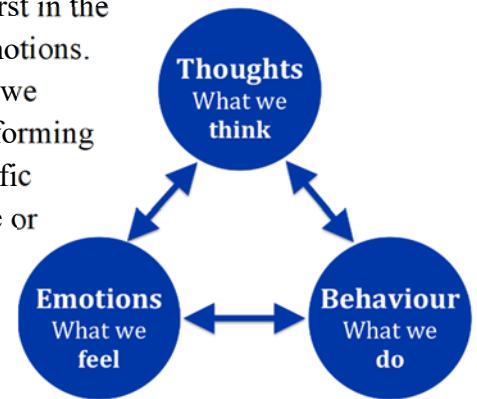


Five Minutes to Thrive: 07-11 May 18

Check Thyself (Lest Thee Wreck Thyself)

Probably the most cliché verbage of mental health practitioners like myself is, “*How does that make you feel?*” (beating out similar such prompts as “How is that working for you?” and “Tell me about your relationship with your mother...”). I personally believe a lot of people are averse to talking to a mental health professional because of the common perception that all we want to hear about is emotions. While that’s usually not our sole (or even primary) focus, there is some truth to the stereotype. This is because how we feel—far more so than what we think—plays a substantial role in how we behave and how we treat others in our important relationships.

There are differing neuropsychological theories as to what comes first in the interactive cognition-emotion-behavior triad: the thoughts or the emotions. The only agreement is that one or both of these will determine how we ultimately act. In truth, whether it’s our thoughts or our feelings informing our behavior is likely situational; we depend on the context of specific circumstances to determine whether an emotionally-fueled response or a well thought-out/planned reaction is most necessary. This usually happens within a fraction of a second, beneath our conscious awareness, drawing from patterns of what’s worked well for us in the past...that is, unless negative emotions take charge.



When we’re feeling upset, our limbic system goes into high activity; some of you may have heard the phrase “amygdala hi-jack.” When this happens, we become motivated to do *something* to reduce the discomfort—anything to make us feel better. Unfortunately, amygdala hi-jack can keep us from thinking clearly, resulting in our acting out in unproductive ways: road rage, yelling at a spouse or child, making passive-aggressive comments, drinking heavily, eating our feelings, or spending money wrecklessly are common examples. Furthermore, we’re most at-risk for these behaviors when we are feeling **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired** (H.A.L.T.).

So to keep a tight rein on your actions (and to keep them from being counterproductive), consider the following suggestions:

- **Know yourself.** Recognize the situations which tend to upset you (i.e. your pet-peeves). Give yourself a pep-talk when entering these circumstances, and focus on remaining calm.
- **Pay attention to your emotional reactions.** When you feel yourself starting to become upset, pause, take a few breaths, and think about what it is that’s making you feel this way. Once you accurately identify the stressor, it will be easier to address it and to guard your actions.
- **Address the H.A.L.T. factors (appropriately).** To borrow from the Snickers commercial, “you’re not you when you’re hungry.” Keep the H.A.L.T. stressors from ruining your life: eat a snack if you’re hungry, do some relaxation techniques (such as diaphragmatic breathing) if you’re feeling angry, meet up with some friends if you’re feeling lonely, or take a nap and/or go to bed earlier if you’re tired. You’ll probably find you can think more clearly afterwards ☺