

**I Can Give Myself and Others a Better Time:  
Awareness of Feelings, Thoughts, and Feelings That Result from Thoughts**

- **Natural, primary feelings** happen *without thought*: mad, sad, glad, afraid, surprised, disgusted, alarmed (includes fight-flight-freeze response).
- **Secondary feelings** happen *as a result of thoughts* that are opinions, beliefs, or rules: shame, guilt, humiliation, self-blame, mistaken other-blame, rage, righteousness, vengeance, "ideations": intrusive thoughts or fantasies of harm to self or others. Feelings that result from thoughts cause suffering through 1) escalating natural feelings, 2) causing painful feelings, 3) creating a sense of "no escape," which can result in feelings of rage, helplessness, and hopelessness, 4) increased reactivity vs. conscious choice, and 5) creating troubled interactions with others.

Something happens.	I feel natural feelings. (Thoughts may precede feelings.)	I think thoughts. (Feelings may precede thoughts.)	I feel feelings as a result of my thoughts.
Example: <i>I hit a deer with my car.</i>	<i>I feel horror, fear, and regret.</i>	<i>I shouldn't have let that happen.</i>	<i>I blame myself and feel ashamed for letting that happen.</i>
<b>I think a realistic, helpful, supportive thought.</b> (Is my thought based on facts? Or am I thinking a judgmental, hurtful thought?) <i>I can control some things and some things I cannot control. I am sorry about what happened and will continue to do my best to drive safely and respectfully in hopes of protecting myself and other beings from harm.</i>			

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## **I Can Give Myself and Others a Better Time: Identifying Thoughts as Facts or Beliefs**

**Life happens. Thoughts happen. Feelings happen. Words and actions? We may be able to consciously choose those...**

**Thoughts happen.** Brains are thought-making machines. Thoughts can be facts. Thoughts can also be opinions, beliefs, and prejudices. Included in the non-fact category of thoughts are rules and all-or-nothing statements. Non-facts can be contested, disproved, and modified based on facts.

Adapted from Colorado State University Writing Center's pages (some sections quoted verbatim):

(<https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/co300man/pop12d.cfm>):

- A **fact** is verifiable. We can determine whether it is true by researching the evidence. The truth of the fact is beyond argument if one can assume that measuring devices or records or memories are correct.
- An **opinion** is a judgment based on facts, an honest attempt to draw a reasonable conclusion from factual evidence. To not become prejudices, opinions must be constantly examined and tested with facts.
- A **belief** is a conviction based on cultural or personal faith, morality, values, or personal experience. Since beliefs are not facts, they cannot serve as the basis of a formal argument.
- A **prejudice** is an opinion or belief based on insufficient or unexamined evidence.

**Feelings can happen** at varying levels of intensity. We use the metaphor of adjusting an inner volume control knob

(<http://www.annegiles.com/2017/12/30/inner-volume-control-emotion-regulation/>) on our inner experience, adjusting from either too low or too high to help keep ourselves, or return ourselves, to a stable range.

Many people experience such intense feelings that they find themselves speaking or acting without thinking. Sometimes the results are unfortunate. Afterwards, they ask themselves, "What was I thinking?!"

Here's the form a helpful inner dialogue might take:

- Is my thought a fact or a belief?
- If my thought is a belief, what do I feel when I think it?
- Is that feeling helpful or unhelpful for managing my inner volume?
- If my feeling is unhelpful, let me challenge my beliefs with facts that inform and soothe me.

## I Can Give Myself and Others a Better Time: Challenging Beliefs About Substance Use

For people with substance use concerns, in this formula...

<b>Something happens.</b>	<b>I feel natural feelings.</b> (Thoughts may precede feelings.)	<b>I think thoughts.</b> (Feelings may precede thoughts.)	<b>I feel feelings as a result of my thoughts.</b>
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...sometimes the “Something happens” is a statement made or action taken by someone else that is based on beliefs about substance use, not on facts. For example, what do you feel when you read this statement? *“Why don’t you just stop?”*

If you are a person with substance use concerns and felt angry, even rageful when you read that statement, these feelings make perfect sense. *“Why don’t you just stop?”* is a belief-based question indicating lack of scientific knowledge about substance use disorders, and lack of respect for an individual’s personal, private experience. This approach is termed “invalidation.” Invalidation conveys as fact that people are wrong to feel and think as they do and are incorrect in understanding their own situations. Invalidation is experienced within as threat of annihilation. It activates the alarm system and the fight-flight-freeze response. Individuals subjected to invalidation might alternately feel rage, panic, trapped, cornered, helpless, hopeless, immobilized, and despairing.

We rarely can change others’ beliefs, particularly in the moment. However, the person stating the belief may be someone we care about and/or has power over us. Using awareness skills calms the brain’s alarm system. This allows the executive functioning, problem-solving structures of our brains to reemerge. We can then cite facts to ourselves, strategize, weigh options, and decide what to do in our own best interests. Interestingly, the simple act of naming the feeling calls forth these cognitive powers.

<b>Something happens.</b>	<b>I feel natural feelings.</b>	<b>I think thoughts.</b>	<b>I feel feelings as a result of my thoughts.</b>
<i>I hear, “Why are you choosing substances over me?”</i>	<i>I feel mad, sad, afraid.</i>	<i>They don’t understand. I’m going to lose this person.</i>	<i>I feel rage and panic.</i>
<p><b>I think a realistic, helpful, supportive thought.</b>  <i>Facts: Substance use and substance use disorder can compromise brain structures and functions related to choice.</i></p> <p><i>I cannot control this person’s beliefs about substances or about me. What I can do is continue to learn to manage my response when my alarm system is activated so I can make more conscious, helpful choices with regard to myself and others.</i></p>			

<b>Something happens.</b>	<b>I feel natural feelings.</b>	<b>I think thoughts.</b>	<b>I feel feelings as a result of my thoughts.</b>
<i>I hear, "I want to help you stop."</i>	<i>I feel mad, sad, afraid.</i>	<i>Are they crazy?! If I stop, all hell will break loose in my heart, mind and body!</i>	<i>I feel rage and panic. I feel cornered and trapped. I feel helpless and despairing.</i>
<p><b>I think a realistic, helpful, supportive thought.</b></p> <p><i>Facts: People use substances for reasons that are meaningful to them. If reduction in substance use is desired, substances must be tapered out, accompanied by tapering in of equally meaningful, adequate replacements as discovered and defined by individuals on a case-by-case basis.</i></p> <p><i>I cannot control this person's beliefs about substances or about me. What I can do is continue to become more aware of what substances do and mean for me and seek additional ways of getting these needs and wants met.</i></p>			

<b>Something happens.</b>	<b>I feel natural feelings.</b>	<b>I think thoughts.</b>	<b>I feel feelings as a result of my thoughts.</b>
<i>I hear, "If you don't have a negative urine drug screen, we're going to cut off from your meds."</i>	<i>I feel terrified.</i>	<i>[My mind is a blank. I am in such horror over what will happen without meds that I am unaware of conscious thought.]</i>	<i>I feel rage and panic. I feel cornered and trapped. I feel helpless and despairing.</i>
<p><b>I think a realistic, helpful, supportive thought.</b></p> <p><i>Facts: Medical care and medications are the standard of care for substance use disorders. Humans have used substances for 12,000 years. Unless medically contraindicated, use of substances while on medications indicates the person is human and may be receiving an insufficient level of care.</i></p> <p><i>I cannot control this person's beliefs about substances or about me. What I can do is continue to inform myself on the science of addiction, align my self-care practices with that science, learn and practice awareness skills to manage my inner state so I'm less likely to use or over-use substances, and document everything I am doing to help myself. Given that substance use is believed to be a personal, moral, and/or criminal problem, it is likely that I will be required to make a case for myself someday. Today, I can fill a binder with page protectors and begin to collect data for my case. I only present copies of my documents to others. I never, ever, ever give away originals.</i></p>			

<b>Something happens.</b>	<b>I feel natural feelings.</b>	<b>I think thoughts.</b>	<b>I feel feelings as a result of my thoughts.</b>
<i>I hear, "You must abstain from all substances for the rest of your life."</i>	<i>Fight-flight-freeze response is activated.</i>	<i>I cannot survive this.</i>	<i>I feel rage and panic. I feel cornered and trapped. I feel helpless, hopeless, and despairing.</i>
<p><b>I think a realistic, helpful, supportive thought.</b></p> <p><i>Facts: In tandem with medical care and medications, use of less harmful substances, in smaller amounts, less often, is the standard-of-care treatment goal for substance use disorders. Specific objectives are co-created by individuals and care providers. Abstinence may be the intended or ultimate outcome of treatment, but abstinence is not an evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders.</i></p>			

*I cannot control this person's beliefs about substances or about me. What I can do is validate my own experience using facts. I can see that, as a result of substance use, I may be subjected to—even persecuted by, overtly or covertly—non-factual, unjust, harmful beliefs. Regardless of what is said to me or done to me with regard to substances, I can refuse to internalize these harmful beliefs. I can continue to use my own heart and mind to help myself through the difficulty of having a health condition made many times more difficult by stigmatizing beliefs that may be held by people I care about, by my care providers, and by society at large.*

(Continued on page 6)

**I Can Give Myself and Others a Better Time:  
Awareness of Feelings, Thoughts, Choices, and Actions**

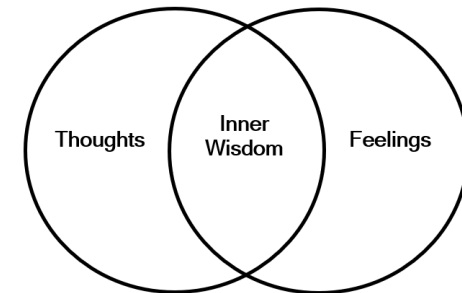
*If I can become aware of what I am feeling and thinking prior to taking action, I can consult my inner wisdom and give myself a chance to make consciously compassionate or strategic choices.*

<i>Old:</i> <b>Feel</b> → <b>Act</b> → What was I <b>thinking</b> ?!	<i>New:</i> <b>Feel</b> → Pause → <b>Think</b> → <b>Act</b> Or: Thought → <b>Feel</b> → Pause → <b>Think</b> → <b>Act</b>
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Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) (first line in the table below) and cognitive processing therapy (CPT) (second and third lines) conceptualize awareness of the interrelatedness of feelings and thoughts in these ways:

<b>A – Activating Event</b>	<b>C - Consequence</b>	<b>B - Belief</b>	<b>C - Consequence</b>
<b>Something happens.</b>	<b>I feel natural feelings.</b> <i>Thoughts may precede feelings.</i>	<b>I think thoughts.</b> <i>Feelings may precede thoughts.</i>	<b>I feel feelings as a result of my thoughts.</b>
<b>I think a realistic, helpful, supportive thought.</b> (Is my thought based on facts? Or am I thinking a belief-based, judgmental, hurtful thought?) <i>I can control some things and some things I cannot control. I am sorry about what happened and will continue to do my best to do well by myself and others and to protect us from harm.</i>			

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) conceives of awareness of feelings and thoughts as offering access to what it terms “Wise Mind” and what we term “inner wisdom.” Within one’s inner wisdom is one’s innate humanity, plus all the perspective and skill one has acquired through experience, effort, and practice. Choices are complex but may be categorized as “compassionate”—based in self- and other-kindness, acceptance, and forgiveness—and “strategic”—based on estimates of probabilities of achieving desired outcomes. Accessing one’s inner wisdom helps one make consciously compassionate and/or strategic choices based on the greater good for self and others.



**I can give myself and others a better time.**

<b>Something happens.</b>	<b>I feel natural feelings.</b> <i>Thoughts may precede feelings.</i>	<b>I think thoughts.</b> <i>Feelings may precede thoughts.</i>	<b>I feel feelings as a result of my thoughts.</b>
<b>I think a realistic, helpful, supportive thought.</b> <i>Is my thought based on facts? Or am I thinking a belief-based, judgmental, hurtful thought? Do I need to challenge, then revise my thought?</i>			
<b>I choose wisely.</b> <i>I am aware of my feelings and thoughts. I access my inner wisdom and I make a conscious choice about what to do or say—or to not do or not say.</i>			