* I'm anxious," but they're probably *thinking* "Everyone will laugh at me," and *feel* anxious. More commonly, you might hear someone saying something like "I *feel* that my partner doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," when they are actually *thinking* "My partner doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," and *feel* hurt.

Try the exercise on the following page and see if you can identify the possible feelings and thoughts in each of the scenarios. Remember to try and make the distinction between thoughts and feelings.

Making the Connection

Part One

Instructions: Read the following scenarios and identify the feelings that may result from the self-statements. Think about how you would feel in each situation. Click on the arrows and select from the different feelings listed. If the emotions listed don't fit with how you would feel, you can type in a different emotion in the space provided. Press "TAB" to move to the next line.

SCENARIO 1:

You've had a rather long and tiring day at work where you were helping a colleague move boxes of stationery and office equipment. You arrive home to find the front door ajar and two sets of muddy footprints (your son's and his dog's) on your cream-coloured carpet leading from the front door all the way to the back door.

A) You say to yourself:

"What! N@!^#*M!! I've had such a tiring day at work and now I come home to this!?!! What have I done to deserve this! We just had the carpet cleaned last week! That naughty boy! All he cares about is himself! That inconsiderate, selfish brat! I'm gonna ground him for 2 years!!!"

Possible Feelings:

_____

_____

_____

_____

B) You say to yourself:

"I've told him a thousand times not to bring the dog into the house and he never listens to me. My kids don't obey even the simplest instructions. I must be the worst mother in the world. If I can't even get this right, I must be a terrible failure."

Possible Feelings:

_____

_____

_____

_____

SCENARIO 2:

One evening, your parents ask you to go over to their house for dinner. As you arrive, you noticed that it was all dark and there were no lights on. You knock on the door and ring the doorbell but no one comes to answer the door. You turn the doorknob and find that the door is unlocked. You step in and find that the house is in total darkness. Suddenly, you hear a chorus of voices shouting, "Surprise!" The lights come on and you see a group of your friends and relatives singing "Happy Birthday" to you.

You say to yourself:

"Wow! I didn't even remember that it was my birthday! What a really nice surprise! Hey, even uncle James and aunt Bertha came and they live in the country! Everyone must think I'm pretty important to throw me this party!

Possible Feelings:

_____

_____

_____

_____

If the responses are typed, you can print this page now to keep as a record

Part Two

Instructions: Read the following scenarios and now fill in the self-statements that lead to the feelings experienced.

You can type your responses below, or print this page out and write them in later.

SCENARIO 1:

You arrive home to find a note from your flatmate telling you that they have moved out. You look around and find that everything that belongs to them is gone. Moreover, their share of the rent has not been paid.

A) You say to yourself:

Feelings:

Angry

B) You say to yourself:

Feelings:

Hurt

SCENARIO 2:

You just finished cooking dinner for you and you partner. Your partner calls to say that he/she will not be home for dinner because he/she has to work late.

A) You say to yourself:

Feelings:

Disappointed

B) You say to yourself:

Feelings:

Concerned

If you typed your responses, don't forget to print this page now to keep as a record

Module Summary

- People often think that the feelings they experience are caused by external events, situations, and the actions of others, but it is what we think about these things that really determines how we feel
- Specifically, it is our thoughts and beliefs about the situation or person that makes us feel and respond the way we do
- Thoughts come automatically to us and we are often not conscious of how or what we are thinking
- There are 3 kinds of automatic thoughts: neutral, positive, and negative
- If we feel distressed, it is often because we are thinking particularly negative thoughts that contribute to us feeling distressed
- If we want to improve how we feel, we need to begin by becoming more aware of what we are thinking and changing our thoughts

Stay Tuned ...

In the next module, we will discuss how to become more aware of our thoughts and how to identify the thoughts that cause us to feel distressed or depressed.