



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

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Know! The Three Steps to a Happy New You!



It's a new year: Have you given thought to what you'd like to take on or improve upon over the next 12 months? How about a happier, more positive life for you and/or your children?

When you think back to the year in review, did you experience more negative thoughts than positive? If so, there may be a technique you can use to see things in a more positive, realistic light. And who couldn't use a little more light in their life?

The technique is called "Cognitive Therapy," and it can be learned about in greater detail in a book called *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* by Dr. David Burns.

Dr. Burns says that cognitive therapy is really "thought" therapy, and that our thoughts, for better or worse, create our emotions and moods. He says our perception or thoughts create our reality even when they are distorted and unrealistic; if we can change our thoughts, we can change how we feel. In other words, we can develop a more positive attitude and outlook on life.

According to Dr. Burns it goes like this:



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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FIRST: An outside event occurs
SECOND: Our internal dialogue begins
FINALLY: Our emotions/feelings develop based on our thoughts

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Here is an example of how it might play out in the life of a teen:

- **An outside event occurs.**

A shy teen meets a friendly, new girl at school today. After sitting together at lunch, the shy teen invites the new girl to hang out together on Saturday. The girl says she'd love to hang out sometime, but she can't Saturday because it's her sister's birthday and they are having a family party that day.

- **An internal dialogue begins. These are a series of the person's THOUGHTS; their interpretation of what just happened.**

The shy teen thinks to herself, "She's making it up. It's not really her sister's birthday. She just doesn't like me and doesn't want to hang out with me."

- **Emotions and feelings develop. A person's feelings are created by their THINKING, and not by the actual EVENT itself.**

"I feel hurt that she said no, and embarrassed that I even asked her. I have no friends. No one ever wants to hang out with me. And now everyone is going to find out I was rejected by the new kid at school and they will all laugh at me behind my back."

But Dr. Burns' theory lets us use our thoughts to change our feelings.

Using the shy teen as an example, here are the three most common road blocks to positive thoughts:

1. **All or Nothing Thinking:** *I have no friends, and no one likes me or wants to hang out with me.*
2. **Mental Filtering (dwelling only on the negative):**
Instead of thinking about the fact that she met a friendly, new girl, and that they sat together at lunch, her thoughts were focused only on the fact that the girl said no to hanging out on Saturday.
3. **Jumping to Conclusions:** The shy teen may assume that everyone will find out she was rejected and laugh at her behind her back. Jumping to conclusions often assumes the worst. Instead, the teen can remind herself that good outcomes are also possible - that she and the new girl can hang out another weekend.

In addition to avoiding the roadblocks to positive thinking, Dr. Burn's suggests this three-step strategy in dealing with cognitive (thought) distortions:

Step 1: Become mindful to catch those involuntary, negative thoughts when they first occur. Write them down. Do not allow them to float around in your head.

Step 2: Think about how you may negatively twist or spin things in your mind and distort the truth.

Step 3: Change or fix those negative thoughts by exchanging them with logical, more positive, counter thoughts.

Back to the shy girl, she could change the way she thinks about this encounter to focus more on the positives:

"I had fun sitting and talking to the new girl at lunch. I believe that she would like to hang out sometime, but it's her sister's birthday, so she can't this weekend. We'll find another day that works. I also know that it is not true that no one likes me. I have other friends and we get together often."

By changing her thinking, she has changed her feelings and improved her mood. Sometimes, negative things will occur. When they do, it's okay to interpret it that way and be realistic about it, but the key is to remember that it's our thoughts, not the event, that upsets us.

By changing the way we think to being more logical and positive, we can rewire our brain for the better. This technique can work for people young and old. Dr. Burns encourages people who suffer from depression to use this strategy – though it may be beneficial to anyone who experiences negative thoughts. As we head out into this New Year, filled with promise and adventure, why not focus on a happier, mentally healthier new YOU!

** As discussed in many past Know! Tips, depression can lead to a number of health hazards and poor behavioral choices, including turning to alcohol and drugs in an attempt to cope with one's feelings. This technique is not meant to replace a visit or conversation with a physician or counselor. If you or your child is experiencing depression, you are encouraged to seek professional help.*

If you're in a crisis situation, you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you and your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

Source: David D. Burns, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Stanford University School of Medicine and the author of the best-selling books *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* and *The Feeling Good Handbook*.