

Lesson 6 – Cognitive Self-Change: Thinking Controls Our Behavior



Summary and Rationale

This lesson demonstrates how thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs control the way people act. A conflict between an “authority figure” and a person under the control of the person in authority is demonstrated. Group members are asked to determine what thoughts and feelings each person is having. Group members watch a realistic situation where thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs lead to predictable patterns of acting. They also practice the process of “objective detachment” in looking at the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs behind our actions. The lesson ends with an explanation of the steps that comprise the skill of cognitive self-change:

Step 1- Pay attention to our thinking – *Pay attention to our thoughts and feelings by observing them without judgment.*

Step 2 – Recognize risk – *Recognize when there is risk of our thoughts and feelings leading us into trouble.*

Step 3 – Use new thinking – *Try a new way of thinking that reduces risk.*

Concepts and Definitions

1. **Thoughts** are ideas or words in our mind.

2. **Feelings** are emotions that go along with our thoughts. Bodily sensations can also be called feelings.
3. **Attitudes** and **beliefs** are general ways of thinking that we carry with us into many different situations. Attitudes and beliefs can be rules, principles, values, or opinions about a range of different people or events.
4. **Thinking for a Change** does not make sharp distinction between attitudes and beliefs. Both are ways of thinking that shape and influence how we experience specific situations.

Objectives — As a result of this lesson the group members will:

1. Recognize how thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs lead to predictable patterns of behavior.
2. Practice “objective detachment” in observing and describing thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs.
3. Practice the three steps of cognitive self-change during the Lesson.
4. Apply the steps of cognitive self-change to real life situations.

Major Activities

Activity 1: Homework Review

Activity 2: Lesson Overview

Activity 3: Demonstration of Conflict

Activity 4: Identify thoughts and feelings of Pat and Jones

Activity 5: Identify Underlying Attitudes and Beliefs of Pat and Jones

Activity 6: Predict Future Behavior

Activity 7: Present Cognitive Principle

Activity 8: Present the 3 Steps of Cognitive Self-Change

Activity 9: Apply the 3 Steps of Cognitive-Self Change to Demonstration

Activity 10: Wrap-up

Activity 11: Assign Homework

Supplements

Charts – Make before facilitating lesson. (See supplement section in each lesson for full text of chart page.)

Denoted in lesson plan with this symbol:



C-6-1-Thinking Report-Pat
C-6-2-Thinking Report-Jones

**The charts made during this lesson need to be kept for use again in lesson 7.

Handouts – Make copies before lesson. (See supplement section of each lesson for camera ready pages.)

Denoted in lesson plan with this symbol:



H-6-1-Pocket Skill Cards
H-6-2-Homework Sheet

Presentation Slides – Make transparencies if projector is not available. (See supplement section of each lesson for camera ready pages.)

Denoted in lesson plan with this symbol:



P-6-1-Lesson Title
P-6-2-Knowing Your Feelings Skill Steps
P-6-3-Homework Review
P-6-4-Thinking Controls Behavior
P-6-5-Step 1 - Pay Attention to Our Thinking
P-6-6-Attitudes and Beliefs
P-6-7-Kinds of Attitudes and Beliefs
P-6-8-Cognitive Restructuring
P-6-9-The Cognitive Principle
P-6-10-Cognitive Self Change Steps
P-6-11-Principles Behind Thinking For a Change
P-6-12-Goal of Thinking For a Change
P-6-13-Homework
P-6-14-Homework,continued

Equipment	Supplies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easel (chart stand) ▪ Projector to show presentation slides ▪ Projection screen or suitable surface 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chart paper ▪ Markers ▪ Masking tape ▪ Copies of handouts

Activity 1: Homework Review

In our last session, we practiced the social skill, **knowing your feelings**. We will take a minute to review the steps of that skill.

Let's have a volunteer read the steps for us.

(Answer: Tune in to what is going on in your body that helps you know what you are feeling; Decide what happened to make you feel that way; Decide what you could call the feeling.)

You also had some real life practice using **knowing your feelings**.

Take out your homework reports and let's quickly review.

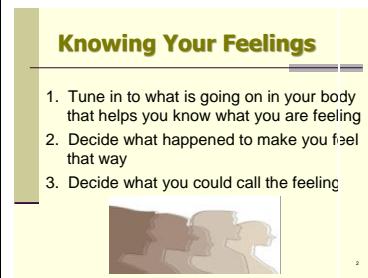
- Tell us about practicing the skill - when you did the skill, where and with whom.
- Describe specifically what you did to follow each step of the skill.
- Tell us another situation where you will



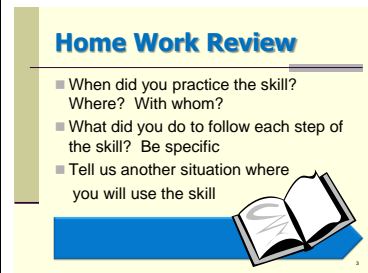
P-6-1



P-6-2



P-6-3



Choose a volunteer group member and take no more than one minute to review the

use the skill.

Who would like to begin?

Activity 2: Lesson Overview

Today, we will learn about how our thoughts and feelings control the way we act.

This is an important idea because it points to a way we can control how we act by controlling our ways of thinking. We can actually look at the thoughts and feelings we have in a conflict.

In a minute (*co-facilitator*) and I will demonstrate a conflict for you. After the demonstration we will discuss what happened and how things might have turned out differently. Then we will talk about 3 steps you can use to help you change the way you act in problem situations. Finally, you will think of some ways to practice what

homework.

Repeat with all group members. This is a quick report of their practice with the social skill so don't spend too much time on anyone's homework.



P-6-4

Thinking Controls Behavior

- Thoughts / feelings control the way we act
- We can control how we act by controlling our ways of thinking
- We can look at the thoughts and feelings we have in a conflict



you have learned before our next session.

Activity 3: Demonstration of a Conflict Situation

In this scene Mr./Ms. (*co-facilitator*) and I will demonstrate a conflict between (*authority figure – Jones*) and (*person under his/her authority – Pat*).

Watch what happens as the conflict grows.

Pay attention to possible thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs for each person in the conflict.

Demonstration Option #1 – For institutional settings, adult or youth:

A correctional officer, Jones, keeps an inmate, Pat, waiting at the door of his/her living unit while Jones finishes a conversation with another officer about the duty schedule for the next work shift.

Pat expresses irritation with sarcasm (“Take your own sweet time.”)

The officer, Jones, expresses irritation at this by asserting his/her authority in a gruff tone. (“Pat, you stand behind that line until you’re cleared to pass.” He points to a line on the floor some feet behind where Pat is standing.)

Select the situation which applies to your group setting.

It may be appropriate to change some details of the situation to meet the circumstances of your audience but the core elements should stay the same.

Conduct a 1 minute demonstration of the conflict.

Keep the demonstration brief, low key and simple.

Introduce the demonstration to the group with very little explanation.

It is important that both players make statements that show deep-seated attitudes and beliefs that will indicate that in the

Demonstration Option #2 – Probation or Parole settings:

A probation/parole officer, Jones, knows that his/her client, Pat, often breaks rules, so Jones wants to set especially clear limits. Pat is 10 minutes late for an appointment, and Jones lectures Pat on the importance of responsibility and threatens to violate his/her probation. Pat believes that he/she has a very legitimate reason for being late.

Demonstration Option #3 – Generic setting for youth:

A police officer, Jones, knows a young man/woman, Pat, was once arrested for dealing drugs. When Jones sees Pat on a street corner with his/her friends he/she tells Pat to “move along.” Jones ignores the other people in the group. Pat feels unfairly singled out.

Activity 4: Identify the Thoughts and Feelings of Pat and Jones

Let’s talk about what was going on.

How would you describe the way Jones (*authority figure*) was acting?

(*Example answers: Angry, bossy.*)

future, conflicts between these two will continue.

As the demonstration continues, you and your co-facilitator escalate the level of anger.

The demonstration stops safely, short of violence, but shows the possibility of violence or other serious consequences.

It is critical that neither side be completely in the wrong or completely in the right.

Have an initial, general discussion about the actions of Jones, and then Pat. Do not chart

How would you describe the way Pat was acting?

(Example answers: Angry, hostile, resentful.)

Now, let's imagine what Pat and Jones might be thinking and feeling. Let's start with Pat.

Assuming this is a typical kind of conflict you have seen before; what do you think is going on in Pat's mind? What might his/her thoughts be while this is happening?

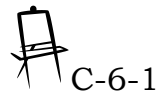
(Example answers: Jones is a jerk; Jones is pushing me around; This is so unfair.)

yet.

Begin charting with thoughts and feelings. Chart for Pat first, then Jones.

Be sure to leave room at the top of each chart, to insert the situation in lesson 7.

Encourage a lot of answers (alternative thinking).



Pat
Thoughts:
1.
2.
3...
Feelings:
Attitudes and Beliefs:

What do you think Pat might be feeling while this is going on?

(Example answers: angry, tense.)

That looks like a reasonable guess about what might be going on for Pat.

Now let's look at the (*authority figure*), Jones.

What might Jones be thinking while this is happening?

(Example answers: I'm sick of dealing with these punks. They never do what they're supposed to do.)

What do you think Jones is feeling?

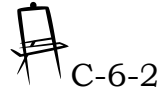
(Example answers: Frustrated, might have a headache.)

Let's look at both of the charts that list what's going on, or what might be going on, inside of Pat and Jones.

Do the thoughts and feelings we have written down seem realistic to you?

Can you imagine that people might really

List all the feelings the group suggests Pat might be having.



Jones
Thoughts: 1. 2. 3...
Feelings:
Attitudes and Beliefs:

On a new sheet, write the thoughts and feelings suggested for (*authority figure*) Jones.

think and feel this way?

Step 1 – Pay Attention to Our Thinking

There are 3 steps to cognitive self-change.

Step 1 is to pay attention to our thinking.

This means we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings by observing them without judgment.

We observe our thoughts and feelings just as they are. We don't explain them.

We will practice this a lot in this class.

The goal is to identify our own thoughts and feelings and also to help other group members do the same thing.

To do this, treat thoughts and feelings as pure information. We don't judge or explain our thinking. The goal is to identify what our thoughts are in tough situations.

In a few minutes we will talk more about step 1 of cognitive self-change, and review steps 2 and 3.

Activity 5: Identify Underlying Attitudes and Beliefs of Pat and Jones

Now, let's talk about attitudes and beliefs.

Attitudes and beliefs are general ways of



P-6-5

Step 1 – Pay Attention to Our Thinking

- Treat thoughts and feelings as pure information without judgment or interpretation





P-6-6

thinking about a lot of different situations. They can be rules, or principles, or values, or general opinions about a kind of person or a kind of situation.

Attitudes and beliefs can express the values and the principles you live by. These kinds of beliefs define the things that matter most.

Here are some examples:

- My family is the most important thing in my life.
- If anyone hurts someone in my family, I need to set it right.
- You have to stand up for yourself.

What are some other general attitudes and beliefs that you have, or that people you know have?

(Example answers: You have to be loyal to your friends; To get respect, you have to be ready to fight.)

Other attitudes and beliefs are opinions or general ways of thinking about different people and situations.

- Teachers are unfair.
- Parents are almost always right.

Attitudes and Beliefs

- General ways of thinking about a lot of different situations
- Rules, principles, values, or general opinions about a kind of person or a kind of situation
- Can express the values and the principles you live by
- Attitudes and beliefs define the things that matter most to us



P-6-7

Kinds of Attitudes and Beliefs

Express values and the principles we live by – defining what matters most to us

- Examples -
- My family is the most important thing in my life
 - You have to stand up for yourself

Opinions or general ways of thinking about the people and the situations around us

- Examples -
- My teachers are unfair
 - My parents are almost always right

Select examples appropriate to your group.

Select examples appropriate to your group.

- You can't trust the police.

What are some other examples?

When identifying attitudes and beliefs the goal is to remain neutral; not judging them as right or wrong.

Attitudes and beliefs are an especially important part of the way you think.

Remember the picture of the iceberg in lesson 1?

The iceberg shows how important it is to pay attention to what you can't see.

You can't see peoples' thoughts.

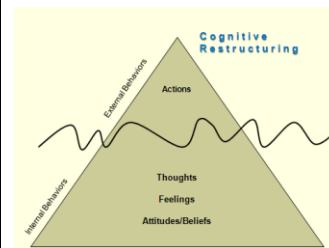
At the bottom of the iceberg are the attitudes and beliefs that shape and support our ways of thinking and feeling about the world.

This is what we're talking about here: identifying the general ways of thinking that shape the way we experience specific situations. Our attitudes and beliefs create personal meaning for us in specific situations.

Let's think about attitudes and beliefs in the demonstration we observed of Pat Jones.



P-6-8



Step back and look at the Pat and Jones charts together.

Encourage a brief discussion to focus the

Based upon how Jones was acting in the demonstration, and upon this list of thoughts and feelings, what are some of the attitudes and beliefs he/she was expressing?

(Example answers: These people have no respect for authority.)

Of course, we can't know for sure. But we can make reasonable guesses based on what we saw Jones doing and heard him/her saying.

What kind of attitudes and beliefs might Pat be acting upon in this situation?

(Example answer: C.O.'s/P.O.'s/Cops like pushing people around.)

group members' attention on the lists of thoughts and feelings.

Write responses on Jones chart under Attitudes and Beliefs.

Write responses on Pat's chart under Attitudes and Beliefs.

You should now have the beginnings of 2 thinking reports charted – 1 for Pat and 1 for Jones – based on the suggestions of the group.

Make sure to **keep these charts!** You will use them in lesson 7 to complete the thinking

Activity 6: Predict Future Behavior

Based on these thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs, can you predict how these people will act toward each other in the future?

For instance, if nothing happens to stop them what could happen?

(Example answers: Yell at each other; Fists fly; Pat gets arrested.)

Suppose this situation doesn't get that far along. Suppose Jones has a lot of back-up and continues to threaten Pat. Pat doesn't want to get into really big trouble, so he/she shuts up and does what he/she is told to do.

Is that going to be the end of the story? How might they act toward each other in the future?

(Example answers: No, it won't be the end of the story. There is likely to be more trouble between them in the future.)

Suppose Pat holds on to these thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs. What might happen later on?

reports.

Group members should be able to predict violence or revenge on the part of Pat, and some kind of punishment or mistreatment on the part of the Jones.

If they don't, suggest these consequences yourself.

Remind the group members to look at the particular thoughts

(Example answer: Pat might make trouble for Jones or try to get even.)

Suppose Jones holds on to his/her thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs. How do you think Jones is going to act toward Pat in the future?

(Example answers: Jones might look for excuses to confront Pat.)

Summarize

It's pretty clear, isn't it? The thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs that Pat and Jones hold can lead to more conflict in the future.

Although you can't tell exactly what this future conflict might be, you can tell that as long as Pat and Jones have the same thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs, the trouble isn't going to go away.

Activity 7: Present the Cognitive Principle

Most of the time our thoughts and feelings are pretty automatic. We think and feel pretty much out of habit.

and feelings and attitudes and beliefs that each is experiencing.

However, we can learn to pay attention to our thoughts and feelings. Then we can learn to take control of the way we think. If we do that, we take control over our feelings too.

We can control our actions by controlling the way we think and feel.

Learning the steps in the skill of cognitive self-change will help us control our actions by controlling the way we think and feel.

Activity 8: Present the 3 steps of Cognitive Self-Change

Cognitive self-change is a skill that includes 3 steps:

Step 1 – Pay Attention to Our Thinking

Pay attention to our thoughts and feelings by observing them without judgment.

Step 2 – Recognize Risk

Recognize when there is risk of our thoughts and feelings leading us into trouble.

Step 3 – Use New Thinking

Try a new way of thinking that reduces risk.

Cognitive self-change is a simple skill to help you take control of your life by controlling your thinking.



P-6-9

The Cognitive Principle - *Thinking controls behavior*

Learning to control thoughts and feelings can control actions

There is always more than 1 way of thinking about a situation

Control of thinking results in real power over life



When we think differently, we act differently



P-6-10

3 Steps of Cognitive Self Change

1. Pay Attention to Our Thinking
2. Recognize Risk
3. Use New Thinking



Hand Out Pocket Skill Cards

Here is a card that lists the 3 steps of the skill of cognitive self-change. Keep it with you to help you practice.

We have already practiced step 1 – pay attention to our thinking. We did this with Pat and Jones. For the next few group meetings we will continue to practice step 1, and begin to practice step 2 – recognize risk.

Activity 9: Apply the 3 of Steps of Cognitive Self-Change to the Demonstration

For now, let's see how these 3 steps might fit the demonstration that Mr./Ms. _____ and I just did.

Step 1 – Pay Attention to Our Thinking

We completed step 1 by listing the thoughts and feelings of Pat and Jones. To do that we:

- Wrote down their thoughts and feelings exactly as we imagined them to be in their minds.
- Didn't make any judgment about their thoughts and feelings (good or bad, true or false, justified or not justified).



H- 6-1

Pocket Skill Cards

Point out the chart sheets listing each person's thoughts and feelings

- Listed their thoughts and feelings as information about what was in their minds at the time.

These are the components of step 1. Each of you will practice step 1– pay attention to our thinking, by listing your own thoughts and feelings during real life situations.

Step 2 – Recognize Risk

After seeing the demonstration we agreed that Pat and Jones’s thoughts and feelings were likely to lead to future conflict between them.

Pat’s angry thoughts and feelings would lead him/her into conflict with Jones. Jones angry thoughts and feelings would lead him/her into conflict with Pat.

This is what we mean by risk thoughts and feelings: Risk thoughts and feelings are those that increase the chances of a person acting in a way that makes trouble.

Seeing the risk in thinking is step 2 – recognize risk, of cognitive self-change.

Step 3 – Use New Thinking

Step 3 is to use new thinking. What does that mean?

Imagine how either Pat or Jones might think differently than they did here. What different kinds of thoughts can we imagine Jones having that would make the situation less tense?

(Example answer: I'll take a minute to listen.)

What different kinds of thoughts can we imagine Pat having that would make the situation less tense?

(Example answer: Let's not make things worse.)

It's pretty easy to see that if their thinking were different their behavior would probably be different too.

If these people were to have these different thoughts in this situation, how do you think they would feel about themselves?

Would they feel okay? Proud? Strong? Or would they feel weak? Humiliated?

Encourage suggestions. The idea is to get the group members to recognize that there are alternative ways of thinking that might help to avoid the trouble that seems inevitable. The ability to imagine new ways of thinking will be further developed in subsequent lessons.

Disrespected?

Since we don't know these people, we can't say for sure, but we can imagine how they might feel.

It's important that however we think and act in a conflict situation, we feel okay about ourselves, isn't it? This is an important key to finding new thinking. Thinking that works for one person may not work for another. And however we change our thinking, it's important that it helps us feel okay about ourselves.

So step 3 – use new thinking, is about trying a way of thinking that reduces risk.

Activity 10: Wrap-up

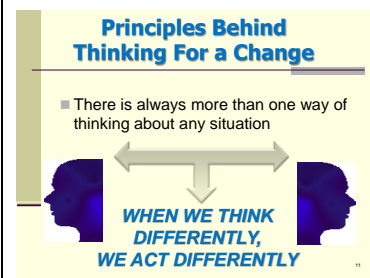
Let's review some key points we've learned thus far.

Thinking for a Change has some core principles, supported by the skill of cognitive self-change:

- There is always more than one way of thinking about any situation.
- When we think differently, we act differently.



P-6-11



The skills taught in **Thinking for a Change** help us learn to make choices about how we think. When we do this we take control of our thinking. When we take control of our thinking, we gain real power over our lives.

The goal of **Thinking for a Change** is *not* to tell us what to think. In **Thinking for a Change** we learn how to take control of our lives by taking control of our thinking.

Paying Attention to Our Thinking

Most of us don't think much about our thinking: Thoughts and feelings just come automatically. But we can pay attention to thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and beliefs, just as we can pay attention to our actions.

Taking Control

In **Thinking for a Change**, we take over the controls. We learn to see where our thinking is leading, and steer it where we want to go.

Changing Our Life

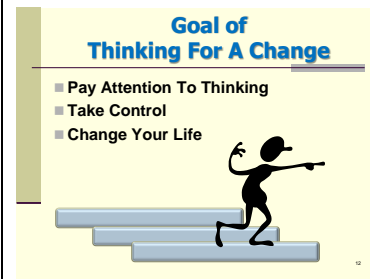
We can change our life by changing the way we think.

Activity 11: Assign Homework

- Think about a situation when you had a



P-6-12



Completing the homework assignment is critical.

conflict with another person.

- What were your thoughts and feelings at the beginning of the situation?
- What were your thoughts and feelings as the situation developed?
- What were your attitudes or beliefs in this situation?
- You will need to write down all the thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs you can remember having during the situation.

Next time we will review this situation and your thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs.

It is an opportunity for each group member to transfer the skills he/she has practiced in the session to real life situations.

As he/she completes the homework, the new skills begin to integrate into his/her thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs, and behavior.



P-6-13

Homework

- Think about a situation when you had a conflict with another person
- What were your thoughts and feelings at the beginning of the situation?
- What were your thoughts and feelings as the situation developed?



P-6-14

Homework

- What attitudes and beliefs were a part of your thinking in these situations?
- Write down all the thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs you can remember having during the situation





H-6- 2 Homework
Handout

NOTE: Keep charts describing Pat's and Jones' thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs for the next lesson.

