

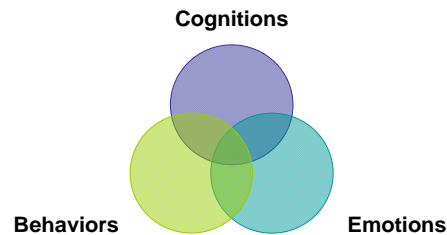
## THE COGNITIVE – BEHAVIORAL - EMOTIONAL (CBE) MODEL

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The “cognitive-behavioral-emotional” (CBE) model recognizes that each individual is composed of cognitions, or thoughts; behaviors, or actions; and emotions, or feelings (Figure 2.1). These dimensions interact almost automatically—thoughts influencing feelings, feelings influencing behaviors, and behaviors prompting thoughts and feelings. In the integrative CBE model, each component is valued and promotes personal, relationship, and sexual health. Without appreciating that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors interact, yet are distinct, our experience of them can be confusing and conflicted. Your insight will be strengthened by understanding the integrated role of cognitions, behaviors, and emotions.

### The C-B-E Model: Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional



#### *Cognitions or Thoughts*

Cognitions involve ideas, beliefs, observations, interpretations, and reasoning. Epstein and Baucom (2002) describe five distinct cognitions that affect your sexuality: assumptions, standards and beliefs, perceptions, attributions (explanations of cause and effect), and expectancies (predictions). These are unique to each man. Cognitions are beneficial or detrimental depending on their effects on your feelings and actions. Our cognitions are the way we think, our self-talk. When it comes to your relationship, you want to think accurately, positively, reasonably. When we don't, we set ourselves up for unrealistic expectations and frustration. Be aware; be deliberate. Think smart.

#### *Behaviors or Actions*

We act (or not) based upon our thoughts and feelings. Action is always a choice (decision). The freedom to choose your behavior is mitigated by thoughts and feelings, but responsible and mature living mandates accountability for your behavior. Whereas feelings are not viewed as ethical (that is, not judged to be good or bad), behaviors are. Behaviors may be constructive or destructive depending on their effect on each individual and the relationship. When healthy, we act positively, cooperatively, emotionally—and with self-discipline. We regulate our emotions and control impulses, as well as emotionally experience joy in life.

## *Emotions or Feelings*

Emotions are chemical–electrical energy events in your body. You label this energy according to how you experience these physical sensations: fear, sadness, loneliness, panic, satisfaction, anger, worry, contentment, frustration, pleasure, irritability, excitement, anxiety, wonderment, confusion, shame, guilt, comfort, embarrassment, resentment, safety. Feelings are motivators that prompt, penalize, or reward action. Feelings are not themselves good or bad, right or wrong. Feelings influence the thoughts we have and the actions we take. Emotions can be positive or negative depending on how you subjectively experience them and how they influence your behavior. Understanding your feelings is crucial to invest them in your intimate relationship.

## *CBE Skills*

### *A Cognitive Skill: Accurate Thinking*

Relationship health requires that you think straight, not be misled by popular myths about relationships such as “Every couple has bitter fights” or “Everyone has an affair at some point.” When we fail to think realistically and be grounded in accurate information, we set ourselves up for cognitive errors. Cognitive errors inevitably set us up to feel inadequate, angry, a failure and inept, or disappointed as well as prompt dysfunctional behaviors that can undermine a relationship. Think realistically. Think courageously. Think for yourself.

### *An Emotional Skill: Understand the Value of Your Feelings*

Because your emotions are indispensable for achieving relationship health, it is crucial that you be aware of and be comfortable with your emotions. Everyone who has a body has feelings, but we differ in our level of awareness and comfort. Some are very aware of their body’s sensations and feelings and have elaborate words to express them. Others are aware of their feelings but have few words to describe them or have learned not to express emotions out of shame, fear, or sensitivity. Still others ignore their feelings, believing emotions interfere with daily functioning. Value your feelings as potential friends.

## *What Are Feelings?*

Feelings can be confusing, distracting, irritating, or frustrating unless you understand what they are about. Because many people—especially men—rely more on reason than emotion for direction in life, feelings are often viewed as irritants, distractions, or even enemies. At their base, feelings are biochemical energies in your body in response to various situations, influenced by your past experiences and current thoughts. Feelings (including sexual feelings) are not enemies; they offer you important information that your reason might overlook. Feelings offer data about yourself, your body, your experiences, and your situation that are not available to you from only logic, reasoning or thinking.

## *A Metaphor for Your Feelings*

Consider a metaphor that a number of men have told us helped them appreciate the value of their emotions.

### **ILLUSTRATION 2.2: “LIFELONG, LOYAL FRIENDS”**

A way to appreciate your feelings is to consider them to be your “buddies” or lifelong, loyal friends. They have been with you through all of your life’s experiences—from childhood to now. They remember your experiences even before you were old enough to remember, or now when you forget. Each feeling, then, is a savvy veteran of experience who will alert or protect you from situations that could distress you. Your friends vigilantly look after you. They will not lie to you, bullshit you, abandon you, or be silent when concerned that you may forget or be misled by your logic. A good buddy will take you aside, counsel you, and even argue with you when he thinks you could be making a mistake or overlooking potential trouble. You may not like the counsel, thinking your emotional friends overprotect (or underprotect) or make things worse, but they are just doing their job. When you are feeling tentative or conflicted, your “emotional buddies” (loyal friends) let you know—anxiety, shame,

frustration. Your loyal buddies get your attention; “cover your back.” On the other hand, when you are engaged in mutually healthy couple interaction, they can reward you with emotional self-assurance and satisfaction.

### *Feelings Can Be Complicated*

Often we have mixed feelings—we feel two or more things at the same time. For example, you may worry that a disagreement with your partner is impossible to resolve, feel hurt and irritated at yourself or your partner, and feel shame that you have failed to find a resolution—simultaneously.

You may focus on only one dimension of the energy (feeling) in your body, ignoring the other feelings. For example, focusing only on frustration, you may overlook feelings of hurt and worry.

One feeling can be converted to another. A person who is taught to not feel anger may convert feelings of anger to shame. A person who is taught that anger is okay but feeling fear is not okay may feel angry when afraid, anxious or threatened.

### *Feelings Are Useful*

People tend to think of feelings as positive or negative depending on whether they agitate (like fear, anger, and guilt) or encourage (like pleasure, joy, contentment, and satisfaction). Our approach to understanding feelings is to think of them as guides, or loyal friends, trying to get your attention so you’ll consider factors other than logic or conscious awareness in your response to a situation. Feelings try to help you respond to different situations. Every feeling is good in terms of its purpose to serve you, protect you, and guide you (although based only on past experience). Your feelings offer honest information. Listening for feelings is an important skill. Considering them offers you more data to incorporate into your choices about action (behavior).

#### **EXERCISE 2.1: LISTENING FOR YOUR FEELINGS**

Alone, provide yourself a quiet, relaxing atmosphere. Focus your attention on relaxing your body until you feel calm, centered, and comfortable. Then imagine that you are a miniature explorer traveling around inside your body, searching for different energies or feelings.

- Where in your body do you experience joyful feelings? In your face, eyes, mouth? In your chest or legs?
- Where in your body do you experience feelings of anxiety or fear? In your stomach? In your chest? In your cold hands?
- Where in your body do you experience anger? In your hot cheeks or ears? In your throat or neck? In your stomach?
- Where in your body do you experience feelings of sadness?
- Where in your body do you experience feelings of confusion, indecisiveness, ambivalence?
- Where in your body do you experience feelings of sensuality and sexual desire?

Write down what you observe. Be specific about each feeling’s “location” in your body. What are you learning?

### *Are You Free to Feel?*

Your feelings are valuable sources of personal information, but don’t let them run your life. It is not always a good idea to act on them—especially impulsive feelings. And remember that your strong feelings will always be anti-intimate, that is, there are no feelings that directly promote relationship cooperation and intimacy. Think about this. Our feelings are “self-protective” or for “self-preservation”. For example, when you feelings are hurt, your emotions will say “You hurt my feelings, so I’ll hurt your’s.” That is why “self-regulation” is an essential relationship skill. You can’t let anger, hurt, or anxiety dictate your behaviors in your intimate relationship. Whether and how to act are ethical choices that you need to make. For example, a feeling of anger offers personal information to you about your situation, usually one in which you feel frustrated, treated unfairly, misinterpreted, hurt, threatened, or blocked. These feelings get your attention by agitating your body so you recognize the problem. What you do with this information is the issue.

The guiding principle is to accept your feelings and judge your behaviors. When you make this distinction between feelings and behaviors, you are free to feel. You can feel frustration and choose not to express this feeling to your partner. Rather, you can choose a more positive course by pausing to calm your body (feelings) and then asking your partner for a few moments to cooperatively discuss the matter. You

want to learn from your feelings but not let them dictate to you. You want to listen to your feelings, consider their counsel, and then decide how to respond in a constructive, effective fashion. Integrating your feelings and reason gives you a more complete picture of your life, relationship, and sexuality.

### *Different Ways of Expressing Feelings*

There are many direct and indirect ways to express feelings. The words to describe feelings are learned. Some words directly describe emotions: “I feel sad,” “I feel close,” “I feel frustrated.” Others express feelings indirectly. You might say, “Isn’t it a nice day?” to express “I feel good today” or “All you do is spend money” to mean “I am worried about money.” The more directly you express your feelings, the more likely it is that your partner will understand and interpret your meaning correctly.

You and your partner have your own emotional language, nonverbal (a smile, a glance away) as well as verbal. How do you express your feelings? How does your partner? How have you expressed feelings about sexual concerns? How has your partner? Verbally? Nonverbally? Negatively? Positively? Calmly? Dramatically? Developing healthier ways to share feelings is important and will deepen your intimacy. Learning to “read” your partner’s words and actions is part of the uniqueness of intimacy. It takes months and years of sharing experiences, explaining your thoughts and feelings, to develop a mutual emotional language.

Communicating emotions is an important skill in an intimate relationship. For most men and women, it is difficult to feel close without sharing verbally what and how you feel. Love involves sharing warm, positive, romantic feelings but also involves sharing difficult, negative feelings even when that may lead to conflict. Communicating negative feelings in a positive, constructive way can lead to emotional closeness. You can still feel loved and valued even if you are down, anxious, or had a failure experience. Love tries to provide that safe harbor amidst the storms of life.

### *Vulnerability Within Emotional and Sexual Intimacy*

Sharing feelings is important to deepening your long-term general and sexual relationship. Emotional openness in your relationship and the nakedness of sex are the two most vulnerable and tender aspects of committed love. During these experiences, we are most exposed. When you give and receive empathy while you are vulnerable emotionally and sexually, you communicate powerful acceptance and comfort and generate trust and love.

### *A Crucial Emotional Skill: Empathy*

In intimate relationships, an important ideal is to feel emotionally valued and accepted without conditions, to feel unconditional positive regard from and for each other. Empathy, the skill of affirming feelings, is the glue of a deep relationship. It feels good to have your successes and strengths acknowledged, but you feel especially loved and respected when your vulnerabilities and weaknesses are accepted. To empathize with your partner, imagine for a moment that you are him/her. Imagine that you think and feel as she/he does, that you experience her/his reality. When you are empathic with your lover (although you may not agree with him/her), you offer the greatest gift: acceptance, nurturance, warmth, respect, reassurance, validation, care, patience, and appreciation. These are wonderful qualities to take into the bedroom.

### *A Behavioral Skill: Self-Discipline*

Our cognitions and emotions are profound motivators for our behaviors. When we do not appreciate the “tag team” of biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors, we can feel and act in emotionally impulsive, even compulsive ways. Women who lose emotional control and are abusive or men who “sexualize” their general emotions (loneliness, frustration) and get into sexual trouble (affairs, Internet porn abuse) later confess that they felt overwhelmed or out of control, distraught and confused, even chiding themselves, “What was I thinking?”

Relationship and sexual health requires self-discipline. Often we think of self-discipline as mortification, punishment, or castigation. A healthier concept of discipline is physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills training. When we understand that discipline is beneficial and resourceful, it no longer is an enemy. Emotional self-regulation involves management of emotions like anxiety, loneliness, fear, frustration, and sadness. It also includes physical regulation of sleep, exercise, and food.

Self-discipline is a personal strength. The athlete's "no pain, no gain" axiom applies here. It may be difficult, painful at times, but the gain is that self-discipline becomes easier over time. Repeated, consistent self-discipline builds skill, a learned way of thinking, feeling, and acting that we've trained into ourselves until it becomes second nature. The professional athlete trains his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors through analyzing "game film" (cognitive learning), workouts in a strength-building program, and repetitive practice to be at the top of his game. To promote your relationship health, you benefit from disciplining your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to become positive, constructive, and cooperative. Self-discipline is your friend, making the healthy regulation of your impulses and behavior easier. Ironically, this self-disciplined skill enhances your ability to let go and enjoy your relationship. So become a balance, well-disciplined person – to enhance your own self-esteem and relationship satisfaction.

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