So far, we’ve talked about the main components of CBT (Cognitions/Thoughts, Emotions, Behaviors and Mindfulness in Mindfulness-centered CBT). We talked about ‘Activating Events’ as in the example with the dog that is off-leash, and how these Activating Events can influence our feelings and actions (e.g. we walk across the street).

Next, we walked through several approaches to goal setting - setting life goals, therapeutic goals and wellness goals. And how to establish goals that are effective - making them personal, specific, rightsized, and motivating.

Now, we will be moving on to talk about (and hopefully practice!) some cognitive techniques. The first technique is examining our thoughts through a critical lens.

1. Identify

So just like before, you can see in the attached image that we are identifying an event (maybe our friend is quiet at dinner).

When something triggers you emotional, you can ask yourself, “What just went through my mind?” Your first thought may be something like, ‘they’re mad at me.’

You can label the thought as ‘just a thought,’ sometimes this can provide some distance from it.

Next, identify the feeling. You can write down the thought that helps you to see this more objectively. And lastly, may be identifying your action or behavior. Maybe because your friend is extra quiet, you become extra talkative.

Our reactions tend to make sense based on the preceding thought.

2. Evaluate

In the next phase of examining our thoughts we are going to evaluate whether the thought is fact or fiction. Ask yourself the following…

Is the thought 100% true?

What evidence supports it? Or is there any evidence?

“Usually when my friend is quiet, they are just tired… I don’t know of any reason why they’d be mad. I often assume that silence equals anger but not necessarily.”

Keep a light touch with evolution. We’re not trying to force ourselves to believe that we’re wrong.

3. Alternative

Now we will explore, is there another way of seeing things? Maybe our friend is worn out after a long day. It’s Ok if you don’t believe the alternative. Just recognize that there are different ways of interpreting the situation. How would you feel if you believed the alternative? How might a different way of seeing things change your behavior?

Try walking through these steps one time this week - Identify - Evaluate - Alternative.

Worksheet: Socratic Questions

Worksheet: Thought log and/or Thought Record