



Religiously-Integrated Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression

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January 2022

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Objectives

1. Why Religiously-Integrated CBT (RCBT)?
2. How Can I Use It?
 - ❖ 7 RCBT Tools
3. Case Study Group Discussion
4. Resources
5. Q & A



Acknowledgements

PI: Harold G. Koenig, M.D.

Department of Psychiatry
Duke University Medical Center

PI: Michael King, MD

Division of Psychiatry, Faculty of Brain Sciences
University College, London, UK

Study Team in Durham, NC and Glendale, CA

Our research was made possible by a grant
from the **John Templeton Foundation**.



Why RCBT?

Does Religion Belong in Psychotherapy?



If religion is important to a client, religion will be part of psychotherapy whether the therapist discusses it or not.

How can we help our religious clients engage with and use their faith as a healing resource in psychotherapy?

(Pearce, 2016)

Does Talking About Religion Help Treat Depression?

- Religious: Less depression; not exempt
- Faster resolution of symptoms
 - 50-70% faster overall
 - 100% faster w/ persistent physical disability
- Religious CBT as effective as conventional CBT for religious clients
- Improvement in psychological and spiritual health

(e.g., Koenig et al., 2015; Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012; Oxhandler et al., 2019; Pearce, 2016; Rosmarin et al., 2019; Tulbure et al., 2018; Worthington et al., 2011)

Multi-site RCT of RCBT

Compared remotely-delivered RCBT with conventional CBT for the treatment of depression among the medically ill

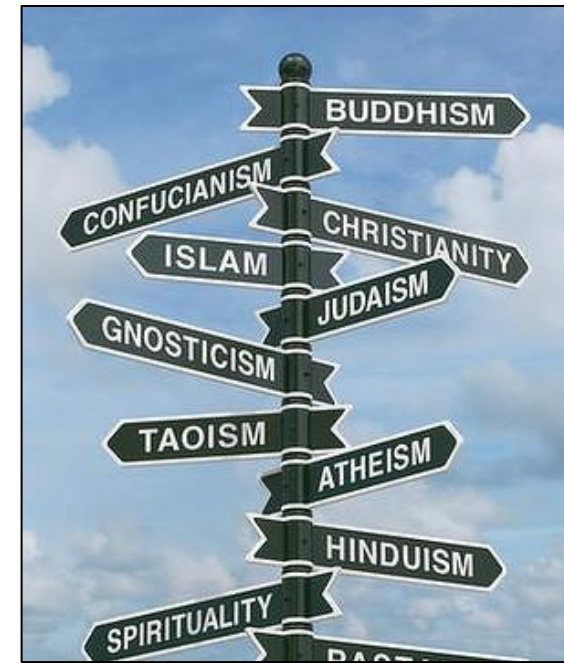
- N=132 (RCBT = 65; CBT = 67)
- 69% female
- Mean age = 51.6 years
- 52% Caucasian
- NC and CA

(Koenig et al., 2015)



Multi-site RCT of RCBT

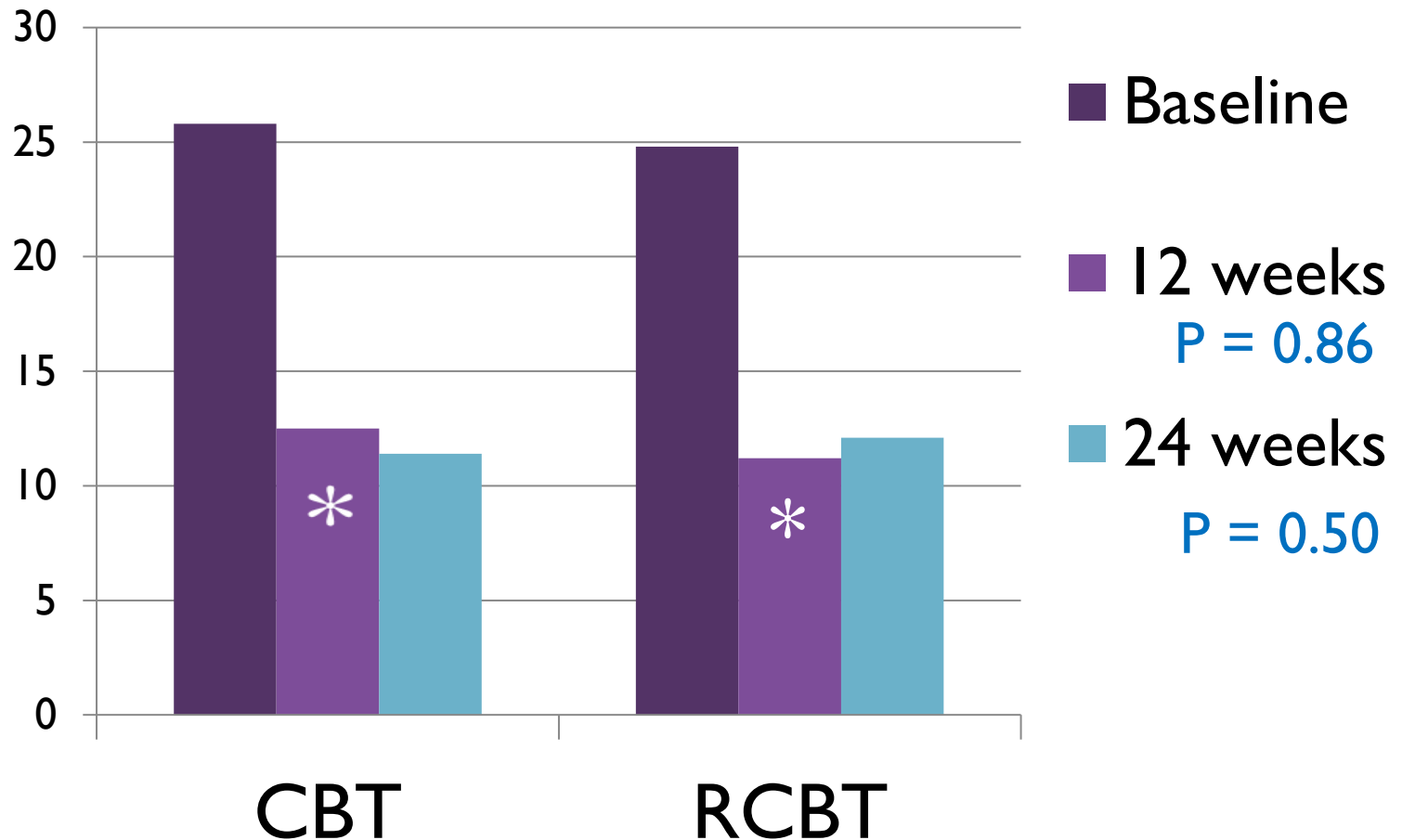
- Manualized treatment with a patient workbook
- 10 sessions (over 12 weeks); 50-60 minutes
- Delivered over *phone, Skype, IM
- Master's level counselors
- 5 world religions:
 - Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism



Results

- No significant differences at baseline
- Religious affiliation in RCBT
 - 87% Christian
 - 7.7% Buddhist
 - 1.5% Jewish
 - 1.5% Muslim
 - 1.5% Hindu
- Depression (BDI-II) primary outcome
 - Assessed at baseline, 4, 8, 12, and 24 weeks

Depression (BDI-II)

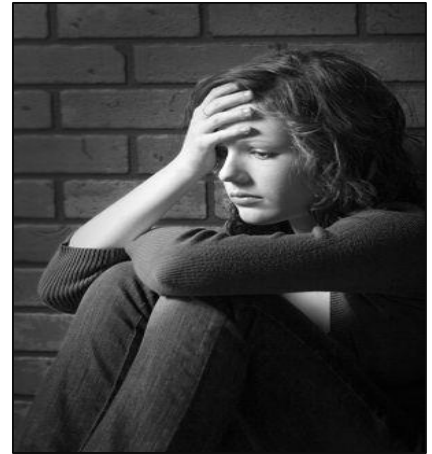


*Also improvement in positive outcomes, such as gratitude, altruism, and purpose in life

(Koenig, Pearce et al., 2015)

What if Religion is Part of the Problem?

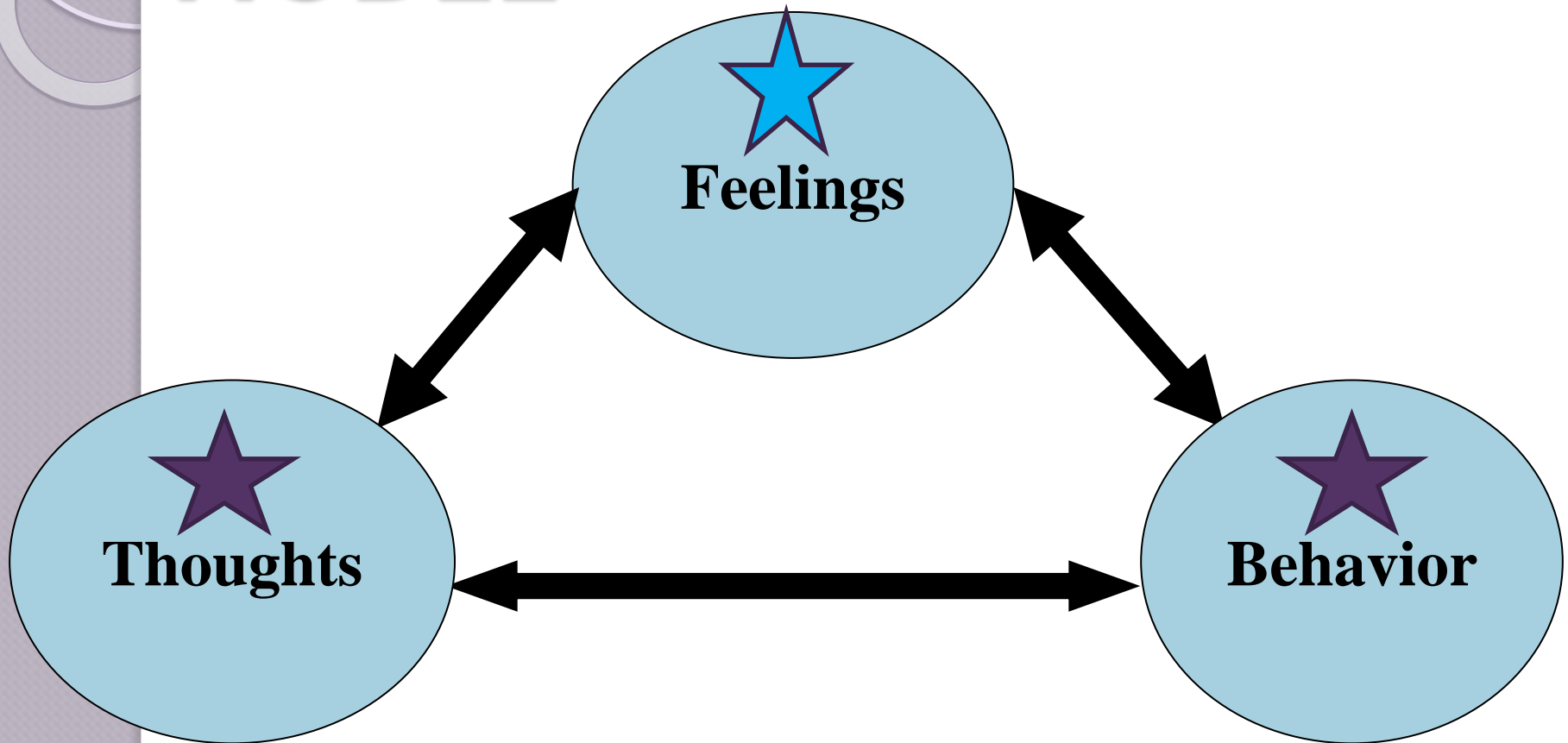
- Some religious beliefs may cause distress, but careful not to pathologize religion as a whole
- Working with clergy
 - Complementary roles
 - Consultation and referral
- Cognitive RCBT tools
 - Help to identify and challenge discrepancies between beliefs/behaviors and client's religious value system





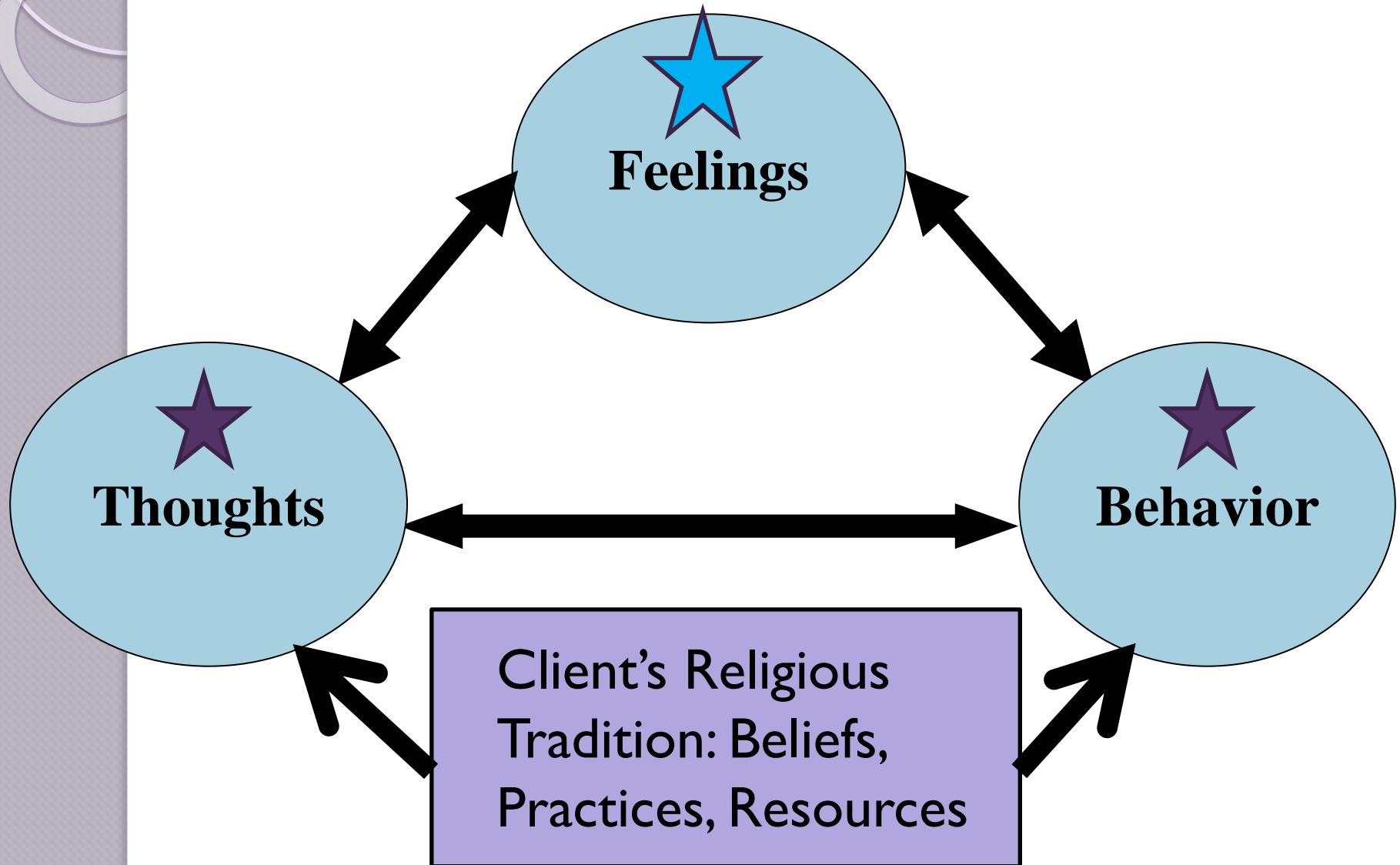
What is RCBT?

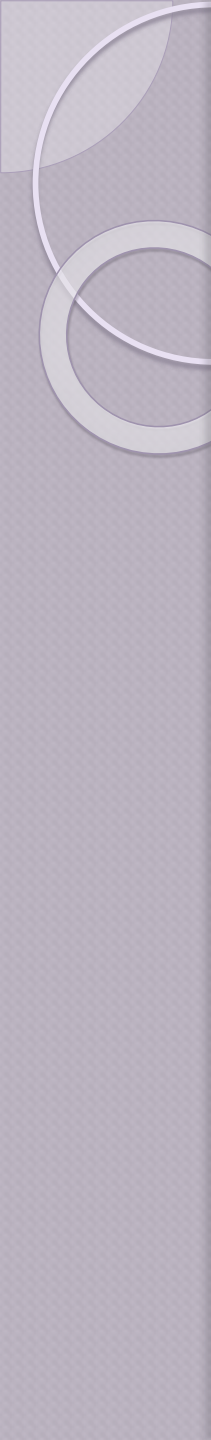
CBT MODEL



(Beck, 1979; 2005)

RCBT MODEL





How Can I Use It?

7 Practical RCBT Tools

I. Renew Your Mind: Planting Truth

Fill your mind with positive and truthful thoughts through mind-renewing activities, such as **scripture memorization** and **contemplative prayer**

- Holy Texts used in RCBT manuals:
 - Christian: Holy Bible
 - Jewish: Torah and Talmud
 - Hindu: Bhagavad Gita
 - Buddhist: Dhammapada
 - Muslim: Holy Qur'an

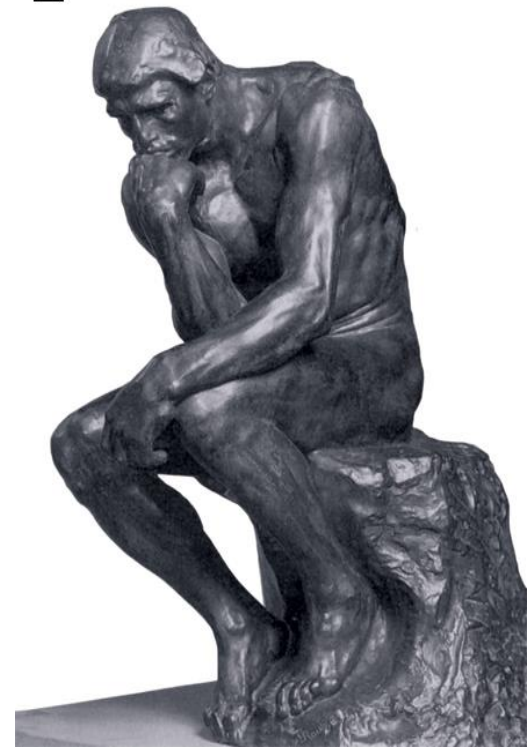


2. Change Your Mind: Metanoia

Challenging thoughts using your religious resources



- ABCD(R)E method (Thought Log)
 - **Theological reflections** on common unhelpful thinking styles
 - **Challenge and replace negative** and unhelpful thinking using client's religious belief system



Theological Reflections on an Unhelpful Thinking Style

Should Statements

Holding and motivating yourself with fixed ideas about how the world “should,” “ought to,” or “must” be.

E.g., A woman with depression who says to herself, “I should keep my house cleaner, and I shouldn't complain.”

Theological Reflection from Buddhism

When we use the word ‘should,’ there is generally little room for self-acceptance or flexibility. The Buddha taught that guidelines for our behavior can be important, but that these need to come from a place of higher wisdom and caring for ourselves and others. Situations are often complex, and a single mode of action or behavior is not desirable or useful.

ABCD(R)E METHOD FOR CHALLENGING THOUGHTS

Activating Event: Describe the situation when the negative emotion(s) began.

Every morning, I wake up with a feeling of dread. I work from home and it is a battle to get out of bed and walk down the hall to start work. There are things I could be doing, but I can't bring myself to start any of them. I basically do nothing day after day, week after week. It's killing me.

ABCD(R)E METHOD FOR CHALLENGING THOUGHTS

Beliefs: What negative beliefs or expectations automatically went through your mind when you were in that situation?

I'm incompetent and a fraud. There are so many things I should know how to do, but don't. My dad would be ashamed of me if he were still alive.

Consequent Feelings and Behavior: What feelings did these beliefs lead to? Rate intensity of each (1-10). What behavior did these beliefs and feelings lead to?

- Sadness (8), self-pity (9), shame (9), anxiety (8)
- After an hour or two of sitting in front of the computer doing nothing, I go watch TV.

ABCD(R)E METHOD FOR CHALLENGING THOUGHTS

Dispute the Beliefs: Specify the unhelpful thought category. What evidence is there that those beliefs may not be accurate or true?

Belief: *"I'm incompetent and a fraud. There are so many things I should know how to do, but don't. My dad would be ashamed of me if he were still alive."*

-Labeling; Should Statement; Fortune telling

-Evidence: I've never received poor feedback from my boss. I am able to help my customers resolve many of their problems.

But I'm afraid that if I try to learn a new skill I'll fail, and failing would be worse than not trying at all. It would mean I really am incompetent.

ABCD(R)E METHOD FOR CHALLENGING THOUGHTS

Religious Beliefs and Resources: How can your view of God/the Sacred, your religious worldview, sacred writings, spiritual wisdom, and other sources provide evidence that challenge your automatic negative beliefs?

-“Therefore, there is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) (shame-buster)

-“**Do not be anxious** about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6) (courage-booster)

-“If any of you lacks **wisdom**, you should ask God, who gives generously to all **without finding fault**, and it will be given to you.” (James 1:5) (shame-buster, promise of help)

-If God isn't condemning me, then I need to stop condemning myself. I don't have to do this on my own.

ABCD(R)E METHOD FOR CHALLENGING THOUGHTS

Effective New Belief and Consequence: What is a different way to look at the situation? How did your feelings change after you looked at the situation differently? Rate each feeling using a scale of 1-10.

-God said in every situation I can ask for his help, and that includes learning new skills for work. My Heavenly Father already knows all my limitations and mistakes and he isn't ashamed of me. Instead, he wants to give me strength and wisdom. If I make a mistake, I won't like it, but I can tell myself I'm already accepted, I'm human, and I can try again.

-Hopeful (8), peaceful (9), confident (8)

3. Redemptive Reframing

Finding God and the blessing in suffering



- Step 1: Sensitively explore (not solve!) spiritual suffering
 - Why would a loving God let this happen?
 - Is it a sin to be angry at God?
 - Is God punishing me or abandoning me?
- Can process in journal or with therapist or clergy

3. Redemptive Reframing

- Step 2: Actively look for how God may have been at work in your life and what blessings might be found
 - **Meaning-making**: How do your religious beliefs help you make sense of this? Where might God's loving hand be in this situation?
 - **Benefit-finding**: Have there been any unexpected blessings or silver linings? What have you learned?



4. Acceptance and Forgiveness

Letting go and letting God

- Psychological and spiritual strategies for responding to hurt and toxic emotions



4. Acceptance and Forgiveness

Spiritual Surrender

- Active, spiritually motivated form of acceptance; intentionally letting go
- **Accept/Surrender** through prayer, letter to God, Gestalt empty chair, symbolic action



4. Acceptance and Forgiveness

Forgiveness:

- 2 types: Decisional and Emotional
- **Forgive** *after* you process and validate the pain
- **Targets of forgiveness:** Self, others, God



5. Reach Out and Connect

Involvement in religious community

- Combats social isolation and lack of purposeful activity
- **Actively participate** in religious community
- Live out faith by supporting others
- **Identify someone** in religious community with whom you can spend time and for whom you can pray



6. Say Thanks: Gratitude

Positive shift in focus and actions

- Notice the blessings one has been given and express gratitude to God and others
- 2-Way Thanker



6. Say Thanks: Gratitude

In everything give thanks;
for this is the will of God
in Christ Jesus
for you.

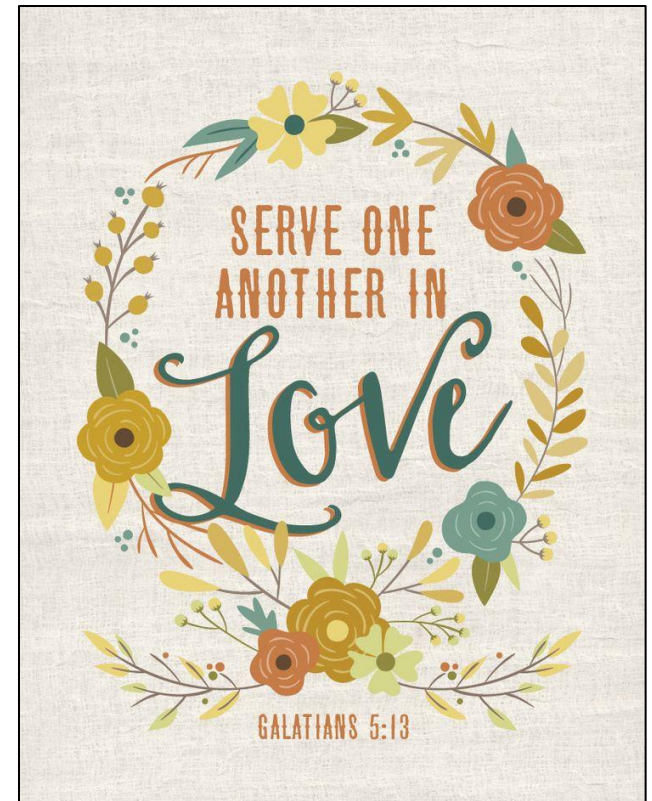
1 Thessalonians 5:18

- Count your blessings: Gratitude list
 - Make a list of 10+ things for which you are grateful
- Renew your mind using gratitude
 - Create new beliefs based on what has/is going well
- Gratitude letter
 - Write a thank you letter to someone who has made a difference in your life
- Prayers of thanksgiving
 - Pray through gratitude list or short prayers during day to refocus attention

7. Giving Back: Service

‘Tis better to give than receive

- Shift the focus off of oneself and one's problems
- **Plan act of service:** Who, What, Where, When, How, and Why?
- **Assess Impact:** Mood, energy, relationships, esteem, spirituality



Summary of 7 RCBT Tools

1. Renew your mind by planting God's word
2. Change mind using a RCBT thought log
3. Do a redemptive reframe (make meaning and find benefits)
4. Accept/Surrender and forgive
5. Reach out and connect
6. Practice gratitude
7. Serve others





Group Discussion: Case Study

Meet Hee Jung

Hee Jung is a 31-year-old Asian Christian Protestant woman who had a miscarriage two years ago. She was five months into her pregnancy at the time. She believes she is to blame. Although her faith is still important to her, she is deeply angry at God for not keeping her baby safe, as she believed he promised to do. She keeps her anger a secret because she thinks it is unchristian of her. She meets criteria for depression.

Meet Hee Jung

Hee Jung is a 31-year-old Asian Christian Protestant woman who had a miscarriage two years ago. She was five months into her pregnancy at the time. Being the conscientious woman she is, Hee Jung reported doing everything right in her pregnancy—taking prenatal vitamins, exercising, not drinking alcohol, gaining the proper amount of weight; however, she believes she is to blame for the miscarriage because she was stressed about work at the time it happened. Hee Jung refuses to believe her physician who said she was not to blame for the miscarriage.

Hee Jung and her husband both grieved deeply for months after the loss. With time, her husband's grief lessened, and recently he has brought up the idea of trying to have another baby. In contrast, Hee Jung's sadness has not abated, and she has become increasingly irritable and withdrawn from her husband and her friends. She lashes out each time her husband suggests they try getting pregnant. She doesn't like the woman she has become and is starting to lose hope that she'll ever feel like herself again.

Hee Jung and her husband still go to church most weeks, but she no longer sits with or talks with her friends there. She is afraid to let anyone know how angry she is at God because she doesn't think it's very "Christian" of her. In her first psychotherapy session, she told her psychologist the following:

"You know what makes this even worse? I prayed over her in my womb every morning and every evening for five months, asking God to keep her healthy and safe. The Bible says God will look after us and that he loves us, but he sure didn't demonstrate either of those things for me or my baby. I'm human and I do everything in my power to keep my promises. God has unlimited power; he has no excuse for not keeping his."

Discussion Questions

1. Is religion a source of comfort and strength or a source of pain for Hee Jung? How so?
2. Would RCBT be a helpful approach? Why or why not?
3. What RCBT tools would you use? Why?
4. Would you consult with anyone? Who?



RCBT Resources

RCBT Training and Resources

- **Free RCBT manuals and workbooks**
 - <http://www.spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu/index.php/religious-cbt-study/therapy-manuals>
- **RCBT Training video**
 - <https://spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu/index.php/religious-cbt-study/training-video/>
- **For Christian clients:**
 - ***“Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Christians with Depression: A Tool-Based Primer”***
(Pearce, 2016, Templeton Press)
- **Online EdX Training Program in Spiritual Competency:**
 - <https://www.edx.org/course/spiritual-competency-training-in-mental-health>

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

for Christians with Depression

A Practical Tool-Based Primer



Michelle
Pearce, PhD



Call for Proposals:

Spiritual Competency Training in Graduate Education

[https://www.spiritualandreligiouscompetencies
project.com/](https://www.spiritualandreligiouscompetenciesproject.com/)

Click: “Funding Opportunity”

Thank you!

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Sample Study Publications

- Pearce, M.J., Koenig, H.G., Robins, C., Nelson, B., Shaw, S., Cohen, H., & King, M. (2014). **Religiously-integrated cognitive behavioral therapy: A new method of treatment for major depression in patients with chronic medical illness.** *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*. online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036448>
- Koenig, H.G., Pearce, M.J., Nelson, B., Shaw, S.F., Robins, C.J., Daher, N., Cohen, H.J., Berk, L.S., Belinger, D., Pargament, K.I., Rosmarin, D.H., Vasegh, S., Kristeller, J., Juthani, N., Nies, D. & King, M.B. (2015). **Religious vs. conventional cognitive-behavioral therapy for major depression in persons with chronic medical illness: A pilot randomized trial.** *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 203(4), 243-251.